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CROATIANNESS AND CHILDREN'S POPULAR CULTURE

The Analysis of Chocolate Stickers *Cro-Army*, *Knights' Tales* and *Maki*

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This paper examines the discursive formation of Croatianness (*hrvatstvo*) during the Croatian War of Independence in the 1990s and the post-war era, focusing mainly on the domain of popular culture. In this analysis of Croatian children's popular culture, the main emphasis is on chocolate bar stickers and sticker albums manufactured by Kraš. At the time, the company had published *Cro-Army* chocolate stickers and the accompanying Croatian army sticker album, *Knights' Tales*, about Croatian history and various historical events, and *Maki,* a sticker album of Catholic saints. In relying on theoretical and methodological frameworks of representational and discourse theory regarding national identity and fantasy, this paper shows one of the ways in which Croatianness was formed in children's popular culture through three main aspects – war, history, and religion.

Keywords: national identity, popular culture, Kraš, Croatianness

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Introduction

This paper is focused on a specific discursive formation of Croatian national identity, primarily during the war and the post-war era in the 1990s, with special emphasis on children's popular culture. According to Stuart Hall, identities are "subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation" (Hall 1996: 4). The relation between identity-formation and the past is analytically provocative, as they are both subject to various representations. For Hall (ibid.), representation is an area in which identities are constituted and, as such, it enables us to understand how and why the (popular) culture of one nation, related strongly to visions of the historical past, creates specific forms of national identities.

A vast number of scholarly works address how popular culture influences identities on the individual and collective level, focusing on national identity. The key work in that regard is, in this case, the one of Stuart Hall, including the interconnectedness of his work on race, diaspora, cultural identity, nationalism and popular culture. In his bibliography (e.g., Hall 1981, 1992b, 1997), he frequently notes that (popular) media not only reproduce social and cultural reality but also create new forms of dominant values in society. Some concrete contemporary examples for these topics can be found, for example, in Jason Dittmer's work, which focuses on

the discourse analysis of superhero comic books, predominately "nationalist superhero narratives" such as Captain America, in order to "examine how the territorial nation-state is produced as a dominant scale of identity and politics" (Dittmer 2012: 3). Several edited books, such as *Nationalism and Popular Culture* (Nieguth 2020), use diverse case studies from various countries and cultures around the world in an attempt to dispel the notion of a singular monolithic national identity and provide insight into how various products of popular culture form national identity and the sense of national belonging.

Whether it is to create the collective consciousness of togetherness or exclude specific minorities or social groups in defense of one monolithic national identity, popular culture and its discursive potentials are always dependent on political, social and cultural contexts. In that way, as Hall points out, identities can be seen as "constructed through, not outside, difference" (Hall 1996: 4). Recognition of one's identity is dependent on the relationship with the Other, constituting the (seemingly stable) identity by establishing what that identity is not. Identities have discursive power; they function only through various strategies of Othering, "identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside,' abjected" (ibid.: 5). Ernesto Laclau (1990: 136) and Chantal Mouffe (2000: 12) call this capacity to exclude the "constitutive outside." For them, as Božić-Vrbančić, Orlić and Vrbančić interpret their work, "all societies and identities are constructed within specific discursive formations, and they are results of articulatory practices," which "consist of different discursive attempts to fix the meaning of the social" (Božić-Vrbančić, Orlić and Vrbančić 2012: 58). However, these attempts are always partial, always incomplete, because "the full closure of society is impossible, but it is exactly the idea of closure that functions as an ideal" and "it is a fantasy that emerges in support of this ideal" (Božić-Vrbančić 2003: 302).

During the Yugoslav Wars in the first half of the 1990s,[1] the sense of Croatian national identity was threatened in many different ways, but, as Laclau (2005) argues, it is exactly at the moment the threat occurs (the moment of dislocation of the social and the negation of identity) that new identities emerge and become new constructions that try to fill in the gap created by the threat. At that time in Croatia, there were many different discourses about national identity. Here, I want to start by focusing on the various popular products on the theme of war that provided points of identification and were closely related to national identity. Numerous songs and television programs, as well as other aspects of popular culture, had a role in the discursive construction of Croatian values, history, victories, and aims. In general, this is what distinguished Croatian people from those of neighboring countries, such as Serbia, Slovenia and Bosnia and Hercegovina. Many popular products of the time –

[1] In Croatian "Domovinski rat" (War of Independence). There are various translations of this war in numerous academic and popular publications from various perspectives. However, one of the most common translations that goes within global description of the war in Yugoslav region is "the Yugoslav wars" (Baker 2018: 8).

especially music, comics, and collectible stickers – were articulated around national identity.

The wider context of nation-building, everyday life, and various cultural forms during the 1990s had concerned ethnologists both during and after the war. For instance, the first works on everyday life, war, and nation-building, written and published during the war, were compiled in a volume entitled *Fear, Death and Resistance: An Ethnography of War: Croatia 1991–1992* (1993), edited by Lada Čale Feldman, Ines Prica, and Reana Senjković. In this work, Ines Prica (1993) and Reana Senjković (1993) provided significant analytical findings, which are used in this paper. It is predominately the findings on the significance of various symbols during the war, which signified enemies, heroes and ideologies, and those providing insight into discursive practices, that correlate with the findings in this paper, as will be shown.

Reana Senjković continued her work on "the war of symbols" (Senjković 2002: 33) fought in Croatia during the 1990s in her book *Lica društva, likovi države*. In her analysis, she mentions various songs and other products (such as postcards and flags) that were used in the "channels of mass communication" (ibid.). She divides the signifiers of Croatian nationhood into two eras, the pre-war and wartime era, where flags, crests, and *pleter*[2] (a type of Croatian interlace) were substituted or heavily complemented with diverse visual codes of the reality of the Croatian war, such as white doves (that symbolized peace), red stars (as a signifier of the enemy aggressor), ruins of Croatian cities, and silhouettes of geographical frame of Croatia. The Other, as Senjković stated, was represented not only through Serbian soldiers, their uniforms, weapons, or beards. Rather, it was also represented through military tanks, grenades, and skulls with the red five-pointed star insignia (ibid.: 36). As these studies established an apparatus and valuable contextual information for analyzing cultural materials, this paper turns to cultural artifacts of Croatian public space that were not previously covered in detailed analysis.

