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»CYRILLIC DOES NOT KILL«: SYMBOLS, IDENTITY, AND MEMORY IN CROATIAN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

ABSTRACT

This article addresses identity construction through social symbolic meanings conveyed in discussions about scripts, primarily Cyrillic, in Croatian public discourse. We focus on discussions in various Croatian online sources from 2013 to 2015 centred on the topic of "Cyrillic as a symbol" and serving as an umbrella for discursive negotiations of (a) identity and belonging, (b) collective memory of the recent past, and (c) minority rights. The symbolic meanings of Cyrillic have been developed and utilized by politicians, professionals, various organizations, and ordinary people in various contexts and with various aims: from delegitimizing political actors and propagating hostility and reconciliation, to creating a "useful" past and consolidating collective identity.

KEYWORDS: Cyrillic, Latin, symbol, memory, Croatia

»Cirilica ne ubija«: simboli, identiteta in spomin v hrvaškem javnem diskurzu

IZVLEČEK

Članek raziskuje konstrukcijo identitete skozi družbenosimbolne pomene razprav o cirilici, ki so se odvijale v hrvaškem javnem diskurzu. Osredotoča se na razprave, zapisane na različnih hrvaških internetnih portalih, ki so se osredotočale na temo »cirilice kot simbola«. V analizo so bila zajeta besedila, nastala med letoma 2013 in 2015, v katerih so se na simbolni ravni odvijale razprave o (a) identiteti in pripadnosti, (b) kolektivnem spominu nedavne preteklosti in (c) pravicah manjšin. Simbolni pomen cirilice so konstruirali in uporabljali politiki, profesionalci, različne organizacije, navadni ljudje v različnih kontekstih in z različnimi cilji: od delegitimiziranja političnih akterjev in propagiranja sovražnosti oziroma sprave do oblikovanja »uporabnih« preteklosti in utrjevanja kolektivne identitete.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: cirilica, latinica, simboli, spomin, Hrvaška

1 Introduction

This article addresses identity construction through social symbolic meanings conveyed in discussions about scripts,[1] primarily Cyrillic, in Croatian public discourse. Žagar (2012) indicated that, over the last several decades, Cyrillic has been strongly identified in Croatia with Serbian literacy and has been perceived as a Serbian national script, as it was in the times when Cyrillic was taught in Croatian schools. Žagar also noted that the awareness of a specific version of Cyrillic used in Croatian history has been low or non-existent. Although both Latin and Cyrillic have been in use in Croatia at different times (see, e.g., Žagar 2012; Gabelica 2014), in the 1990s Cyrillic became almost exclusively connected with Serbian language and nationalism.

Language and scripts play an important role in the construction of national belonging (see, e.g., Edwards 2009; Greenberg 2004). The Croatian case is specific because standard Croatian is based on the same dialect as standard Serbian. Moreover, both Serbian and Croatian[2] are part of the South Slavic dialect continuum.

The (symbolic) importance of Cyrillic is a recurrent topic in Croatian public discourse. It has been widely discussed by academics such as linguists, politicians, and laypeople alike. For example, at the beginning of 2016, the chancellor of the University of Zagreb, Damir Boras, proposed reintroducing Cyrillic in primary schools, which sparked extensive media discussions.[3] Similar discussions about the use of scripts have occasionally turned into heated debates, usually triggered by certain social actions. The absurd nature of these discussions has occasionally been the topic of satirical comments and fake news portals.[4] One such action that triggered disputes in 2013 was an attempt to display plaques in Cyrillic on public buildings in the Croatian town of Vukovar. That attempt was followed by intense protests in Vukovar and elsewhere in Croatia. The script-related discussions that followed have not only been a platform for achieving temporary political goals, but also a means for achieving long-term ones, such as identity consolidation through fostering collective memory.

This article uses a discourse-analytical framework to focus on script-related discussions in Croatian public discourse published online between February 2013 and April 2015. The material analysed (see Section 3) mainly relates to discussions about Cyrillic plaques in Vukovar. These discussions serve as an umbrella for discursive negotiations of (a) identity and belonging (Sebba 2006) because the use of Cyrillic is perceived as a provocation and threat to Croatian identity, (b) collective memory of the recent past, and (c) minority rights.

In analysing our multimodal material (texts and images), we concentrate on the content (topics and motifs) and discursive strategies used by discourse participants (Wodak et al.

1. We use "scripts" and "alphabets" as synonyms for writing systems.
2. Standard Croatian also shares its dialect base with Bosnian and Montenegrin.
3. For example, HRT (19/01/2016). The format of the dates in the article is day/month/year.
4. See, for example, an article on the Croatian News-Bar portal entitled "Headquarters for Defence of Croatian Vukovar Mistakenly Breaks Baška Tablet" (News-Bar 2016), which connects the recent breaking of Cyrillic plaques to an imaginary event of accidentally breaking a well-known Glagolitic monument of early Croatian literacy.

2009: 30–42). While analysing content, we focus on narrations of the collective memory of recent history in times of crisis, argumentation lines, and symbolic constructions of language and script in relation to identity. Strategies used when discussing identity issues in public discourse include the instrumentalization of individual memory with the aim of forging and sustaining a specific version of collective memory, and the delegitimization of the Other by demonizing the Other's symbols. Furthermore, we analyse what scripts symbolize to whom in different contexts and how scripts as symbols fit into competing ways of discursively constructing collective memory.

Our material suggests that the disputes about scripts as symbols contribute to discursive construction of collective identities, be they national (Croatian) or transnational (EU), religious (Orthodox/Catholic), or moral (oriented towards minority rights and/or victims' rights).

