

UDK 316. 647: 355. 292

Published Professional Conference Contribution

THE SOCIAL TRAUMA OF WAR VETERANS¹

Olivera MARKOVIĆ-SAVIĆ²University in Pristina with a temporary Head Office
in Kosovska Mitrovica, Faculty of Philosophy /Department of Sociology

Abstract: This paper deals with the attitude of the society towards war veterans in Serbia, from their perspective. It presents the research results of the social position of war veterans in Serbia from the theoretical framework of the so-called *social constructivism*. This theoretical approach advocates the standpoint that the problem of war veterans does not socially exist until it is constructed as a social problem, i.e. until it reaches the appropriate symbolic interpretation. Therefore, the interpretation and representation of participating in war, viewed as socially symbolic acts, are important aspects of understanding the social trauma of those who return from war and carry with them clinical and therapeutic aspects of trauma. 30 war veterans who partook in the wars on the territory of former Yugoslavia participated in the study. The method of semi-structured interviews was used in the research. The objective of the study was to determine their attitudes and experiences about their own position in the society through the most important aspects of their interaction with the close and wider social environment. The research results indicate that dissatisfaction prevails in the examinees' self-perception regarding their reacceptance into the society. The self-perception of the society's attitude towards their participation in the war ranges from condemnation to pointlessness of their sacrifice. The situation is even more drastic with those who returned from the war with a physical disability; their self-perception of the society's attitude can be summarized as compassion without genuine support for the re-socialization.

Keywords: war veterans, social constructivism, social trauma, re-socialization, stigmatization.

1. Introduction

The perception of social attitudes towards war as a social process has a significant impact on the types of interaction and social networks that war veterans use in a society to create a place for themselves, create meaning and connect. The research uncovers and examines the ways in which war veterans

¹ Paper presented at International Scientific Conference *Facing Social Traumas: A Challenge for Sociological Research*, Faculty of Philosophy, within Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Skopje 23-24 April, 2015.

² markovic.olivera@gmail.com

cope with the difficulties caused by the conflict between proclaimed ideals and the reality in modern society. During the twentieth century, there was a wide establishment of the proclaimed values of the Enlightenment, such as: human intellect, independence, tolerance and peace, embodied in constitutional guarantees in the form of: the right to life, liberty, equality before the law, preservation of peace, prohibition of cruel punishment and so on. At the same time, there was a spread of violence on a massive scale, and as Malešević states: "Having in mind that in the 20th century more people were killed than in the rest of human history, there is an imperative to solve the ontological dissonance created by a mismatch between the reality and the proclaimed ideals." (2011:18). In observing the above contradiction through experiences of veterans, it became important to examine their perceptions of the social attitude towards their participation in the war, and thus towards the problems faced in the process of re-socialization after the return to a peacetime society. In this way it was possible to study how the conflict between the proclaimed values and the reality translated at the micro level in actions and relations among social actors. An adequate understanding of the character of the controversy requires posing the question: how is reality being constructed?

The standpoint of social constructivism in an attempt to establish the sociology of veterans is advocated by Wilbur J. Scott (2004) in his work on Vietnam veterans. This author believes that the life stories of Vietnam veterans about the problems of re-socialization belong to the realm of symbolic interactionism. W. Scott finds a good illustrative example in the story of health problems of Vietnam veterans. He explained this example by distinguishing between the following terms: a disease, an illness, a sickness. The term disease refers to conditions that impair the functions of an organism/body. The perception that something is wrong is an illness, and a sickness occurs when adequate medical experts confirm that a person has a disease and officially report it (e.g., a person receives the status of dismissal from work due to a disease). Regardless of the fact whether someone is ill and to what extent, assumptions, values and interests of several institutions come into play. In modern society, this includes science, the health care system and the court. Thus, as already mentioned problematic conditions - no matter how important - do not speak for themselves; they need someone to identify, articulate and advocate them. "An injury requires interpretation! I emphasize that sentence because the terror inflicts pain on the body, but it also seeks to be interpreted and, if possible, incorporated into the personality." (Farell, 1998).