This paper mainly focuses on those parts of Croatian popular culture that articulated specific national fantasies and are seen here as places of discursive conjunctions that created and recreated a certain sense of belonging and differentiation from various Others who emerged as a threat during the war. I will analyze the role of products for children from the 1990s, precisely the special chocolate bar series manufactured by Croatian food company Kraš, accompanied by collectible stickers. More concretely, I will analyze three specific Kraš products – the first being *Cro-Army* series (1992), chocolate bar stickers of Croatian soldiers accompanied by the sticker album depicting various war-like situations. The sticker album of Croatian soldiers will be followed with the *Knights' Tales* series (1996), a sticker album of the history of Croats retold from the perspective of a magical dwarf that visits major historical events. And, lastly, the *Maki* series (1997), an album and stickers of Catholic saints, which Kraš published together with the Croatian Catholic publishing house

[2] Feđa Vukić also notes the role of *pleter* in Croatian visual culture in the 1990s, as well as the prefix "Cro" in many products during the 1990s as a part of "creating new national identity" that combined commercial ideologies, the market and ideas of mass culture (Vukić 2012: 169, 174).

Glas Koncila. Inspired by representation theory and discourse theory (Hall 1992a, 1996; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Hage 1998) on national identity and fantasy, this paper presents an analysis of discursive formations, which appeared in these products aimed primarily at children. Also, it will be investigated how articulations of Croatianness (*hrvatstvo*) – a form of Croatian national identity that imposes certain values a Croat (an ideal citizen) should have – are dependent on various strategies of Othering.

Subjective realities of Croatianness

If we take Benedict Anderson's consideration of a nation as "a community socially constructed, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group" (Anderson 1983: 6–7), then different symbols within the media, songs, sports, and everyday life can be a part of the apparatus constructing an idea of unity and discursive guidelines on what the nation has to be or already is. Ghassan Hage, in his analysis of Australian national identity, describes this idea of national unity as "fantasy" – "subjective realities, enduring fantasies, which reveal to us many important aspects of the way in which social reality is structured" (Hage 1998: 19). Hage argues, similarly to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), that the yearning for closure, or an ideal unity, is never complete. It constitutes a fantasy (closely related to the psychoanalytical tradition of Jacques Lacan in which fantasy stages a certain relationship and mode of interaction between the subject and the object of desire). In other words, "fantasy is something that one yearns for, but is considered somewhat unrealistic to achieve" (Hage 1998: 68). Hage's notion of nation as fantasy was inspired by Slavoj Žižek's psychoanalytical work and his work on "national otherness" (Hage 1998: 74). Hage notes the influence of Lacan and Žižek when he describes the nation as a state of yearning. By connecting nationalists' yearning and acts as one highly dependent, Žižek, in his vision of what he calls the "Nation Thing," states that "nationalists are constantly worried that the Other is going to steal their Thing (their fulfilling nation) away from them" (ibid.: 72). The Other is necessary for a subject to have a specific fantasy of national space. It is a fantasy that does not present that perfect image as much the yearning for that image – the wholeness of the nation.

Representation works in a way that offers some sort of closure to this yearning, an idea of unity that presumably stabilizes identity. However, as Laclau (2005: 70–71, 119) argues, such unity is impossible; hence there are always some stereotypes that try to hide that impossibility, some exclusions that mark what identity cannot be (Lawler 2008: 2; Božić-Vrbančić 2008: 12). In this context, we can say that identities appear in relation to the Other and are constantly destabilized by that which is excluded from their production (Božić-Vrbančić 2008: 12). As Hall (1996: 4) posits, identities are constantly changing and transforming, evoking the past, dwelling in the present and attempting to construct the future. Therefore, it is necessary to

analyze how exactly the Croatian identity was constructed at a time when the Other was clear and fixed (Serbian army) and when other threats (ranging from economic to social and political) brought to the fore the insecurities of Croatian history, as well as its future – the transition era embroiled in capitalism, neoliberalism, and socialist legacy.

In the case of Croatia in the 1990s, determined primarily by the war and the post-war era, the role of popular culture (sports, music, children's products, etc.), retrospectively, seems like one with a pivotal role in addressing Croatian national identity, especially Croatianness. As, for example, in the case of Croatian literature, Maša Kolanović states that after the turbulent war events, Croatian literature was in the position to redefine Croatian identity (Kolanović 2011: 340). I argue that the same thing happened on many other cultural levels that include commercial products. Caught in-between the transition process and the capitalist mindset of trying to commercially transform every aspect of life, Croatian cultural history in the 1990s is seen as intertwined with the notion of Croatianness and how to form it discursively.

This is evident in the way the vision of public television service, Croatian National Television (HRT), was formed based on the personal and somewhat more official testimonies of its role during the war. According to its former director, a well-known filmmaker and author Antun Vrdoljak, and his interpretation of the war and experiences during the war, HRT was a part of the battleground, "You have a statement from Carrington, a European Union official in Croatia, who told Milošević in Belgrade that they could not win the war because they lost the media war with HRT" (Grubišić 2012). HRT, with the reports of its journalists from the battlefield and the continual programming of Croatian popular and patriotic songs, played a great role in sustaining the image of Croatianness. The situation of "defending the homeland through music" is referenced by Ivana Polić (2019: 38), whose work focuses on children and how they were included in the nation-building process. Additionally, Catherine Baker discusses the music in Croatia to a great extent. In her book *Sounds of the Borderland: Popular Music, War and Nationalism in Croatia since 1991* (Baker 2016), she analyzes national identity narratives involving *tamburica*, *klapa*, urban Croatian music, Eurovision contests, singer Marko Perković Thompson, and many others by detailing political and media situation in Croatia during and after the Yugoslav wars.

The bands *Putokazi*, *Thompson*, *Jura Stublić and Film*, *Band-Aid*, and many more, with their specific ideologies and effects on the public (in the past and today), had a role that cannot be ignored in this kind of an overview. Whether their songs were about promoting peace, war politics, or profiling specific fascist overtones (ibid.: 103), they all made a cluster of numerous signifiers, attitudes, and feelings dispersed through various media embedded in a wide area of public memory, complemented with consumerism, reproduction, and production. All of them tried to fill the ever-persistent lack within Croatian identity, contesting it with discourses referencing the political and social situation at the time, while providing their visions of what that situation was and how Croatian people should act and feel. A similar strategy was noticeable in political flyers and posters promoting Croatian political parties during

the war (see Wróblewska-Trochimiuk 2019; Senjković 1993). There was a need to determine who were good, representative Croats, which values they should reject, and which they should honor and glorify, to be distinguishable from everybody else. This ascertainment is, again, heavily influenced by previous ethnological research and the examples used in the analysis of posters, songs and various other artifacts.