Section 2 briefly discusses the importance of Vukovar for Croatian contemporary identity and explains the role of languages and scripts. Section 3 continues with theoretical remarks important for our analysis. Section 4 is devoted to the discussion of our findings. Finally, in Section 5 we draw some conclusions from the overall analysis.

2 Historical background: Vukovar, languages, scripts as symbols, and rights of national minorities

The tragic events that led to and followed the disintegration of Yugoslavia resulted in great human suffering for all warring parties. Many books have been written about the causes and effects of the wars of the 1990s (for an overview, see e.g., Vrkić-Tromp 2002). However, the historical background presented here is limited to some comments about the city of Vukovar because the discourse we analyse concerns the use of Cyrillic in Vukovar. Located in eastern Croatia near the Serbian border, Vukovar was almost totally destroyed between August and November 1991. During an eighty-seven–day siege, also known as the Battle of Vukovar, around two thousand self-organized fighters resisted attacks by a significantly larger force of Yugoslav Army troops before eventually capitulating. Thousands of people from both sides were killed.[5] Serbs remained in Vukovar under the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina, and Croats were displaced to other areas in Croatia. In late 1995, an agreement was reached on the reintegration of the region into Croatia. The peaceful reintegration lasted for two years. A significant number of Croats returned only in 1999 (see Kardov 2007). Vukovar has become one of the ultimate symbols of Croatian victimhood and it occupies a central place in the foundation myth of the Croatian state (Banjeglav 2012: 15).

Warfare is still present in both individual memories (e.g., those of direct witnesses to the war) and in official rituals, such as yearly commemorations aimed at fostering collective memory (for further information on Vukovar's commemorations and memory-making

5. Some authors have pointed towards the Western media's unequal treatment of atrocities committed by Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims, and the media's demonization of Serbs (e.g., Parenti 2002; Herman 2009).

around Vukovar, see, e.g., Pavlaković 2009; Banjeglav 2012). People living in Vukovar today face a difficult economic situation and are, in a way, still victims of the war.

Vukovar has a special place in official Croatian memory as a crucial "realm of memory" (Nora 1989) and as a site whose role is to remind people of selected events that are vital for national memory. As Kardov (2002) emphasized, Vukovar is "the final argument" with which one can silence all other arguments. According to Dežulović (2013), the town is a "monument to itself", reduced to a "place of special reverence", devoid of every form of life and serving as a depository of candles and wreaths. The town's symbolic function has been widely used by various social actors.

The city is split into two "parallel realities", socially separated between the two ethnic communities (see, e.g., Kosic and Tauber 2010 on polarization in schools, local radio stations, sports clubs, and cultural associations). Clark (2013) argued that Vukovar's numerous war memorials are obstructing reconciliation between the town's Croats and Serbs because they encourage selective memory through the erasure of Serb victims and contribute to the phenomenon of a "surplus of memory" that prevents society from moving forward. As noted by Baillie (2012), the highly selective and ethnically exclusive memorials provide little room for finding common ground. The symbolic meaning of the city for the two communities, Croats and Serbs, is different. This is reflected in the language used in relation to the events of the 1990s. Prior to 1998, the local Serb citizens celebrated 18 November as the town's "day of liberation". After 1998, with peaceful reintegration, the date was marked as "the day when the conflict ended" (Žanić 2007: 84 in Banjeglav 2012: 18; see also Ljubojević 2012).

Almost the only time that Vukovar attracts the attention of the wider population is during the annual commemorative "Memory Walk" to pay respects to its sacrifice (on Vukovar commemorations, see Banjeglav 2012: 14). On several occasions, this march has served as a venue for political conflicts. One of these occurred in November 2013, when Croatian war veterans – members of an organization known as the Headquarters for the Defence of Croatian Vukovar[6] – protested against the government's announcement that plaques in Cyrillic would be placed on public buildings along with the Latin ones. The application of bilingualism[7] in accordance with the law on minority rights – the Serbian minority now accounts for more than one-third of the population in Vukovar, triggering their right to use Serbian and Cyrillic in the public sphere – became a subject of intense agitation. Croatian war veterans argued that, due to wartime events, Vukovar has a special status and should

6. The organization was founded in January 2013 and led a campaign against the erection of parallel Latin and Cyrillic signs in Vukovar. That campaign was part of broader anti-government protests. The organization, led by Tomislav Josić, was also engaged in planning a referendum in 2013 that would have tightened restrictions on the use of Cyrillic signs in areas of Croatia populated by the Serbian minority, but they lost their bid to hold the referendum (Reuters 2014). See also Balkan Insight (2014).
7. The status of Croatian and Serbian as separate languages is a disputed topic that we cannot discuss here (but see, e.g., Greenberg 2004; Kordić 2010). If Croatian and Serbian are conceived of as a single language, one cannot speak of "implementing bilingualism" if something written in Latin is simply transliterated into Cyrillic and vice versa.

have been excluded from application of the law. A number of Cyrillic plaques were torn down and smashed with hammers in Vukovar and elsewhere (this incident motivated the use of the label čekićari 'hammerers' in public discussions).[8] A photograph that has been widely distributed on the internet (Večernji list 2014; the second photo in the gallery) shows one man smashing a plaque while several other men hold him up to help him.