A similar attitude is shown towards a social trauma. Namely, a trauma has two important aspects: the clinical aspect and the aspect of its representation and interpretation. In this way, there is an individual trauma, which in the case of war veterans is reflected in a sustained high stress typical in terms of threats to one's own life or death of a close comrade, while a certain number of veterans experienced a bodily trauma, in case of injuries and physical damage, so they started the process of re-identification in the light of new life circumstances.

When it comes to the representation and interpretation of such traumatic experiences, an individual trauma is primarily included in the ways it is "validated" in a society. Thus, the interpretation and representation as socially symbolic acts again become important aspects of understanding trauma (Mijatović, 2009).

The term veteran here relates to a person with war experience, who was a member of the army of former Yugoslavia, i.e. Serbia and Montenegro, engaged in war-torn areas of former Yugoslavia. The normative attitude towards this social group is not negligible since it affects how and under what conditions the lives of individuals and entire groups take place. However, this paper will not discuss the role of dominant social structures that regulate obtaining the veteran *status*. It discusses the relationship between a specific context of accepting the people with experience of war and the ways in which these people still live in social and cultural environments with the aim to determine the strategies that these people develop in social relations perceived as a negative attitude of the society toward their sacrifice for the community.

2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample and a description of applied instruments

The research was conducted as a part of a broader research entitled "The Social Status of War Veterans in Serbia". Using the method of semi-constructed interviews we examined 30 veterans engaged in the conflict in Kosovo and Metohija, as well as in war-affected areas on the territory of the former Yugoslav republics Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study was conducted in the Nišava, Jablanica and Pčinja districts. Prior to the beginning of the research, all the participants were familiarized in detail with the topic and the purpose of the research, and after the promised anonymity, all respondents agreed that the conversations can be recorded. The interview was conducted in accordance with pre-established groups of questions, and the analysis of questions related to the personal and collective identity is the subject of this paper. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed in its truest form. Nineteen respondents live in a city, three in the suburbs and eight in a village. The sample includes veterans who suffered damage to the body on the basis of which they were given the status of disabled veterans and those who do not have such a status. Thus, among the questioned veterans, fifteen of them have a bodily damage in the range of 20% to 100%. One respondent has the status of a peace-time disabled veteran; fourteen of them have not been officially recognized with a bodily damage, including two of them who seek a formal assessment of disability in court.

3. Results of the analysis

In the time before the wars in former Yugoslavia started the army as an institution enjoyed a great confidence among people. Recruited young men were sent to perform military service in a ceremonial way by their closest relatives and friends. This attitude towards the army was prolonged when the violent clashes flared in the former common state, since the population harbored hopes that the violent conflicts were only transient periods, and many young men recruited by the military administration had the idea that their engagement in those conflicts was a way of giving personal contribution to preserving the state and ending violent conflicts as soon as possible. Since conflicts did not stop and as they expanded, the ideological justification of those conflicts was losing support among people. Jasarević and Leutar (2008) offered an explanation of the attitude of society towards the veteran population in Croatia, which they presented in three phases, and that can also be applied to the veteran population in Serbia. The first phase, figuratively called the "honeymoon phase", is the period of an open display of gratitude for war efforts when the veterans are provided with all possible social support. After it, the so-called "sobering phase" follows during which the weight of all the care of those injured in the war is scrutinized, which in this case resulted in a reduction of the financial and social support for the disabled war veterans³. The last phase, still in progress, is called the "negation phase" characterized by questioning the justification of the war and its results. This phase has many negative implications on the lives of veterans, which will be discussed in more detail below. Respondents reminisce the phases of social attitude towards veterans and say that they had initially experienced a widespread support, even "admiration" for their decisions to go to war-affected areas, but then, with the cancellation of the ideological support for the violent conflict and the state's renunciation of this form of violence, they experienced loss of support even to the level of condemnation for their participation in the war. A retired officer describes it: "During the war, the attitude of the environment to me was full of respect, reverence and admiration, because many had relatives who were reservists, and as such sent to the battlefield. They knew that there were officers who did not want to go and they respected us who did. But the problem aroused after, because the war got a bad political connotation... Generally speaking, we are the victims of a bad image, not because the YNA fought badly, but because it did not meet the expectations of being the guarantor of sovereignty, brotherhood and unity. Even closest friends believe it was sheer nonsense... that I did not need all that... that I've lost a lot. Nobody condemns me, but they believe that it was pointless.", (2). A participant of the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina who willingly joined the YNA units in war-affected areas, and who was then drafted by the military for the war in Kosovo, explains conflicting attitudes of his nearest environment regarding war actions: "When I went to war they all encouraged me, and when I came back everyone said: he was a fool to go, he did not need it in his life.", (23). A participant of the war in Kosovo and