According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 112), every society is an unfinished process in which there are always various discourses that fight for hegemonic power "as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity," to establish meaning to society, and to form and protect a specific system of values. In other words, "the lack in the social is always hidden with phantasmatic construction through which we perceive society as objective reality" (Božić-Vrbančić 2008: 15). The reality during the war can be seen quite as clearly in the context of reading popular culture of the time – enemies were commonly known, concrete, and the focus on Croatian greatness and identity was one of the primary public concerns. As Croatian identity is seen here as a contingency of various discourses, I will try to locate the main discursive points from the perspective of children's popular culture of the era and show how specific values and messages formed this sense of "objectivity" regarding Croatianness. To be more precise, the fantasy space of Croatianness, presented here through Kraš products, will pinpoint what it lacks – the Others, who "allow nationalists to believe in the possibility of such a space eventuating" (Hage 1998: 74).

This issue is a complex one. However, this paper places its focus on one specific element of Croatian popular culture and investigates points of fixation and discursive formation of Croatian identity. Some of these products (patriotic songs, political posters, etc.) were targeted to children and young adults as their primary audience and were closely connected to the war being fought at the time. The function of television programming in Yugoslavia changed even before the outbreak of war. It was already becoming dominated by American TV shows that incorporated specific capitalist elements (commercials) into the socialist system (Vučetić 2019: 387). In that period, the Yugoslavian public sphere, the one influenced by media, caused a specific paradox of accepting elements and operating strategies of popular culture from the West within socialist ideology.[3] In Croatia, during the war and afterward, the impact of the United States was similar, as indicated by numerous programs in Croatia that were airing action movies, selling American superhero comics, and producing their own versions of game shows such as *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy*. The impact of specific publishing houses, such as Marvel, could be seen in "media war folklore" about the first Croatian superhero, *Super Hrvoje* (Prica 1993: 52). Just like the comic book series *Captain America*, which was a part of World War II propaganda, the Croatian comic book *Super Hrvoje* was created with similar narratives, although in this case, regarding Croats fighting Serbs and the Serbian army during the war. Ivan Čolović also mentions *Super Hrvoje*, which he calls a part of "Serbo-Croatian contemporary war propaganda folklore," describing it as a compilation of

[3] More on the topic of Disneyfication of Yugoslavian society can be found in Radina Vučetić's book *Koka-kola socijalizam* (2019).

various motifs from Superman comic books and Star Wars movies (Čolović 2007: 140). It dealt with the life of Hrvoje Horvat, a child of Croats who moved to Germany before the war, primarily because Hrvoje's father was unhappy with the political regime in Yugoslavia. Hrvoje becomes an orphan at a young age, after Yugoslavia's secret service kills his parents. The family that takes him in has a son, Stjepan, who becomes his best friend. Though Hrvoje stays in Germany during the war, Stjepan returns to his home country for archaeological research. During an excavation, he discovers a strange statuette that is, according to the legend, magical. The legend says that only one pure of heart whose blood is spilled on sacred soil (in this case, the *pleter*, a kind of Croatian interlace engraved in stone) while carrying the statuette will become a hero and defend his land from any danger and enemy. Hrvoje later finds himself in precisely that situation while in Croatia to find Stjepan, thus becoming Super Hrvoje, the man of stone. The comic book actively immerses into a battle against the Serbian army, introducing us to both the main antagonist and the development of a superhero, who finds himself in many new adventures throughout the Yugoslavian region. Besides the fact that the enemies of Super Hrvoje were labelled by nationality, their visual characteristics are just as important. Much too often, enemies (Serbs) were somewhat monstrous in their appearances: hairy, grotesque, with fang-like teeth. Not only did *Super Hrvoje* apply the mechanisms of constructing a superhero as an American product, but the discursivity of monstrous enemies and Othering was also "transferred" from the first issues of Captain America in which the hero fought Nazis. Though there was only a single issue of *Super Hrvoje*, similar products began to take over the popular entertainment sphere in Croatia during the war, primarily the graphic illustrations of sticker albums sold by the Croatian food company Kraš.

Omitting the legacy in Kraš

As stated on the official web page, "[t]he UNION Factory in Zagreb started production as the first large-scale chocolate manufacturer in south-eastern Europe" in 1911.[4] For the next 30 years, they gradually started to manufacture various chocolate treats, making their own flour and cookies and developing the first slogans for their products, such as candies and cookies, as well as manufacturing what they named "the thinnest milk chocolate," later to be known as *Životinjsko carstvo* (*The Animal Kingdom*). Before the 1950s, Kraš was a conglomerate of various smaller manufacturers, such as Union and Bizjak, until they officially unionized under the name taken from anti-fascist fighter and syndicalist Josip Kraš. The topic of Josip Kraš, as a person embodying socialist values and consequently erased from today's

[4] https://www.kras.hr/en/about-us/about-us/history-of-kras/ (accessed 1. 9. 2020). The UNION Factory would later on become Kraš. As stated on the official web page: "Union, Bizjak and other smaller manufacturers merged under the name of Josip Kraš, an antifascist fighter and trade unionist." (https://www.kras.hr/en/about-us/about-us/history-of-kras/1950).

commercial, marketing, and political aspects of the factory that bears his name, is a complex one. With many other similar examples in the countries of former Yugoslavia (such as Rade Končar, Marijan Badel, Boris Kidrič and others), both the names and the reasoning behind giving the manufacturing companies these names had been systematically erased from the collective memory. The question of what exactly happened to the factories named after communists, anti-fascist fighters, and syndicalists, and how these figures' significance in the naming of the factories was omitted in the 1980s (or during and after the war in the 1990s), presents a challenge that requires considering various factors in detail largely beyond the scope of this paper. However, it should be noted that there were some difficulties in finding (at least in my experience and research) available literature and previous research regarding this convoluted history. The most significant information was discovered in the newspaper media. An article from Luka Filipović (2019) and another from Karmela Devčić (2009) note the chronological changes in these factories (which exist even today) and specific information about the reasoning behind omitting the legacy of the names these companies carried. In Devčić's interview with a former Kraš engineer, Vlasta Konjevoda Host, it is mentioned that the difference between a brand and a person was established in many business rationales of these companies:

> After we converted into a joint-stock company in 1992, we realized that our name was our strongest brand and that we should keep developing under it. It was a story of a brand and not of a name. Names and surnames always suggest something, and this made our communication with the market much harder. So, as we did not want the name of our company to be associated with anyone, we decided to keep only the surname, Kraš, leaving out the name Josip. (Devčić 2009)

The independence and competitiveness on the market can be related to what Sanja Potkonjak and Tomislav Pletenac (2007) call an ideology of great narration in which socialism is followed by the ideology of Croatian sovereignty and independence. Thus, the act of omitting Josip's name can be read as a trace of this independence. Various other information in these newspaper texts implies the reason behind the names Končar and Kraš (among others) remained only as a trace of the Yugoslavian region, which was seen not only as a post-conflict space but also as a post-socialist one (Baker 2018: 8). The person no longer exists, only the brand and image do.

