

Bandaging Wounds of a Partisan Fighter as an Answer to the Policy of Forgetting

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Partisans and the World War II period remain the focus of discussions about the past in Croatia as well as in a wider post-Yugoslav context. Although the topic was permeated with the official ideology during the period of socialism, today's historical interpretations view the events from a completely different point of view. The topic divides the ideological space along the partisan-Ustasha axis. The political class was successful in changing the gloves that were necessary in the reproduction of this crucial problem. They used every available means to eliminate the clash that reveals the revolutionary nature of the constitution of Yugoslavia. The strategy of political class is the neutralization of discussion about the revolutionary quality of the war of national liberation. There dominates the reconciliation, which is some sort of bad Hegelian synthesis. The reconciliation is a call for all Croats to recognize the culprits and to finally start living in harmony, in a future without the trauma and the memories that awaken ghosts. Because those ghosts still seize the alive tirelessly. However, the ghosts are more numerous today than in the past. The ghosts of communism are striking again.

The latest ghosts have demanded victims among monuments as well. Their actions have had a common goal – to destroy certain history, i.e. the historical traces of anti-fascist struggle in Croatia. A new history has been written.

At the beginning of the 1990s there were two methods of destroying monuments. The first solution could be named the reshaping of old monuments. Such monuments were simply filled out with new elements. The space remained the same, but instead the red stars the monuments were adorned by catholic crosses; instead of anti-fascist slogans and praises to the partisan fights there emerged Croatian coats of arms with the dedications to the Croatian people written underneath. New monuments were frequently created to celebrate the visit of the first Croatian president Franjo Tuđman. The other methods of dealing with the past included direct and devastating actions. Unknown culprits would simply blow up the monuments or devastate them or write Ustasha's inscriptions. Except in a large part of Istria, almost all anti-fascist monuments in Croatia were devastated. It would be wrong to claim that

such devastation was a result of the politics orchestrated “from above,” i.e. that this was a secret plan that was created by the Croatian regime of that time. On the contrary, the reality leads us to the conclusion that the systematic devastation was part of something that we could call the policy of cleansing. In other words, it was the cleansing of foreign, unorthodox and non-Croatian elements that had to do with the constitution of the socialist Yugoslavia and partisans. The battle for the new Croatian identity and for the constitution of the new Croatian national country reached the moments of ideological interpellation. Every member of the new country had to share dual belonging: to be a loyal follower of the catholic faith and of the Croatian nation. That dual inscription of Croatianness was also reflected in the very change of the landscape – the changes of the monuments and streets reflect the effects of battles in the imaginary and the symbolic.

This is the context for understanding the performance “Bandaging wounds of a partisan fighter” that was performed in the town of Sinj by Croatian artist Siniša Labrović in 2000. It is an intervention on the monument to the war of national liberation, a typical monument of soc-realism, situated in the town park of Sinj. The monument has been largely destroyed by an explosive device planted by unknown culprit(s) who tried to destroy both the monument and a part of history that they tried to eradicate. Such an act has not caused an action of the public that has been silent about the devastation of the monument from the war of national liberation and that considers these actions unworthy of any special attention.

The performance of Labrović is that he literally applies various wounds medicaments on the damaged areas of the monuments, after which he bandages them with various gauzes and bandages, treating monument as a human being who needs help after serious injuries. He does all of this before the eyes of his fellow citizens, since this happens in the central area of the town, thus provoking their reactions and comments.

With his performance Labrović tackles the problem which A. Gramsci defines as social approval.¹ Gramsci defines approval as a result of dominant social forces to impose new social value system by uncoercive methods. With his performance Labrović problematizes a general acceptance for constituting new identities, whose creation demands the eradication of

¹ A.Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Lawrence&Wishart, London, 1971.

old, in this case foreign, unorthodox and non-Croatian elements that are linked with socialist Yugoslavia and partisan movement. He also problematizes our inclination to easily accept violence which creates that sudden change of identity. Therefore Labrović carefully and with lots of attention cleans and bandages the wound of a partisan fighter.

The important thing about Labrović's performance is, other than the very topic that many institutions avoid, the selection of the location for the performance. The performance takes place on public location, in the central park of Sinj which is at the same time the place of the devastation of the monument. The political potential of his performance is also evident in his desire for interaction with the local community that has been silent about the dominant ideological practices for decades.