Cyrillic and Latin were in use in both Croatia and Serbia at different times. In communist Yugoslavia, official policies encouraged the teaching of both scripts in schools.[9] However, the situation varied in different republics: Owen-Jackson (2015: 85) states that the official policies were not strictly adhered to in all republics: the script that dominated in Croatian schools was Latin. The official status of scripts changed in the 1990s. Nowadays, the constitution of Croatia states that the Croatian language and Latin script are to be used in Croatia. The Serbian constitution, on the other hand, states that Serbian and Cyrillic script are in official use in Serbia.[10]

The Croatian Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities mandates use of language and script, including bilingual signs,[11] in areas with more than one-third of the population belonging to an ethnic minority.[12] However, in August 2015, a narrow majority in the city council of Vukovar passed a new statute that abolished the official use of Cyrillic. Nonetheless, the statute does not rule out the possibility of bilingualism. Each year it can be discussed whether the conditions for bilingualism in the town have been fulfilled or not.[13]

The symbolic function of languages and scripts is well known to laypersons, linguists, and political elites. Whereas connections between language in general and identity have been studied in numerous works (e.g., Edwards 2009; Greenberg 2004), connections between choices of writing systems (scripts) and identity have been neglected until recently (Jaffe et al. 2012; Sebba 2006). Many historical examples clearly illustrate the role of scripts in nation-building strategies: changes in the political course of a country may be followed by the abolition of an old script and introduction of a new one. For example, Stalin's establishment of the border between Romania and the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was followed by the Moldovans' creation of a new nation that spoke their own language. Moldovan was originally written in Cyrillic to further differentiate it from Romanian, which was written in Latin (Sebba 2006: 81). Significantly, Moldovans switched from Cyrillic to Latin after their country gained independence in 1989. How ideology

8. See, e.g., Pollitika (2013).
9. See conclusion 3 from the Novi Sad Agreement: "both scripts, Latin and Cyrillic, have equal status; therefore it should be ensured that both Serbs and Croats learn both scripts equally well, which can be done primarily through schools" (authors' translation); see Hrvatski
10. See Ustav Republike Srbije (2006) and Ustav Republike Hrvatske (2010). However, a recent Serbian normative guide states that both Latin and Cyrillic are in use, but gives priority to Cyrillic, arguing for its symbolic function (Pešikan et al. 2010: 15).
11. See footnote *7* on bilingualism.
12. Croatian Parliament (2016).
13. See Vukovar (2015). The decision has been widely discussed in the media; see, for example, Jutranji list (2015).

can be tightly connected to scripts is also shown in the example of a Russian law passed in 2002 requiring all official languages in Russia to use the Cyrillic script (Sebba 2006: 99).

Religion as an identity parameter and a powerful symbol is also connected to the use of scripts, as the case of Urdu and Hindi shows (Ahmad 2011). Religion also plays a salient role in the Croatian and Serbian context because Catholicism is assumed to be a Croatian identity marker, whereas Orthodoxy is assumed to be a Serbian identity marker (Stensvold 2009).

It is sometimes possible for a country to choose *digraphia*; that is, to allow two writing systems for the same language, as was the case in communist Yugoslavia with its policy of official digraphia for the unified Serbo-Croatian language, and is also the case in today's Serbia, despite the constitutional advantages given to Cyrillic.

Another example that shows how an orthographic solution can also serve as an identity marker comes from the broader area that we focus on here and concerns the new Montenegrin orthography. In the Montenegrin normative guide (Perović et al. 2010), two new letters, *Ś* and *Ź*, have been introduced, and they have the important symbolic function of differentiating Montenegrin from Serbian (Greenberg 2004: 97–104, 177).

These and many other examples show that the abolition or introduction of writing systems, as well as changes in orthography, can be part of nation-building strategies and even nationalism,[14] as well as a sign of changes in political, ideological, religious, and cultural orientation. Changes in scripts as a rule relate to identity construction and occur in the realms of symbolic nation building.

3 Data sampling and theoretical preliminaries

3.1 Data

Our data consist of official and unofficial Croatian discourse found on the internet. The sources include various online newspapers (eight), portals publishing general and specialized news (twenty), portals concentrating on politics (four), portals of towns and communities (seven), Facebook groups and discussions (seven), forum discussions (four), portals of political parties, religious groups, and schools (three), portals of other groups and organizations (three), and blogs (two). The material sometimes contains only texts and images, and in some cases comments on the "main" texts (thirty-seven sites include comments, and thirteen sites have more than thirty comments, four of which are forum discussions). The material is heterogeneous in terms of genre and register (i.e., the samples found are formal and informal). Formal discourse is represented by online newspapers, for example, and informal discourse by blogs and forums. Media texts often interact with different texts that represent grassroots discourse on the internet and provide a multifaceted image of the phenomenon analysed.

14. However, nationalism as such is not addressed in this article.

The data were collected using the Google search engine (Google.hr)[15] and keywords in Latin script corresponding to 'Cyrillic' and 'symbol' or 'symbolic' in the same contexts. We focused on the 150 highest-ranking hits. The search was performed in Croatia on 29 April, 2015. The search results also contained texts from Serbian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin sources: these are included in a separate corpus and were excluded from this analysis. In addition to the domain .hr, other criteria for selecting "Croatian" sources were geolocation and language. Duplicative results were disregarded, as were examples in which symbols and Cyrillic were discussed in non-relevant contexts, such as keyboards and typesetting. The collected corpus includes texts published between 1 February 2013 and 26 April 2015, comprising approximately 145,000 words from fifty-eight internet sites, mainly from the domain .hr. The data were obtained from a variety of sources, but the material is related to the specific context of discussing the introduction of Cyrillic plaques in Vukovar, and is restricted to a limited timeframe.

3.2 Discourse, identity, collective memory, symbols and discursive strategies

We adhere to the definition of discourse as "a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action" linked to a macro-topic and argumentation about validity claims (Reisigl and Wodak 2009: 89). In our case, semiotic practices include multimodal texts found in online sources. These sources (such as online newspapers and social media) influence political and social actions and at the same time are shaped by their contexts. Therefore, they are excellent for analysing identity negotiations. We understand identity and collective memory as constructed and negotiated in discourse, and changeable and dynamic (Wodak et al. 2009). However, this does not mean that people do not strive to hold on to what they experience as stable elements in life, such as their perception of history based on selective collective memory. In that construction, stable elements of the life world serve as the content of collective memory, but the ascription of meaning to that content changes in relation to time, place, and who "remembers".