The Animal Kingdom first came to market in 1956, and Kraš has been manufacturing this kind of chocolate with collectible stickers until this day. Kraš transformed from a social enterprise into a joint-stock company and began "to develop as a modern and market-oriented company in 1992, during the war."[5] This historical retrospective available on the official Kraš website provides a timeline with various years and thumbnails of the specific product that may or may not still be on the market. In representing the 1990's, especially the war years, they pointed out their moderniza-

[5] https://www.kras.hr/hr/o-nama/o-nama/povijest-krasa (accessed 1. 9. 2020).

tion as their greatest achievement, as well as the centralization of manufacturing that happened in 1999.[6]

Kraš is known for many children's products that have become and remain a part of popular culture to this day, and of all the chocolate products with self-adhesive stickers, only *The Animal Kingdom* is still prominent and available, although in new versions and adaptations. As stated on the official Kraš site:

> Besides the chocolate, each chocolate wrapper contains an animal sticker. The stickers are collected in an Animal Kingdom Collectible Sticker Book that is, in fact, a children's animal encyclopedia, and Kraš offers a bountiful bag of sweet treats for a completed sticker album.[7]

Kraš continued this description by noting the element of education and award in these chocolates:

> In more than 80 years *The Animal Kingdom* has been satisfying kids' curiosity and educating them while treating them with just the right amount of sweet indulgence and chocolate taste as remembered by many generations. [8]

The Animal Kingdom is noted on the web lexicon of Ex-Yugoslavia mythologies,[9] thus framing it as one of the classic and well-known, almost folkloristic, elements for many people in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. This is an important element in the analysis of other similar products – how exactly did sticker albums about war, Croatian history, and religion educate children and what was the reward? These products, with the same premise of collecting stickers when buying chocolates, were (in order of release): *Cro-Army* (1992), *Knights' Tales* (1996) and *Maki* (1997).[10] Kraš's official history, just as it omits the reasons behind naming the company and mentioning Josip Kraš, omits the three chocolate products that I am analyzing here. It is no wonder, then, that regardless of its longevity in collective memory, Kraš today only manufactures *The Animal Kingdom* chocolate bars that, seemingly, are not explicitly connected to Croatianness.

Cro-Army and the national identity during the war

Among these three albums, *Cro-Army play*s the most striking role and holds the most interesting position since it was issued during the war and dealt explicitly with war-related topics. Retrospectively, the role *Cro-Army* had was greatly incorporated into the specific "narrative of the nation" (Hall 1992a: 293) – a nation that was in

[6] https://www.kras.hr/hr/o-nama/o-nama/povijest-krasa (accessed 1. 9. 2020).
[7] https://www.kras.hr/en/products/chocolate-bars/animal-kingdom (accessed 1. 9. 2020).
[8] https://www.kras.hr/en/products/chocolate-bars/animal-kingdom (accessed 1. 9. 2020).
[9] http://www.leksikon-yu-mitologije.net/zivotinjsko-carstvo/ (accessed 10. 10. 2020).
[10] All translations from Croatian to English regarding these three sticker albums are done by the author of this paper.

turmoil. The specific animosities towards people with whom this nation was at war and the political situation was mirrored in these collectible stickers aimed primarily at children.

Hall suggests the "narrative of the nation" as the foremost characteristic of national culture:

> As members of such an "imagined community," we see ourselves in our mind's eye sharing in this narrative. It lends significance and importance to our humdrum existence, connecting our everyday lives with a national destiny that preexisted us and will outlive us. (ibid.)

Nationalist attitudes, or the "mentality of nations" articulated in the narration (discourse) can consequently consist of the perception of that which differs from the narrative of the nation, by establishing the Others and through "the increase in discriminatory acts and exclusionary practices conducted in the name of nationalism in many parts of Europe" (Wodak et al. 1999: 1). Although Wodak et.al. are not referencing practices in popular culture in their text, we can notice that the *Cro-Army* album constitutes an evident exclusionary practice, in a similar way, by being infused with the discourse of power of one nation. Although *Cro-Army* does not explicitly name any army or country as an enemy, the enemy is referred to as "the more powerful aggressor" (Kraš 1992: [3]).[11] The only text, on the first page of the album, states the premise and explains the setting of the album:

> CRO-ARMY collectible stickers series came out of the wish to honor the moment when our Croatian Army came into being and bravely stood up against a more powerful and better-equipped aggressor. Once you collect all of our beautifully crafted stickers, you will discover five interesting battle situations featuring our friendly mascot GARDY, who takes part in different military operations. The completed album will occupy a special place in your collection and remind you of our brave soldiers' days of glory and their fight for the good of our Croatia. (ibid.)

In addition, the characters (actual soldiers) are only shown wading through rivers, climbing mountains, passing through some rough terrain, and carrying all sorts of weapons, while there is no representation of killing or blood; there is nothing explicitly represented as an element of violence that might be expected from some

[11] For more on the process of naming the enemy, primarily from the perspective of children's narratives within the context of "wartime everyday life in 1991-4" see: Maja Povrzanović (1997). In the children's life history essays she analyzed, the issue of naming the enemy is an indication of how heterogeneous these discourses can be. Whether the enemy is not named in their testimonies all together (by referencing the war as something that was a force of nature more than any kind of ethnic or ideological conflict), or by being under the indirect influence of naming the enemy through noting cultural and historical stories that differentiate opposing sides in the war (ibid.: 89), as well as media representations (ibid.: 90), she notes diverse influences in constructing the image of an enemy. These connections are seen in *Cro-Army* in which the enemy is labeled as the aggressor but is not visually presented in the album. Povrzanović's insights are also taken into consideration in the analysis of the other two albums that were published after the war.

other sorts of war representations (Figure 1).[12] Senjković wrote about how Croatian mass media often concentrated on the soldiers in action, portraying the romanticized and more optimistic vision of brave Croatian soldiers (influenced by American popular culture, especially Rambo films) in various music videos and video reports (Senjković 2002: 181–217). *Cro-Army*, in this way, provided an upbeat documentation of the Croatian army and their fight, presumably to lift the morale of civilians and soldiers, in a similar way to, for example, Super Hrvoje, or Captain America during World War II.