³DWVs further in text

Metohija in the reserve army, who was diagnosed with a PTSD as a consequence of war, explains the relationship of the environment: "In the beginning my neighbors, friends and relatives cheered me and were proud of me as I was there and endured it all, but then it all became boring to them because I only speak about it. It is not their only concern in life, so they are not willing to listen to those stories again and again." (28).

The phase of the war effects negation is - at the same time - a phase when the ideological support for a violent conflict resolution stops, since violence (like war) seeks permanent and long ideological support and justification, while violent actions *per se* are regarded as an illegitimate social behavior. This phase, which continues to this day, is explained by the participants as *contempt and making the participation in the war look senseless*. Respondents most often state that their surroundings, their friends, relatives and neighbors, consider their participation in the war meaningless, and their sacrifice as unnecessary and reckless "nonsense", in addition to a condemnation they sometimes face. A retired officer, who was in the military service due to the fact that as a young man in Croatia in the early 90s he had to make a decision "whose army he would fight for" - and so opted for the YNA - explains the inability to fit into society: "Nobody sees me with understanding, neither my wife, nor the firm, nor friends, no one. This is why I do not like to socialize. It is much better for me to take walks, but only with selected people, as it may be counterproductive otherwise and I could get angry.", (3). A veteran who participated in the war in Croatia in conscript forces, and then in the reserve forces during the war in Kosovo, describes society's attitude in this way: "Most often they say 'You were a fool to go to war', 'We pay today for what you yourselves deserved', 'Criminals', 'You did not win anything, you lost everything', and I do not blame them because they do not know what really happened there.", (7). A sniper whose participation started in the reserve forces of the YNA in Bosnia, and then joined the professional forces, interprets the reaction of the environment to his participation in the war: "There were different reactions, some said 'You were silly and crazy to go', even my own cousin says 'Why did you go? Look what you got for it! Who is looking after you now?' and so on. They did not go to the battlefield as they had not been drafted. Had they been drafted, they would have probably gone, too. But now, that I look back, I do not really know why I went.", (8). A Roma veteran who participated in the war first as a conscription soldier, and then in the reserve forces of the army, has not encountered the support of his surroundings: "They said that I was crazy and a fool. I have a friend who is the same age as I, we have the same number of days of participation in the war, 'day to day', and to the two of us they say: 'You two are the only crazy people who went to war.", (9). A participant of the war in Kosovo and Metohija in the reserve forces of the army says: "We, the veterans... are mostly regarded with misunderstanding, thinking that we are pretending to be too important and they consider us incompetent losers. There are people who really lose due to fear, and then someone says that he has seen and survived nothing. There are people with whom you can share your story of the war, but most people abuse this topic, they

are happy to label us as killers. You just cannot explain to a person what war is, when he has not seen it.", (20). A participant in the war in Kosovo and Metohija who reported to the army before he received an official call explains the relationship of the immediate environment in the following way: "The environment looks at me with disdain, although they are sure I did not bring anything back from the war and I did not go into robbery. I think that there are very few of those who went to war for robbery and I am very sorry that they have not been convicted... People in my environment can't understand that after war a man thinks differently, that he loses much of his personal identity, and that he cares a lot about certain principles and categories which had not been important to him before. I was even condemned by saying 'Shame on him, he left his wife and children and went to war'. I like to spend time with comrades, because a war friendship is much stronger than any other since on the battlefield we entrust life to each other. I feel lonely among neighbors and do not like to spend time with them.", (25).