Misztal (2003: 7) defined collective memory as "the representations of the past, both that shared by the group and that which is collectively commemorated, that enacts and gives substance to the group's identity, its present conditions and its vision of the future". Giving substance to a group's identity implies a decisive role of memory in collective identity. In modern times, both collective memory and identity have been characterized by the influence of mass media and "electronification" (digital technology, interactive media, etc.; see Thompson 1996; Urry 1996); memory and identity construction have become pluralistic and detached from traditional sources of power. Collective memory

15. Google results are always personalized. Google's dynamic adjustment of search results depends on a range of algorithms that take into account the search term, one's geographical location, and the search history (see, e.g., Devine and Egger-Sider 2014). Therefore, the search results are not "objective" or "universal". The search was performed by a person that had not performed any similar keyword searches before.

enhances national identities and is crucial to the emergence of nation-states (Misztal 2003: 25).

National identities as a type of collective identities combine ethnic, cultural, economic, legal, and political elements and the attachment to a territory. Among their essential components are common historical memories, myths, and traditions (Smith 1991: 9–14). In the process of national identity construction, influential social actors, such as political elites, attempt to rearrange memories, myths, and traditions in an order that suits their own objectives and forge national identities that ensure social cohesion. This is illustrated below by the actions carried out by a Croatian veterans' organization called Headquarters for the Defence of Croatian Vukovar. "Dissemination of collective memory" relies on "realms of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*), historical or pseudohistorical sites that are reminiscent of selected events in national memory (Nora 1989). Vukovar is such a realm.

Collective memory, like identity, is not given and stable. It is discursively constructed by different social actors. In the construction of collective memory, different active agents use diverse means and employ different discursive strategies. These "memory agents" make use of "cultural tools" (or memory tools); that is, instruments that mediate remembering (Boyer and Wertsch 2009: 119) and include places, textbooks, and monuments.

Here, we understand symbols in their broadest meaning as "something that represents something else" (Mach 1993: 22). For example, in the context of national identity construction, a nation's symbols can be its flags, commemorations, national anthems, and, as we claim, scripts. The common trait of all symbols is that they "serve as a way for members of a society to both communicate heritage and socially connect with other members of a group – both past and present" (Moeschberger and Phillips DeZalia 2014: 1). Symbols preserve the past within a culture and, in doing so, become part of collective memories (Moeschberger and Phillips DeZalia 2014: 3). In addition to establishing a connection to past generations, symbols have the potential to cause strong emotions; they "express and maintain cultural narratives as they contribute to social representations and they are a perceptual filter to understand the self in relation to society" (Moeschberger and Phillips DeZalia 2014: 2). Steinbock (2013: 31) pointed to the "heavy emotional weight" that symbols derived from social (collective) memory carry because memory creates feelings of identity and group solidarity. The meanings of such symbols and the collective memories from which they derive can never be fixed: they can be reinterpreted by influential agents struggling for dominance in the realm of symbolic capital at any time. This implies that symbols are highly context-dependent: the decisive factors for their meaning are the time and place of their usage and the actors that use them. Cyrillic text on a plaque in front of the Russian embassy in Zagreb would not have the same potential to provoke strong reactions and emotions as a plaque in Cyrillic in Vukovar at a particular moment in time. Identity, collective memory, and discourse are complex interrelated concepts: symbols and discourses (along with sites and artefacts) are assumed to serve to forge collective memories, whether they are reconciliatory or divisive (Staiger 2006).[16] Conway (2010:

16. However, sites and artefacts are also symbols; Staiger (2006) presumably considered flags, coats of arms, and similar as (prototypical) symbols.

11–12) pointed to symbols and discourse as important realms in which and through which "the past is carried". Interestingly, collective memory itself is defined as a "genre of political discourse . . . through which communities construct a shared identity" (Bruyneel 2014: 589).

The discursive formation of identity and collective memory comes into being through the use of different types of discursive macro-strategies, including constructive strategies and strategies of demontage (or dismantling) or destruction (Wodak et al. 2009: 33–35). Through the use of constructive strategies, national identity is constructed by "promoting unification, identification and solidarity, as well as differentiation". On the other hand, strategies of demontage are aimed at the destruction of existing constructions of national identity (Wodak et al. 2009: 33). These macro-strategies are supported by various strategies, such as justification (to preserve a threatened national identity), strategies emphasizing difference (e.g., between Croats and Serbs) – strategies of dissimilation – and strategies stressing national positive uniqueness (Wodak et al. 2009: 30). These are further discussed in the following section.

4 Discursive negotiations of collective memory and cultural/collective identity through discussions about Cyrillic

Script-related disputes are sites for the discursive construction of collective memory and the establishment of "memory regimes" (i.e., ways in which groups of people frame their understanding of the past; see Winter 2015: 221). In the discursive construction of memory and identity, different social actors use different strategies in their argumentations. We start by providing an overview of macro-strategies found in our material and then exemplify them by focusing on competing symbolic meanings ascribed to Cyrillic and their relation to collective memory.