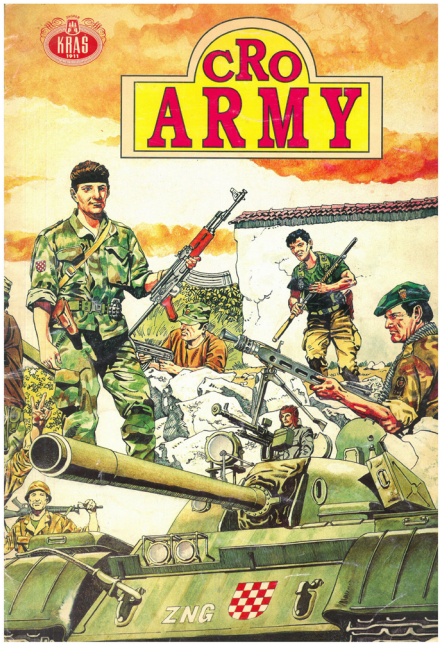

Figure 1. The cover of Cro-Army album (Kraš 1992)

The *Cro-Army* album is presented through 100 stickers placed within "five interesting battle situations," which, although drawn, depict authentic uniforms and are presented seriously and very realistically without any cartoonish characteristics. On the other hand, there is the "likable mascot" Gardy, whose name is a playful modification of the word "Gardist" (Croatian for "a member of the National Guard"), who acts as a mascot throughout the album. Though Gardy is only in the spotlight on a single page in six different shapes and appearances, those six different shapes could hardly be called actual characters in the strict sense of the word. They are, in fact, different mascots (one of them is undoubtedly a girl), presuming Gardy is the name of all these characters/mascots (Figure 2). Gardy is also dressed in war clothes, with an army hat or helmet. Unlike the "real" soldiers in the album, Gardy has a smile on his or her face and is just a child. The role of this mascot was evidently to approach

[12] All images in this paper are used in a manner consistent with the doctrine of fair use. They are solely presented here as a part of research.

children in a manner that would be more likable to them, to be the front stage of the product, while the backstage (or rather, it is safe to say, the main stage) was reserved for the very realistic and explicit representation of the war taking place at the time. This kind of strategy was evident in the video commercial of the product,[13] followed by the melody of the popular patriotic song "Mi smo garda Hrvatska" ("We Are Croatian Army").[14] In addition to these mascots and battle situations, the album had a special weapons section where the children could color all the weapons used during the war, which could be seen in the media's war coverage. There were also six available spaces for stickers presenting weapons. The weapons were also drawn in a realistic style rather than as cartoons.

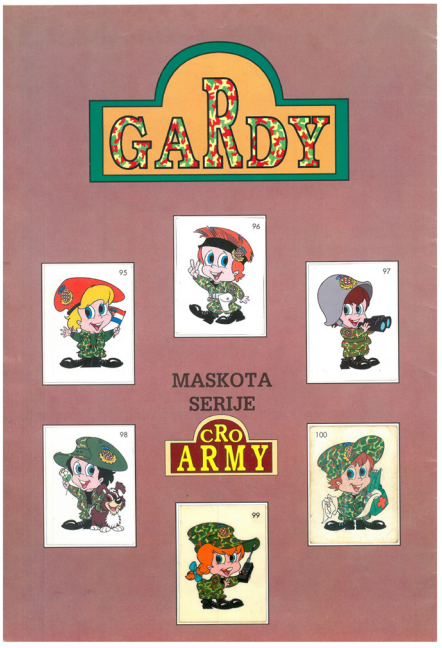

Figure 2. Official mascot Gardy in Cro-Army album (Kraš 1992: [14])

We can see how war, in its totality, is re-appropriated for children's consumption, even as a social event and an almost "naturalized" state of human existence. There are no "R," "PG 13," or similar disclaimers on the front or the back of the packaging. One would think that the notion of war and placing cartoons with children in soldiers' uniforms could be problematic as an entertainment product, however, this was not the case here. Senjković notes *Cro-Army* was an element of prestige among kids in Croatia. "War stories of their fathers became a topic for conversation [...] role models for planning a game" and in this way, these stories could also be collected (Senjković 2002: 45). To be very direct, national ideology, spread and manifested in this way, did

[13] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbWV_pFT4qM (accessed 26. 10. 2020).

[14] Chorus of this song, performed by Mladen Kvesić, is as follows: "We are Croatian army, our hearts are heroic, we are not afraid of anyone, we love our country."

not make distinctions between the people of the nation and those to whom it speaks. People, regardless of age, must be immediately introduced to the world of enemies because, without the enemy, there is no nation to preserve and no nation (or identity) in danger. By seeing how the enemy is portrayed through this discursive strategy of Othering we can talk about the lack of Croatianness and Croatian national identity. The hegemonic dominance of certain discourses implies the partial fixation of the social, the predominance of an ideological phantasm, and the giving of meaning to empty hovering signifiers such as freedom, justice, Croats, etc. Inspired by Lacan's concept of "point de caption," such privileged discursive points with partial fixation are termed "nodal points" by Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 112). While we can see how the discourse of "our nation" is an attempt to halt the chain of signifiers, in the very fact that *Cro-Army* collectible stickers exist as a representation of memory, a symbol of "Croatian honor" and "war spirit," the place of an enemy or "the more powerful aggressor" can be taken up by anyone, anytime (Kraš 1992: [3]).

There are always more nodal points in society that, through the processes of partial fixation of certain meanings, always produce a certain excess, i.e., that which cannot be included in the processes of signification but rather defines the identity of what is constructed as the "constitutive outside." However, the very existence of nodal points, namely the need to fix society and to introduce stability, is indicative of their inability to close the system, the partiality of each fixation, the full range of contradictions, and differences that exist within each discourse; the antagonism functioning as a society limit (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 128). If we reconsider Hall's (1992a: 292–293) insights about national culture as a discourse, along with how this discourse influences the formation of national identity, we can interpret *Cro-Army* as an important element in this discourse. This is an element characterized by war, leaving an opening for the emergence of new enemies or the reaffirmation of already known ones.

Postwar Kraš stickers: *Knights' Tales* and history

While the *Cro-Army* series constructed its vision of Croatianness in the circumstances of the Yugoslav Wars, the *Knights' Tales* series addressed the presence of the same brave Croats in various historical situations. After the war, Kraš embarked on a specific kind of narrative of the nation, a retrospective in which the main role was played by a dwarf who decided to follow the "brave and honorable people of Croatia" through various historical situations in which they proved themselves (Kraš 1996: [2]). The focus of this sticker album was on Croatian history and tradition, mainly related to famous battles lead by Croatian kings and the gatherings of Croatian people on different occasions.