Even more striking are the cases of veterans who came back from the war with some acquired physical disability, and their return to the community is worth of separate exposure. Although not significantly different from other veterans' stories, their stories carry particularities, different identities, since after returning home these veterans found themselves in a stigmatized group of persons with disabilities. Therefore, they may feel insecure not knowing how the environment to which they return will identify and receive them. Furthermore, the uncertainty arises because a person knows that - deep down inside - others would still identify him in terms of his stigma and the veterans explain this with the feeling of pity that they encounter in primary groups. A pity with no true support for re-socialization in civil society and condemnation for the participation in the war causes a burden on the veterans, which adds to the traumas suffered. During the adaptation to certain disabilities in the rehabilitation process, subjective perceptions of disabled people have more effect on the process than the extent of physical disability, so in this sense disabled people must learn how to live with their own perception of disability more than with the disability itself (Frigelj, 2003). It is in this process that the role of society is most important, because it is not enough that a man himself accepts the limitations stemming from the disability, but it is essential for him to be accepted by the immediate surroundings. A member of the reserve forces of the YNA who suffered a serious bodily injury in war explains his return to the nearest social groups: "During the first night upon my arrival home after treatment, which means that I did not come home after the battlefield, but after a few years in hospitals, it all became clear to me... the environment to which I returned became unknown and strange to me, everything was simply different. The silence was awful, I was used to constantly hear detonations, shots, assaults, the sound of tanks, guns, vehicles, anticipation, fear, and - later in the hospital - moans, screams of pain, nurses shouting, syringes rattling, expecting surgeries every day. And then, suddenly, an insidious silence, everything around me was silent, people live their normal lives. I did go back home to my wife and children, but

this was not my environment, people are different, everybody gets up and walks, I cannot. I'm the center of attention as everyone is looking at me, and everyone turns their heads when we meet face to face. Then, I wonder why this is so. Who am I? Am I a freak and do they pity me, or they just hate me? A thousand questions emerge. Part of the society understand me, but I think that more people are looking at me with pity, which gives me horrible pain. Most often, when I come to a person's house, the host takes care of the place in which I would be most comfortable to sit. It bothers me because I know where it suits me to sit and where it does not. Also, I am under the impression that they think 'This man was in war, he is certainly not normal, get out of his way' to avoid a conflict with me. However, I'm not like that, I have a good relationship with people, I'm not a conflicting person and quarrelsome.", (12). A wounded soldier from the conscripted forces in the 1999 war describes the attitude of the society like this: "The environment does not accept a veteran or it accepts him in a different way, because he came back different, with different values. He drinks. He harasses his family. He is not normal, and the environment slowly discriminates against him and removes him from the community. Another way to be accepted is out of pity, which is worse. I was able to go to war and defend all the neighbors, and now when I returned I became miserable, someone who needs help and someone who is below them. As I lay in bed with bandages, still not able to talk properly, they came to visit me and ask: 'How many have you killed? Was it bad? How many dead ones?' I - as a participant of the war - could not answer, because whatever I might have said would have been taken for granted, and thus I would have labeled myself as a killer, and with this label I'd have to move among people. In large cities, such as Belgrade and Niš, it is not too important since people do not know each other, but it means a lot in Vranje and other small towns where everything is being heard, known and accumulated. So if you say that there were dead, people will eventually recount that you are a war criminal. Everything you say, knowingly or not knowingly, people abuse, so it was my opinion that they shouldn't be told these things.", (13). Another veteran with severe disabilities, who participated as a conscription soldier during the war in Kosovo and Metohija, recounts his experiences: "In the beginning they were annoying. They all came to hear my stories and I was bored to repeat all the same story about how it was in the war and how I was wounded. In the end, I made a tape and gave it to people to listen because I just could not recount the same thing, especially since it made me nervous. I hated pity, and it was present. However, they accepted me well, they do not avoid me, and this would have been the hardest thing. I avoid talking to them about war experiences, since I do not want to be reminded of some things. On the other hand, I do not find it difficult to talk to veterans about it because they believe and understand me better having gone through similar things.", (16). A volunteer and a DWV: "Upon my return, I had a bad relationship with the environment, and now it is good. I was not able to understand them and they looked at me as a person who went to war to steal and got hurt." A police officer, a war veteran from the area of Kosovo and Metohija, summarizes the attitude of the society towards his war experience: "It was more

important to people to gather as much information about how it was 'down there', than how it was for you who was there.", (15).