4.1 Discursive strategies

The dominant macro-strategies found in our material are constructive strategies that promote identification within one's own ethnic group and differentiation from another ethnic group. In differentiation, or emphasizing the difference between "us" and "them", the topos/fallacy of external threat is frequently utilized. To some discourse participants, Cyrillic symbolizes past aggression and the Serbian Other, and thus directly relates to a past (and possibly present) threat. Therefore, suppressing Cyrillic in the public space in Croatia is their superordinate aim. To some other discourse participants (e.g., Serbs' representatives), removing Cyrillic symbolizes removing the presence of the Serbs on Croatian territory. Therefore, insisting on Cyrillic in public spaces is their superordinate aim. The strategy of emphasizing difference is closely linked to the strategy of dissimilation/exclusion and defence (a strategy that is itself often linked to the disaster topos; Wodak et al. 2009: 40). In this strategy, an action is rejected because its consequences for a community's future fate are depicted as negative (the topos of threat). The most frequent motif this strategy utilizes is collective suffering, which can be linked to the topos of history lessons.

In one version of remembering collective suffering, the "history lesson" concerns warfare from the 1990s and the suffering of Croats, whereas in the other version it concerns the Second World War and the suffering of the Serbs (i.e., the Ustaša persecution of Serbs in the Nazi-backed Independent State of Croatia, or NDH). In both versions, the feelings evoked include strong identification and solidarity with the victims and negative feelings towards the perpetrators.

The macro-strategy of demontage (dismantling) or destruction is realized as a specific subtype aimed at the "destruction" of a symbol: Cyrillic. The strategy of dissimilation or "emphasis or presupposition of difference" (Wodak et al. 2009: 33) is frequently linked to the topos of comparison, and language means of its realization are dissimilative/pejorative labels, such as the nouns *enemy, crime, occupation, atrocities*, and *cruelty*.

Our material includes instances of strategies of assimilation (presupposing sameness) as well, in which collective memory is constructed so that it promotes peace and reconciliation. However, assimilation strategies that promote a culture of peace were found less frequently than strategies of dissimilation. The strategies of assimilation could be tied to a more inclusive identity construction that seeks detachment from the traumatic memory of the 1990s, as in shown in the examples in the following section.

4.2 Competing symbolic connotations/meanings ascribed to Cyrillic and their relation to collective memory

We have identified two main competing lines of argumentation discussing symbolic meanings of Cyrillic. Generally, the first characterizes Cyrillic as a symbol of aggression, evil, and Serbian nationalism. The second characterizes Cyrillic as a symbol of culture in general, and also Croatian culture. These are further connected to two larger narratives: 1) the narrative about aggressors/victims in the recent armed conflicts and beyond, and 2) the narrative about a need to preserve cultural heritage. Whereas the former is a cornerstone in collective memory, in our material the latter is connected to human rights. These lines of argumentation are further exemplified below.

Many examples in our material explicitly state or support the view that scripts are symbols of nations: specifically, they suggest that scripts are symbols and demarcation lines between the Self and the Other; that Other is clearly marked as Serbs (e.g., Hrvatski fokus 2013b, 21/10/2013; Portal HKV, 30/07/2014; Index.hr, 27/02/2015). Scripts as symbols can also create binary oppositions with the following inferences: the Self is good, the Other is evil; the Other causes death and suffering. In these discourse samples, therefore, Cyrillic is devoid of various other possible symbolic references. Its main reference is metonymic: Cyrillic is reduced to its assumed connection to the events of the 1990s: warfare in Vukovar and destruction of the city (e.g., Politika plus, 24/10/2013); see (1) below:

(1) Installing bilingual plaques in Vukovar is troubling because the Croatian homeland fighters were killed and tortured under that script.

[Postavljanje dvojezičnih ploča u Vukovaru smeta jer su pod tim pismom ubijani i maltretirani hrvatski branitelji.]

The power of this symbolic link, as exemplified by (1), connects the current generation to the war generation (both dead and alive). The discussions in the public space foreground recent traumatic individual memories by "homeland fighters" and real and imagined witnesses of atrocities (e.g., *Dnevno*, 06/04/2015; *Sbplus*, 15/09/2013).

(2) During the aggression against the city and after breaking the defence, the Serbian soldiers and paramilitary committed atrocities and even today [some people] encounter their rapists and torturers in Vukovar. There are still a large number of families looking for their lost family members. For all of them Cyrillic is a symbol of suffering that they went through, and its introduction would come as a bitter blow and would show total disrespect for their sacrifice and feelings.

[. . . tijekom agresije na grad i nakon sloma obrane istog počinjeno [je] nasilje od strane pripadnika srpskih vojnih i paravojnih postrojbi i danas susreću svoje silovatelje i mučitelje u Vukovaru. Još uvijek veliki broj obitelji traži svoje nestale članove. Za sve njih ćirilica je simbol patnje koju su proživjeli te bi im njezino uvođenje značilo težak udarac i okrutno nepoštivanje njihove žrtve i osjećaja]

References to traumatic individual memories, as in (2), contribute to common collective memory building through the narration of a common traumatic political past. The main motif used in such discourse samples is that of victim. The strategy of positive self-presentation of the violent resistance to Cyrillic signs – which, in a broader context, indicates an opposition to the implementation of minority rights laws – is justified by references to traumatic memories or self-victimization. The symbolic link of Cyrillic and war relies partly on metonymy; that is, a contiguity relation that is explicitly established in our material by using memory tools such as wartime photographs showing Serbian fighters carrying flags with Cyrillic letters (see, e.g., the fourth photograph from the top in Portal HKV, 30/07/2014). The crimes ascribed to Serbs carrying the flags are ascribed, via them, to Cyrillic. This metonymic base of Cyrillic as a symbol enables the metaphor "Cyrillic kills", utilized by some social actors in our multimodal material. The language expressions related to that metaphor found in statements and counter-statements either ascribe evil agency to Cyrillic or deny it by claiming that "Cyrillic kills" and "Cyrillic does not kill"; see (3) and (4).