The narrator of the album of 120 stickers is "Martin the dwarf who has lived a long time and knows a lot," who describes himself as just one of the "little long-lived beings" who "see everything humans do, but almost no one notices us so we

can carefully record human history and sometimes remind you, little people, who you are and where you come from to help you understand each other better" (ibid.) (Figure 3). The motives behind the whole story of following Croats throughout history are explained in Martin's rationale:

> I have seen many countries and peoples because I am very, very old, but I remember your country for the beauty of its landscape – the sea, forests, and mountains – but also the courage and honor of its people – the Croats. (ibid.)

Figure 3. Introduction to the album Knights' Tales, with dwarf Martin as the narrator (Kraš 1996: [2])

The dwarf with supernatural powers (including time travel and the ability to disappear) presents throughout the album various events and situations which are in the imaginary of Croatian history. According to the album, these situations should be the foundation and legacy for the young Croats for whom this product was intended. Historical moments are illustrated in black and white in the form of chapters with special names (Figure 4).[15] The role of the dwarf Martin in this narrative in

[15] Quotes from some of the chapters are noted in brackets: "The arrival of Croats," "The Battle against the Franks" ("Croats became Christians and built many churches and monasteries, decorated on the mysterious plaited ornament," Kraš 1996: [8]), "Coronation" ("Envoys of the Roman pope crowned Croatian king prince Dmitar Zvonimir," ibid.: [12]), "Mongols," "Military camp" ("soldiers offered their souls to God," ibid.: [16]), "Heroes leave for battle," "Battle against the Turks" ("The great Dalmatian dogs of the Croatian army shot down the Turkish soldiers [...]," ibid.: [20]), "Tournament" ("The Croats loved tournaments – they even invented a very special one called Sinjska alka in honour of the victory over the Turks," ibid.: [22]), "The Story of the Great Joža" ("to a giant named Veli Jože, who is somewhere in the woods and is waiting for an opportunity to drive strangers out of that beautiful area," ibid.: [34]), "Creatures from the forest," "Battle of Siget" ("Help from the emperor did not arrive and Zrinski decided to die heroically for his faith and homeland," ibid.: [38]), "Before the Battle near Sisak," "Sinjska Alka" ("[...] if you are interested, come to Sinj to watch it, maybe you will see me inside a hollow tree or in a stone shelter. And then I will tell you many more interesting things. Goodbye!" ibid.: [44]).

which he explores the Croatian past invokes discursive framings of Croatian national identity filled with pride. Martin saw a lot of other countries and people, however, only Croatia deserved this kind of presentation and narration. The exceptional attributes that Croats presumably have (though the narrative does not explicitly mention who the enemies might be) brings us back to the work of Ines Prica and her text "Notes of Ordinary Life in War" (1993). In her analysis of various wartime songs, enemies are often portrayed as having features of an "animalistic or demonic nature," thus making a mythical image out of them in which they, for instance, lack culture or are cowardly (ibid.: 53). In the *Knights' Tales* series, the lack of others' culture or the representation of some enemy as cowardly is substituted with enunciating Croatian culture and bravery. In this way, the discursive construction of Croatianness is as determined as it is open to various other threats and enemies that do not have to be specifically and explicitly named. Bringing this fantastic element of a magical dwarf as a narrator, and thus stepping outside of the confines of the reality of war (in contrast to what was done in the *Cro-Army* series), brought a childish element full of praise from an outsider who relishes Croatian history and bravery.

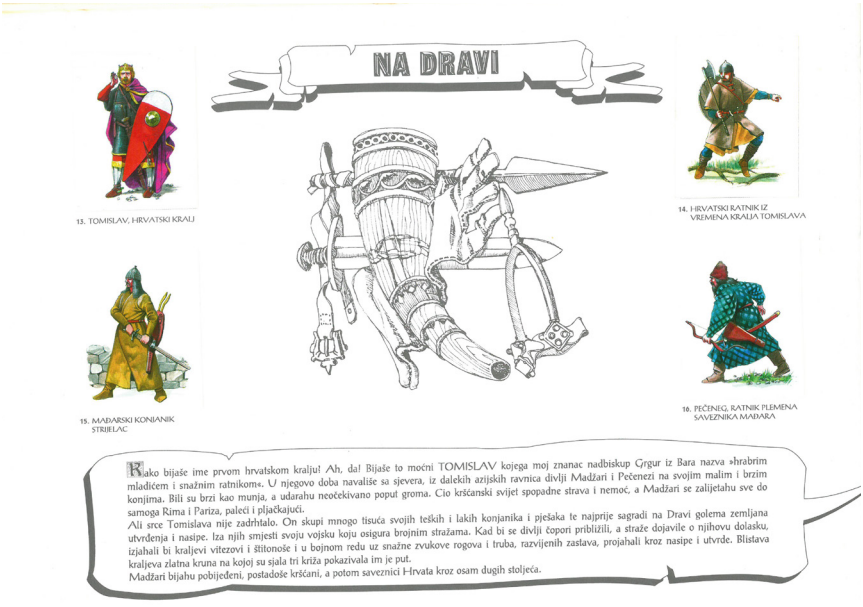

Figure 4. Knights' Tales page with stickers and the text that accompanies a specific historical event (Kraš 1996: [10])

All scenes in the album are in black and white, and this kind of style performs the function of presenting the drawings as real (but not yet whole) historical events, in the sense that it is the dwarf (or someone else who made the album) who provides the reader with a clear picture (and a copy) of events in which Croats participated. For Hage, such fantasy needs to have a reference to social reality, "they have to sup-

port and be supported by the practical reality lived by the subject" (Hage 1998: 132). By combining historical facts and natural beauty extending throughout Croatia with the element of a fictive character such as Martin, *Knights' Tales* balanced the roles they have in supporting the fantasy of Croatianness, as the "relative lack cannot be too great or the fantasy would appear unattainable" (ibid.: 133). For this reason, the use of activities, which go beyond mere reading, with which the subject must engage is a valuable element to analyze in these sticker albums. The element of making the consumer engage with the narrative is different here than in the *Cro-Army* series. In the latter, the element of reward was that kids could imprint the *Cro-Army* logo on their t-shirts, while entire product *Knights' Tales* was advertised as a coloring book in which children must fill in all colorless lines and events and thus leave their imprint on Croatian history (Figure 5). The function of creating imaginaries of honorable and brave Croats, proportionally and historically, progressed further in the 1990s with this product. In the same way as *Cro-Army*, *Knights' Tales* provided a pedagogical apparatus to teach its target audience (elementary school children) what exactly makes a great Croat. The bravery of Croats and their enemies construed the history of the Croatian people as one full of challenges, victories, and attempting to preserve to the situation Croatia had during the publication of this album – independence. After all, *Knights' Tales* were published a year after the war ended, in 1996, and its role is seen here as an attempt to fill the new lack – the lack of establishing what Croatianness is and what it could be, after the turbulent era of war. In the same way, the analysis approaches the third part of presumed discursive tendencies in trying to fix national identity: religion. Though *Knights' Tales* briefly noted the elements of religion in the events depicted, it was the third sticker album that put the strongest emphasis on it.