However, when the attitude of primary groups is concerned, the most drastic reaction is caused by behaviors that are considered socially unacceptable. In this case, it is the attitude of neighbors to a woman who went to war on a voluntary basis: "The neighborhood is still looking at me like an alien. They still call me 'She who went to war'. Neighbors absolutely do not understand me. They were avoiding me because they did not know how to react when we meet. None of the neighbors talks to me. Friends understand me better, but mainly those who were on the battlefield as well, or those who are really close to me. There are people who look disrespectfully at my participation in the war as if it wasn't a big deal", (24).

As already mentioned, the lack of understanding and an indiscriminate condemnation for the participation in war is the most distinctive feature which society uses to characterize the participants of wars, according to the self-perception of our respondents. Also, the feeling of being condemned is further complicated because its meaning changes depending on the view of the events in the wars of former Yugoslavia. The veterans point out that some people condemn them for participating in war in general, while others condemn them because they "lost" the war. Both groups justify their views believing that the veterans suffered adequate punishment for what they, their comrades or their tribe committed, taking it as a justification for such treatment. It is precisely this impersonal communication that shows how contacts with strangers are reduced to stereotypes. A disabled war veteran explains in the following way the condemnation that war veterans experience: "I think that the problem of veterans in Serbia is that a part of the public refers to us as losers, and the other part as war criminals, without a third option. Those who see themselves as being patriotic consider us losers, since in the areas where we fought there are no Serbs left. We, the veterans, are also aware that there are people who fought for Milosević because they were loyal to his policies, and people who fought because of Milosević, since he provoked wars. Therefore, this generalization that all veterans are bad is preposterous. People do not want to remember that many youngsters were sent to the YNA army with music. Nobody asked parents if they could take their child to a war zone, and youngsters were taken away over night and lowered into hell. Why is that kid guilty and bad, when at that time all he did was respond to the call to serve his country? Reservists went without being really conscious. I, myself, went to war as if I would stop a war, so that those who rebelled would see that they cannot play games with the army, believing that the whole thing would be sorted out quickly. However, when a man arrives there, there is no coming back, it's a one-way street", (12). A retired officer and a DWV addresses the perception of society towards the war veteran group: "The main problem of the veterans is the fact that the war was lost and that no one understands why they went to war in the first place. It turns out that we went to war for a wrong thing, so now we are not important. I understand that American

veterans from the Vietnam war had problems because the American public realized how far Vietnam was and wondered what the Americans were doing there, but I do not see why our public turned their backs on us because we did not go to a foreign country to kill their people, we defended our people in our country. The influence of the media is such that I can no longer explain it to my own child, let alone someone else's.", (4). A voluntary member of the reserve forces of the YNA, who is also a DWV, has addressed the situation of veterans in society in the following way: "I think the climate is such that all those who participated in wars in the last decade are a burden to this society which would like to get rid of them.", (18). Another volunteer from the wars in Croatia and Bosnia discusses this attitude of society towards war veterans: "The veterans are degraded by the State and by the environment. Those who once declared themselves as being great Serbs, who sang Chetnik songs in pubs and were patriots at the time, have now become pacifists and democrats in horror of war veterans.", (19). That the image of war veterans in public is adverse was explained by a former soldier under contract and a participant in all the wars of the nineties in former Yugoslavia: "From the very establishment of the Society (the 63rd Parachute Brigade), it was important to us not to be typical veterans, because when you say a veteran, you are immediately placed into a negative context, into an image of a man who is disheveled and always wearing a part of military camouflage clothes, always unshaven, smelling of alcohol, a little noisier. That, I think, is the image of veterans in Serbia", (6). Generalizations and a discrediting the attitude towards war veterans is explained by a DWV: "We, the veterans, are labeled as people who went to war to steal and get rich, and this is not true. Secondly, we are labeled as murderers, which is true in a way, but in war you do not have other options", (8). A DWV from Vranje further explains the generalizations that war veterans are met with: "The mentality of people from this region is such that anyone who was in war is labeled as being 'insane'. They do not want to dive into the problems of a man who comes from a battlefield. The understanding of the environment is negligible", (14). A reservist from the war in Kosovo and Metohija places the position of veterans in society in a broader social context and thus further deepens the social problems faced by war veterans in Serbia: "In Serbia, we are a marginalized group that seems not to exist in this society, unregulated by law, and that issue is what we have to fight against. Veterans mainly come from the working and rural classes most badly hit by the current social and financial crisis. Those are the social layers that remained jobless in the process of privatization, their wives also, leading to a crisis. On one hand, there are the consequences of the war, on the other, there is poverty and adversity. Families have difficulties functioning. Children have their own desires which the father cannot meet, so an average veteran comes into a situation to which there is no solution", (13).