(3) During several hard and bloody years, Cyrillic erased Latin by killing the city, people, cultural monuments, and cultural heritage or, in other words, the identity of the City as a whole

[Ćirilica] je na nekoliko teških i krvavih godina, ubijajući grad, ljude, kulturne spomenike i kulturnu baštinu, odnosno identitet Grada u cjelini, izbrisala latinicu (Sbplus, 15/09/2013)

(4) Cyrillic never killed or expelled anybody, nor did it burn anybody's house down. *[Ćirilica nikada nikog nije ubila, prognala, niti nečiju kuću zapalila]* (Croportal, 10/02/2013).[17]

17. See also examples with *Ćirilica je ubila* (Cyrillic killed) and *Ćirilica ne ubija* (Cyrillic does not kill) in Dnevno (2014) and Croportal (2013).

The symbolic connotations of Cyrillic related to individual memories are generalized; concrete or imagined fighters have become a symbol of all Serbs and Serbia, and Serbs and Serbia are linked to the Greater Serbian expansionism that was successfully defeated by Croats. This link nourishes the Croatian narrative of the "homeland war" as a cornerstone of independence. The following quotes illustrate such a meaning of Cyrillic, which is most frequently found in sources representing views of Croatian veterans, and conservative and right-wing political factions; namely, Cyrillic as a symbol of aggression:

(5) Cyrillic is a symbol of aggression, territorial claims, rule of Chetniks, slaughtering, evil in this territory of the Croatian state

[ćirilica je kao simbol agresije, teritorijalne pretenzije, četnikovanja*, klanja, zla na ovom prostoru hrvatske države]* (Facebook page of Ruža Tomašić, 14/07/2014)

(6) . . . in Vukovar, Cyrillic (a Croatian script, too) is a symbol of (an old and new) aggression against Croatia, the Town, Nation, Identity, Freedom, Sacrifice, Women, Mothers, the Dead, Graves, Defenders ... !!!

[... ćirilica (koja je i hrvatsko pismo!) u Vukovaru – SIMBOL. Simbol (stare i nove!) agresije na Hrvatsku, na Grad, na Naciju, na Identitet, na Slobodu, na Žrtvu, na Žene, na Majke, na Mrtve, na Grobove, na Branitelje . . . !!!] (Blog Večernji, 06/09/2013)[18]

(7) Cyrillic is a symbol of an act of appropriating a foreign country.

[Ćirilica je simbol svojatanja tuđe zemlje.] (Hrvatski fokus 2013a, headline, 16/10/2013)

Some other sources refer to Cyrillic as a continuation of the aggression (*nastavak agresije;* Ipress, 07/04/2013), while the attempt to install Cyrillic plaques has been described as Cyrillic aggression (ćirilična *agresija*; Dragovoljac, 14/10/2013; Facebook page of Ruža Tomašić, 14/07/2014). All of these examples are a part of the strategy of demontage or dismantling of a symbol, in this case Cyrillic.

Our material contains many photographs that primarily emphasize the symbolic nature of scripts. For example, the slogan "Vukovar will never be Bykobap", combining the Cyrillic and Latin[19] names, is used on a T-shirt (Glas Slavonije 2013). In the slogan, the name of the city written in Latin symbolizes its Croatian identity, whereas the same name in Cyrillic symbolizes its Serbian identity. The slogan is in an intertextual relation with a 1991 poster that is well known in Croatian public space: OSIJEK NIKADA NEĆE BITI OCEK[20] ("OSIJEK WILL NEVER BE OCEK"), which is one of the best-known examples of an "engaged figurative use of Cyrillic in modern Croatian history" (Košćak 2015). That symbolic combination of Cyrillic and Latin has initiated many similar realizations. Košćak (2015) termed similar inscriptions as "awe-inspiring figurative hybrid digraphic inscrip-

18. See also "simbol agresije" (Narod, 03/07/2014)
19. Note the "confusion" of Cyrillic used in handwriting with Cyrillic block letters used in printed materials in the word *Bykobap*. If Cyrillic letters are intended, the third and fifth letters should be ***к*** and ***в***, not ***k*** and ***b***.
20. Designed by Predrag Došen in 1991. See: Stilistika (2016).

tions". The original poster inscription combines two elements related to language as an identity symbol: the "Serbianized" name of the Slavonian town of *Osijek* is not simply transliterated (as is the case with Vukovar), but it is also "ekavized". In the context of the poster, the Ekavian pronunciation of the old Slavic phoneme *jat* provides an additional symbolic reference to Serbian identity.[21]. However, the Ekavian variant of the town's name is very rare in standard Serbian: it usually uses the Ijekavian form (the same as in standard Croatian). Thus, the Cyrillic form Осек is not expected.

Some other photographs in the corpus also juxtapose Cyrillic and Latin by showing, for example, signs for Vukovar written in Cyrillic and Latin, where the Latin sign relates to other visual elements symbolizing peace and Cyrillic pertains to visual elements symbolizing war and death (e.g., Ipress.hr, 07/04/2013).

Some photos (see Ipress.hr 2013, the second small photo below the first, large one) illustrate discourse participants' multimodal elaboration of the connection between Cyrillic and Serbian "aggression against Croatia".[22] In addition to the text, one discourse sample (Portal HKV, 30/07/2014) also contains six wartime photographs showing soldiers, paramilitary troops, and dead bodies. The author explicitly stated: "I include several historical photographs so that we could more easily understand the sentiments of Croats in Croatia and Vukovar towards Cyrillic as ideology" [*Prilažem nekoliko povijesnih fotografija, kako bismo lakše shvatili raspoloženje Hrvata u Vukovaru prema ćirilici kao ideologiji*]. The fourth photograph from the top is an image from a television program showing members of Serbian paramilitary troops carrying a flag with Cyrillic in Vukovar in November 1991. By including these photographs, the author creates an explicit metonymic link between Cyrillic and war atrocities and utilizes the ability of symbols to arouse emotions.