Figure 5. Depiction of one of the battles in Knights' Tales (Kraš 1996: [21])

Post-war Kraš stickers: *Maki* and religion

Following war and bravery, tradition and history came as a part of the construction of Croatian national identity. After that, the triad of Croatianness was complemented by religion. The sticker album of Catholic saints, *Maki*, was the third instalment of the popular Kraš chocolates. Focused on religion and the collecting of stickers of Catholic saints and their placement in the designated slots, this album provided lengthy biographies of each saint, which consumed most of the space on the pages. While the *Cro-Army* series had no text except for the introduction and *Knights' Tales* had a lot more text accompanying the stories, *Maki* had even more textual content regarding Catholic saints. Additionally, this album came with a slot for the consumer's photo (to be represented as a saint as well). This time the album was for collecting images of Catholic saints, each accompanied with a text, which is too extensive for an analysis of this type. Nevertheless, it is possible to highlight some important aspects of this popular product. What is most noticeable in the album is the cover itself, which has a space in the middle left for a picture of the consumer (child) who starts collecting images of the 240 saints included in the album (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Cover of Maki, together with the page on which a consumer could place his/her photograph as a central saint (Kraš 1997)

The name of the album is, although unconfirmed, an abbreviation and wordplay on *Mali Koncil*, a monthly Catholic magazine for children. In this way, the Croatian Catholic publishing house Glas Koncila additionally imprinted its role on this pro-

ject, which was not conducted solely by Kraš. *Maki* also has its main characters (although they are not listed anywhere as such) – smiling angels who, on the cover, together with a picture of a person who collects the stickers, create the atmosphere of children's content, behind which there are 240 short stories mentioning evil, good, battles, Satan, and various other vices which the people who became saints managed to resist. The pedagogical elements are completely explicit, while the role of putting one's photograph on the album is a message to all children what they should strive for so that one day they would find themselves in a similar document, among the company of these saints. To become exemplary Catholic citizens of Croatia, a predominantly Catholic country, Kraš, together with Glas Koncila and many professional associates, started this project.

The only available document and newspaper report concerning this product contains the following record:

> The presentation of the new program for children by "Glas Koncila" and the food industry "Kraš," "MAKI – an album of saints" and "MAKI – chocolate with pictures of saints," was held on December 10 in the hall of the Minor Seminary in Šalata. The program was presented by Božica Bregant MSc, Tomo Petrić MSc, Zvonimir Grubišić PhD, and don Luka Depolo. The event was also attended by the Bishop of Varaždin Marko Culej, and the music program was enhanced by opera champion Lidija Horvat Dunjko, with organ music by Marija Penzer, the "Makovci" choir from Čakovec and the puppet theater "Ivana Brlić Mažuranić" from Zagreb. The presentation was attended by several hundred children who were entertained by don Luka Depolo, while the event was hosted by a member of the editorial board of "Glas Koncila," priest Mijo Gabrić. Don Luka Depolo pointed out that this program for children had been prepared for two years and was undertaken because the young generation has no role models to look up to. This project aims to show children that "good people" are the greatest and eternally famous and that everyone, even if bad, can change and become good. Don Luka thanked the initiator of the children's program Boris Matovšek, as well as Drago Bašić, who was responsible for printing and who gave his constant support to the program. (Informativna katolička agencija 1997)

Editors wrote that the album contained similar messages inside, with a more detailed explanation on how to collect these stickers and receive awards, descriptions of the awards, and the goals and "missions" of this album:

> In your hand, you have an album of 240 slots for stickers of 240 different saints. On the back of each one is a short lyric by which you recognize the saint. The slots also come with a number on which to place the sticker. Beside the image, there is a longer, more detailed text about the saint's life. Once you place the stickers, do not discard papers. Store them in a special place, so that when you collect all 240 stickers, meaning that you completed your album, you can send them as proof to our address. To reward your effort, we will send

> you big pictures of Jesus and Mary that you will place on page 4. Apart from that, you will be a contender for a special lottery with many great prizes, including mopeds, bicycles, ping-pong tables, photo cameras, video cameras, a trip to the Holy Land, golden necklaces with the Maki logo, etc. […] There are more than 240 saints. Thousands of them are in the calendar, and more than a million of them are commemorated on All Saints' Day, on November 1. Many of us were named after a saint. […] Every boy or a girl, young man or woman, wants to achieve great deeds in their lives. Most of them are not sure how to achieve it, so they wait for their chance or look for an idea of how to do so. Inside the album, you will find 240 lives full of adventures, because saints are God's adventurers, his heroes. You will see that many of them were not born saints, but God helped them change their ways. It is exactly this that we pointed out in their biographies […] Your era needs new saints, and perhaps some of your friends, or you, will become one! (Kraš 1997: 4–5)

Editors of *Maki* explained the origin of all saints, stating that every Croat bears the name of a saint celebrated annually, thus eliminating the possibility that someone's name does not have that kind of origin, and proposed that children contact the editors if they have any trouble finding their saint. In this introductory note it is stated,

> [Many] of us are christened with the name of a saint. This is why we celebrate our name day on the feast day of the saint after whom we are named, […] If you do not know the name of your saint, please contact the editors of Maki. It is good to have your protector, your saint, to whom you can pray whenever you need help. (ibid.)