Therefore, the stories given above show that veterans face negative attitudes of the environment and that there is public animosity towards war participants. They are generally perceived as reminders of the inglorious past and the events that need to be forgotten as soon as possible, so every story about

them and their problems awakens undesirable memories. However, the veterans were not experiencing condemnation when the war was in progress: they were cheered from the nearest environment and state institutions, but when the policy was met with a failure, the burden was "laid on their backs." Here, it seems advisable to make a connection with the theory of deviance by Howard S. Becker. Specifically, Becker (1963) considers that a central fact in the study of deviance is that *it is created by the society*. More precisely, he states that "social groups create a deviance by making rules whose violation constitutes a deviance, applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders" (Becker, 1963: 7). So, from this standpoint, a deviance is not a property of an act that someone commits, but a consequence of the fact that the environment applies rules and sanctions to the "offender". This explanation is very applicable to the case of war veterans in Serbia, where public attitude regarding the participation in the wars in former Yugoslavia changed from interpreting it as a desirable response to patriotic duty and heroism to an extreme stigmatization of soldiers who are perceived as losers, bullies, war profiteers, troubled individuals who have earned their unenviable position. The focus of our interest here is the etiquette and the experience of being labeled as an outsider, or socially stigmatized, and the reactions to that attitude. It is not the committed act itself, because whether an act is deviant or not depends on how other people react to it. "The point is," as Becker says, "that the reaction of other people must be understood as problematic" (Becker, 1963: 10). This approach is important for this research because it points to a situation where the same conduct may be in violation of the rules at one time, and in line with the rules at another. Becker further points out that we should bear in mind that modern societies are not simple organizations in which there is general agreement as to what the rules are and how they should be applied in specific situations. In particular, Serbian war veterans fought for "their" people which was a socially desirable behavior when the war was in progress, while upon their return, the participation in the war received the connotation of a deviant behavior because the social and political trends dictated a different view of the war and the politics of war, and of deviants and socially undesirable behaviors. On the other hand, in the part of the public who continues to support the value of armed struggle for "one's own" people, veterans receive condemnation because they are seen as losers or insufficiently effective warriors. In observing the meaning of a deviant behavior from different perspectives, a reaction of the veterans to the views of the people who label them, i.e. judge them, seeing them as "outsiders", is not negligible. That raises the question: who is really in a position to impose their own rules and to force others to accept them? Here Becker finds the answer in the relations between a political and an economic power: "The groups whose social status provides them with the means and the power have the greatest ability to enforce their own rules." (Becker, 1963: 15)

4. Conclusion

The research uncovers and examines how war veterans cope with the difficulties caused by a conflict between the proclaimed ideals of modern society which condemns violent actions as an illegitimate form of behavior and the reality which testifies to a wide-scale violence in the last century. The focus of the analysis is actually a question of how this conflict, from a structural level (between the declared values and the reality), translates at the micro level in actions and relations among social actors. The findings suggest that a structural dissonance observed from the level of personal experiences of war veterans in the area of social representations and interpretations of their experiences of war trauma leads to social trauma. The social trauma is reflected in disparaging and sentencing attitudes of society towards the experience of war veterans. The attitude of society towards their war involvement has varied depending on the ideological support or the condemnation of the violent resolution of conflicts in former Yugoslavia. War veterans testify that they went to war-affected areas with a broad public support, and that they experienced a misunderstanding of their personal sacrifices in primary social groups upon return, while the attitude towards their military engagement, as contacts grew socially distant, was increasingly dooming.