The organization Headquarters for the Defence of Croatian Vukovar and its leader Tomislav Josić had the most prominent role in constructing Cyrillic as a symbol of aggression in the Croatian public sphere. Their insistence on the narrative of Serbian aggression and Croatian suffering in Vukovar and elsewhere was related to their broader political objectives, one of which was discrediting the government at the time.[23] By disseminating that narrative in the mass media, holding protests, and organizing other activities, the organization initiated a broad, heated public discussion in which numerous public actors supported Headquarters. The organization proved to be an influential social actor engaged in constructing a collective memory functional for its political goals (Lebow 2006: 26).

As we have seen, the essentialist understanding of a "pure national identity" and its symbols – in this case, scripts – operates with clear opposition. It is based on a specific version of collective memory of the warfare of the 1990s. This model employs individual memories of warfare to foster collective memory, and its two clearly demarcated motifs are aggressors and victims.

21. More details about the status of Ekavian in Serbian are provided by Greenberg (2004: 63).
22. Another text we found on the internet (but have not included in our corpus because it did not appear in the topmost search results) shows ammunition with Cyrillic on it (Braniteljski portal 2014). The text above the image reads "Bullets with Cyrillic Killed 16,018 Croats in the Homeland War".
23. See, for example, an interview with Josić in Slobodna Dalmacija (2014).

As Zerubavel (1996) observed, individual memories are socio-biographical because they are constructed with the interpretative framework provided by the dominant, official memory, and because people are socially constituted and seek affirmation of their group membership.

4.3 Cyrillic as a shared symbol of culture and minority rights

A competing line of argumentation about the symbolic meaning of Cyrillic is the one constructed by social actors (e.g., professionals such as linguists, Serb representatives, the Croatian government, and anonymous forum discussants) that, in their discourse, connect Cyrillic with the necessity to respect minority rights, trying to break the symbolic link between the script, warfare, and the Battle of Vukovar. These social actors try to demetaphorize the metaphor "Cyrillic kills" by explicitly stating that human agency cannot be attributed to scripts; see example (8) below. This symbolic reference was advocated by state officials; for example, former President Ivo Josipović made a widely quoted statement that "Cyrillic is not a symbol of crime".[24] Example (9) shows such argumentation that aims to deconstruct the metaphor "Cyrillic kills" and connects the script to human rights. Some examples question the negative contextual/situational meaning of Cyrillic in which it is constructed as a symbol of war, destruction of Vukovar, suffering, and Greater Serbianism (see 10 and 11).

(8) Cyrillic does not kill, destroy, burn down. People with names and surnames do this.

[Ćirilica ne ubija, ne ruši i ne pali. To čine ljudi, koji imaju svoja imena i prezimena] (Croportal, 10/02/2013).

(9) Cyrillic is here only a symbol of recognition of minority rights.

[Ćirilica je tu zapravo samo simbol priznavanja manjinskih prava.] (Novi list, 05/05/2013).

(10) Cyrillic is not a symbol of Greater Serbianism . . . the normal letter *u* is not a symbol of Ustashas, but a letter of an alphabet. Cyrillic is an alphabet used in Russia, Ukraine, Macedonia, Serbia . . . Cyrillic was, if you like, a Croatian alphabet. It is an alphabet in which numerous literary works were created (including some of the greatest works ever); it is the alphabet used for writing the histories of people who use it . . . To claim that Cyrillic is a symbol of Greater Serbianism is a terrible offence to all who have used it or still use it.

[Ćirilica uopće nije simbol velikosrpstva . . . normalno "u" nije simbol nikakvog ustaštva, već slovo abecede. Ćirilica je pismo Rusije, Ukrajne, Makedonije, Srbije... Ćirilica je, ako baš hoćeš, bilo i hrvatsko pismo To je pismo na kojem su stvarana brojna književna dijela (među kojima su i neka od najvećih djela književnosti uopće), pismo kojime je pisana povijest naroda koji ju koriste . . . Reći kako je je

24. For example, Novi list (22/11/2013). Josipović saw the protests against Cyrillic as an action by the HDZ party (the Croatian Democratic Union) that aimed to destabilize the Social Democratic–led government. His statement was frequently found in the search results originating from Serbian and Bosnian media (not included in this analysis).

ćirilica *simbol velikosprpstva grozno je uvredljivo za sve koji su njome pisali ili pišu]* (Forum.hr, 18/11/2013)

(11) CYRILLIC IS NOT A WAR SCRIPT, NOR A SYMBOL OF SUFFERING OF THE CROATS AND THE DESTRUCTION OF VUKOVAR.

[ĆIRILICA NIJE RATNO PISMO, NITI SIMBOL STRADANJA HRVATA I RAZARANJA VUKOVARA] (Jutarnji list, 11/02/2013)

In this construction of a competing symbolic meaning, a script is an identity marker of different (national) groups that use it in a synchronic or diachronic perspective, and cannot be "imposed upon" one group only as its negative identity marker. These instances make up the strategy of assimilation, which helps construct the collective memory that promotes peace and reconciliation.

4.4 Comparisons of symbols and "metadiscussions" on symbols' connotations

Some discourse participants attempt to "rationalize the situation" by comparing Cyrillic with other symbols and suggesting a "middle solution": that Cyrillic is a problem in a specific context and time (see example 12). Rationalization of the situation is also visible in reasoning that Cyrillic should not be discursively constructed as a symbol of the Serbian nation; however, the timing for reintroducing it in Vukovar is evaluated as unfavourable (examples 12 and 13).