Maki was published a year after *Knights' Tales* and encompassed its role in defining Croatian reality not only through religion but also through names. Establishing state symbols, holidays, and rituals were a part of defining everyday life in Croatia, but this was also defined through returning some older street names, and older Croatian names in general (Wróblewska-Trochimiuk 2019). This can be applied to the effort Kraš and Glas Koncila put into this album, which re-established such core values related to Catholicism by acknowledging every Croatian name is related to a saint. Not having that kind of relation is not an option, as the editors offered to answer anyone's call and find this connection. The fantasy of Croatianness, in that way, relies on specific connections with Catholic saints. The entire album is written in an encyclopedic style. In the beginning, one page is dedicated to the sources from which all the stories and data are derived, and the credibility and truthfulness of these stories are further emphasized in this way. At the end of the album, we have an index providing an alphabetical list of all the saints. As *Knights' Tales* used black and white techniques to maintain seriousness when depicting historical events, *Maki*, in the same manner, used a vast number of sources and a more serious tone when presenting data and the background stories.

Maki has a lot of great connections with *Cro-Army*, despite their aesthetic differences. While *Cro-Army* implicitly presented violence, in real scenes where violence

was not explicitly shown but could be assumed, *Maki* carries with it many lyrics describing "torture," "beheading," "rejection of Satan," and similar expressions that quite vividly form the context within which children place the pictures of saints they were given in a standard chocolate package.

What is excluded from this kind of narrative? Discussing the otherness formed through the narratives which are not representing the Other explicitly, Gillian Rose (2001: 157) states that the diversity of forms and the articulation of discourses demand us to recognize the symbolism of some texts or images as those signifying that which relates to other texts and images. Thus, Rose notes we should consider what is not said as a part of the discourse, so that we could reinforce the intertextuality based on our (the interpreters) knowledge and experience, which is, too, under the influence of various discourses (ibid.: 142). So, by constructing the world of Croatianness, Kraš and its sticker albums formed a space that includes Catholics and the bravery of Croats, both throughout history and during the war. By taking into consideration the context in which *Cro-Army* was published, we can thus rely on the interpretation that it is the Serb aggressor, unreligious people, and those who have no respect for Croatian bravery that form Otherness. The remaining question is how and if these characteristics overlap.

Conclusion: how does Croatianness work?

In a way, Kraš works like a monument in that it is related to past moments that evoke nostalgia and remind us how Croatian national identity had been discursively constructed. It explains how it worked for children who have now grown up. It leads us to the beginning and location of Croatianness, as intertwined with the historical, social, and cultural contexts of the time that preserved the national present tense from the materials of the past.

> A national culture is a *discourse* – a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conceptions of ourselves […]. National cultures construct identities by producing meaning about "the nation" with which we can *identify*; they are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it. (Hall 1992a: 292–293)

Hall states that every identity needs to establish the illusion of its uniformity. National culture is a system of representation (ibid.: 296). Kraš is an established symbol of Croatian products, with famous chocolates and other candies, which have their own visual identities, flavors, and people who feel affection for them. The three albums central to this analysis are no longer available on the market, but they remain as a relic of one specific point in time. Heavily based on the war in the 1990s and on other aspects in the post-war era, mainly religion and history, they present

one discursive construction of the symbolic order of Croatian national identity. This coincides with Senjković's analysis of "the accumulation of symbols" in the political posters or various other social and political events, which, through "war visuality" and the use of religious and historical themes, presented threats, fears, and visions of Croatian identity in times of crisis (Senjković 1993: 28, 30, 38). These albums can be seen as a dedicated product, which is, in the case of *Knights' Tales,* simply aimed at educating people about history, or in the case of *Maki*, merely presenting a product that is important for children since Croatia is a predominantly Catholic country. However, they present points of identification with the values and meanings this paper attempted to define as elements of Croatianness that were the dominant ideological impact of these albums. In this way, by following notions established by Hage (1998: 19, 68), Croatianness is a fantasy position, a field that can obstruct different visions and values that seem to fulfil and maintain this fantasy. If we approach the Kraš albums as one valuable factor of this fantasy, as an influence or product of this yearning, it can be seen how and on which values Croatianness has been constructed. With these examples, it is possible to see the mechanisms of constructing and representing Croatian identity to the children, citizens of Croatia, by establishing the values and traditions that they need to follow. In the 1990s, when Croatia went through a turbulent time with the rest of the region, there was a need to establish a clear and strong national identity. Collectively, the feeling of national belonging had to be catalyzed not only because of the events in Croatia and neighboring countries but also because there was a need for authority. The specific mechanisms connected to higher instances (highly consumed popular products such as music, movies, toys), which articulated the feeling of collectiveness and belonging, created the fantasy of Croatianness and defined a set of criteria on how to be a Croat. Kraš, as a Croatian factory, ostracized from its socialist legacies and point of pride during and after the war, became (deliberately or not) one of the most seemingly innocent speakers of security, collectiveness, and, finally, Croatianness.

Croatianness was presented to children and the general public through various products, but in the case of Kraš chocolates analyzed in this paper, it was presented through three main fields – war, history, and religion. According to these albums, to "be a Croat" means to be aware of the heroics of the Croatian people, to be aware of the history of what is presented as a unique and independent Croatian populace, and to be Catholic. However, this means to be under the constant threat of the Other, be it the Serbian aggressor, as implied in *Cro-Army*, unreligious people (*Maki*), or anyone else who has no respect for Croatian bravery and belongs to the people who fought the Croats in various other places and times (*Knights' Tales*). Do these things overlap more concretely? Are the Others predominately Serbs? Are people who do not support the narratives of Croatian history and those of different (or no) religions in Croatia one and the same thing? These questions are open to further research and analysis. Clear, distinct boundaries between nation-states, even in the past, as presented in *Knights' Tales*, formed nationalities, dangers, and differentiation, including the Other, as a part of the fantasy, thus maintaining a symbolic order that is all too familiar.

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Hrvatstvo i dječja popularna kultura. Analiza samoljepljivih sličica s čokoladama *Cro-Army*, *Viteške priče* i *Maki*

Cilj je ovoga rada prikazati diskurzivnu formaciju hrvatstva za vrijeme Domovinskog rata i u poslijeratnom razdoblju u domeni popularne kulture. Rad predstavlja analizu hrvatske dječje popularne kulture, prvenstveno čokoladica sa samoljepljivim sličicama tvornice Kraš, koje su obilježile ta razdoblja. Riječ je o albumu hrvatske vojske *Cro-Army*, albumu *Viteške priče* i albumu katoličkih svetaca *Maki*. Koristeći se teorijskim i metodološkim postavkama teorija reprezentacije i teorija diskursa o nacionalnom identitetu i fantaziji, rad pokazuje kako se hrvatstvo konstruiralo u dječjoj popularnoj kulturi kroz tri glavne odrednice – rat, povijest i religiju.

Ključne riječi: nacionalni identitet, popularna kultura, Kraš, hrvatstvo