Due to this predominantly negative attitude of society towards war veterans, we can conclude that they belong to stigmatized groups. That war veterans bear a social stigma is shown by their experience of being labeled as outsiders, not due to specific acts they performed (which, as we have seen, can be supported or challenged by ideological positions), but due to the fact that the environment applies rules and sanctions to the "offenders". A person who carries the stigma of being a war veteran is faced with prejudices of the environment in the form of social and psychological consequences. Prejudices are, in themselves and in this case, generalized and affect the identity and personality of the stigmatized person. The visibility of the stigma can affect the way in which the stigmatized ones will deal with the stigma, so those with an "invisible" stigma - such as war veterans who are not disabled - may be spared of social rejection at first glance, but an invisible stigma can also lead to problems in re-socialization and a psychological vulnerability. Respondents who acquired a disability in war point out that the dominant attitude of society towards them is that of pity, but they feel rejected and condemned to a lesser extent compared to those whose stigma is subject to control, i.e. war veterans without a physical trauma.

The research shows that this is not only the case with war veterans in Serbia, but that veterans mostly face negative reactions from the environment as soon as the ideological support of the armed resolution of the conflict - the war - stops, which makes this problem a global social problem, i.e. not only a moral one, but a sociological problem as well.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Becker, S. H. 1963. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, New York: The Free Press.
- Dandeker, C., Wessely, S., Iversen, A. and Ross J. 2006. *What's in a Name? Defining and Caring for "Veterans": The United Kingdom in International Perspective*. *Armed Forces & Society*, 2: 161-177.
- Farrell, K. 1998. *Post-traumatic Culture: injury and interpretation in the nineties*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Figley, R. C. 1989. *Treating stress in families*, New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Frigelj, D. 2003. *Vojna psihologija*, Zagreb: MORH.
- Jašarević, T. and Leutar, Z. 2010. „Samopercepcija društvenog položaja invalida domovinskog rata“. *Društvena istraživanja* 19 (1-2): 93-116.
- Malešević, S. 2011. *Sociologija rata i nasilja*, Zagreb: Jesenski i Turk.
- Mijatović, A. 2009. „Trauma i pitanje reprezentacije: suvremena teorija traume, Sigmund Freud i Walter“, *Fluminensia*, 21: 143-162.
- Scott, W. 2004. *Vietnam veterans since the war. The politics of PTSD, Agent Orange, and the National Memories*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

ОПШТЕСТВЕНАТА ТРАУМА НА ВОЕНИТЕ ВЕТЕРАНИ

Оливера МАРКОВИЌ-САВИЌ

Апстракт: Овој труд е посветен на општествените ставови за воените ветерани во Србија, од нивна перспектива. Во него се изложени резултатите од истражувањето на општествената положба на воените ветерани во Србија од перспектива на теоретската рамка на т.н. *социјален конструктивизам*. Овој теоретски пристап ја застапува перспективата дека проблемот на воените ветерани е непостоечки сè додека не се конструира како општествен проблем, т.е. додека не достигне соодветна симболичка интерпретација. Оттука, интерпретацијата и репрезентацијата на учеството во војна, разгледувани како општествено-симболички акти, претставуваат важни аспекти за разбирањето на општествената траума на оние кои се враќаат од војна и со себе носат клинички и терапевтски аспекти на траума. Триесет воени ветерани кои земале учество во војните од поранешна Југославија учествуваа во студијата. За истражувањето беше употребен методот на полуструктурирани интервјуа. Целта на студијата беше да се утврдат нивните ставови и искуства за сопствената позиција во општеството преку најзначајните аспекти на нивната интеракција со поблиската и пошироката општествена околина. Резултатите од истражувањето упатуваат на заклучокот дека незадоволството е превалентно во самоперцепцијата на учесниците во поглед на нивната реинтеграција во општеството. Самоперцепцијата на општествените ставови за нивното учество во војна варира од осудување до бесцелност на нивната жртва. Ситуацијата е уште подрастична кај оние кои се вратиле од војна со физички инвалидитет; нивната самоперцепција за општествените ставови може да биде сумирана како сочувство без суштинска поддршка за ресоцијализацијата.

Клучни зборови: воени ветерани, социјален конструктивизам, општествена траума, ресоцијализација, стигматизација.