(12) Even though Mile Budak was a minister in Pavelić's government, his literature does not have anything to do with that fact. Even if Vukovar was killed under the Serbian cross with Cyrillic letters on Serbian flags, Cyrillic is not only Serbian, but also Croatian inheritance. However, in Vukovar, the time has not come for Cyrillic – there is too much Milošević, and Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Miroslav,[25] Vukovar Cyrillic.

[Ako Mile Budak i jest bio ministar u Pavelićevoj vladi, njegova književnost s tom činjenicom nema veze. Ako Vukovar i jest ubijan pod ćiriličnim ocilima na srpskim zastavama, ćirilica nije samo srpsko nasljeđe, već i hrvatska baština. Ipak, u Vukovaru za ćirilicu nije vrijeme, jer – puno je Miloševića, puno je Memoranduma SANU u Miroslavljevoj, 'vukovarskoj' ćirilici. Treba vremena da to 'izvjetri'] (Sbplus, 15/09/2013).

(13) Cyrillic should not be a synonym for aggression displayed by one nation during the Homeland War, and, when it comes to plaques in Cyrillic, we agree that it is too early, but also that Croats should not negate a part of their own culture because history is what makes us what we are today.

[ćirilica ne bi trebala biti sinonim za agresiju počinjenu od strane jednog naroda za vrijeme Domovinskog rata, a u pitanju ćiriličnih ploča slažemo se da je još prerano,

25 This could be an allusion to *Miroslavljevo jevanđelje* (the Miroslav Gospel), one of the oldest documents written in the Serbian recension of Church Slavic.

ali isto tako Hrvati ne bi trebali negirati dio svoje kulture, jer povijest je ono što *nas* čini *onime* što *danas jesmo].* (OŠ Vukovac-Kašina, 21/01/2015)

Similar lines of argumentation can be found in some other discourse samples (e.g., the Facebook page of the group Occupy Croatia, 02/10/2013). Other examples explicitly discuss the connotations of symbols that may arise in various situations (e.g., Blog Dnevnik, 01/12/2013). Such "metadiscussions" are expected, considering the keywords explicitly searched for (the equivalents of 'symbol' and 'symbolic'). Discourse participants try to rationalize the discussions by comparing Cyrillic with other powerful well-known negatively connoted symbols (such as the swastika, in Blog Dnevnik, 01/12/2013) in their metadiscussions of symbolic connotations.

5 Concluding remarks: collective memory, identity, and symbols in discourse

Our material provides a number of examples that support the hypothesis that scripts as symbols can acquire and change meaning in discourse; that is, it illustrates the contextual nature of symbols. Thus, Cyrillic is a symbol of aggression in one context – a symbol of different nations and their culture and literacy – and a symbol of respecting minority rights in another. Alternatively, as we have shown, there are competing constructions of symbolic meaning of Cyrillic coexisting. Moreover, the symbolism of scripts is explicitly acknowledged and elaborated in the narratives by discourse. This finding is supported by research that focuses on various contexts in which symbols change and acquire meaning in discourse (see, e.g., Mach 1993), and in which scripts and languages function as symbols (Sebba 2006).

Scripts are often used to index group membership and express elements of identity. In the context of Vukovar and its own symbolism, Cyrillic acquires new symbolic meanings. Its generally established meanings (e.g., as a symbol of certain Slavic cultures) are altered and narrowed down when connected to a single Slavic nation.

Our samples contain a lot of evidence of emotional language and references to human suffering: they refer to and narrate fragments of individual memories that are aimed at collective memory construction. Emotional discourse is "closed" because discussing the feelings of victims excludes all other discourses. In our data, various discourse participants link Cyrillic to traumatic individual memories and to a city that itself is a symbol of suffering and a marker of the key Croatian narrative of independence. By perpetuating details of traumatic individual memories in discourse, as shown in some of our examples, social actors deliberately link Cyrillic to some specific groups of perpetrators, which then become symbols of an entire nation; in this case, Serbs.

The symbolic potential of Cyrillic has been used in discourse by politicians, professionals, journalists, various organizations, and ordinary people. The functions of this use range from the deligitimization of political actors (e.g., delegitimizing the Croatian government by veterans' organizations and their leaders, and by their political opponents) and propagating hostility towards an ethnic group, to creating a "useful" past and consolidating

collective identity. At the same time, in a competing discourse, Cyrillic is also aligned with propagating human rights issues in Croatia, and a considerable amount of discursive work has been done to demetaphorize Cyrillic as a killing agent.

Our findings support Mach (1993), who emphasized that symbols have highly contextual meanings. This assumption can be complemented by the assumption that these are shaped in specific discourse by specific social actors. These actors often act as memory agents. Discourse participants with some kind of power or influence greatly utilize symbols' ability to inspire. They do so by (un)consciously using macro-strategies (constructive and demontage) and various supporting strategies of justification (to preserve a threatened national identity), strategies emphasizing the difference between Croats and Serbs (strategies of dissimilation), and strategies emphasizing national positive uniqueness (Wodak et al. 2009: 30). Instances of strategies of assimilation are also present in the material analysed, but they are infrequent.

When social actors discursively negotiate a specific meaning of symbols, that meaning is always situationally constrained. Although the discourse analysed here has its constraints because it is limited to a specific time period, it shows that a symbol can become partially or entirely detached from its "universal" symbolism (i.e., its link to various cultures and peoples), and it can be shaped in such a way that it only mirrors an ongoing political agenda or a specific group's ideology. The stability of new meanings of any symbols, including Cyrillic, is uncertain, and an analysis of a more recent discourse could reveal a different image.

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