THE FLAG HERITAGE FOUNDATION MONOGRAPH AND TRANSLATION SERIES
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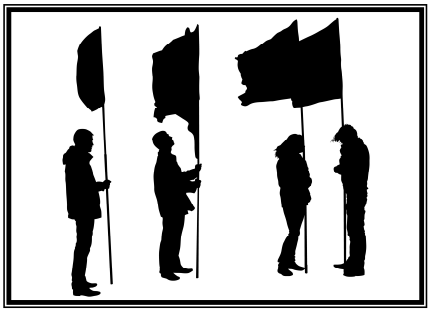
VEXILLOLOGY AS A SOCIAL SCIENCE

by Lt. Col. Željko Heimer, PHD, FF



Edward B. Kaye, Editor

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An adapted excerpt from the doctoral thesis in Sociology
Identitet Oružanih snaga Republike Hrvatske
iskazan zastavama vojnih postrojbi u Domovinskom ratu i nakon njega
(*Croatian Armed Forces Identity as Expressed*
through the Military Unit Flags in the Homeland War and Following It),
successfully defended in 2013 at the University of Zagreb, Croatia.

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THE FLAG HERITAGE FOUNDATION

MONOGRAPH AND TRANSLATION SERIES

The Flag Heritage Foundation was established in 1971 in order, among other purposes, "to collect, organize, and disseminate information concerning all aspects of flags and related symbols" and "to promote wide public knowledge of the rich history of flags which fosters international understanding and respect for national heritage." It is a registered charity in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The Flag Heritage Foundation Monograph and Translation Series was established in 2009 to publish worthy monographs on flags and related subjects, and to translate and publish in English works previously appearing in languages inaccessible to many scholars. This is the sixth publication in this Series.

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Table of Contents

Preface

Many vexillologists, when asked when their interest in flags began, answer "I've always been interested in flags!"—often referring to the colorful depictions of flags in encyclopedias or dictionaries that fascinated them as children. But once an interest turns into a passion it becomes a hobby, and when that passion results in systematic research and methodology, it becomes a scientific study. So vexillology is the study of flags.

Early in the 1990s I started to "research" flags as a hobby, attempting to show part of Croatia's flag heritage on my website—at a time when that heritage was almost completely unknown, even in Croatia. The development of modern information and communication technologies soon enabled me to connect with enthusiasts of similar interests around the globe and I joined the international vexillological group *Flags of the World* (FOTW), whose members exchanged flag information through a mailing list and maintained a website. FOTW's volunteers had already begun communicating with the well-organized community of flag scholars connected through the *International Federation of Vexillological Associations* (FIAV). And beginning with the 18th International Congress of Vexillology in York, England, in 2001, I had the opportunity to acquaint myself with the scientific approach to flag research; ever since I have tried to apply it and introduce it into the Croatian scientific community.

While preparing papers for later vexillological congresses, I was fortunate to meet Prof. Ozren Žunec, who encouraged me to approach vexillological topics through the prism of sociology. In 2006 that resulted in my enrolling in doctoral studies in sociology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies of the University of Zagreb. At the time, sociology was an entirely new scientific area for me. The topic of the 1991–1995 Croatian Homeland War, a landmark in modern Croatian history, seemed a logical choice for my doctoral thesis—considering my employment in the Croatian Ministry of Defense—and a unique way to link my private (flags), professional (military), and scientific (social studies) interests. The flags of the Homeland War had not been researched at all, appearing only sporadically in published papers and under other more traditional topics. There had been no systematic research into those flags, nor had anyone the remotest idea how many of them existed.

For my thesis I am immensely indebted to Prof. Žunec, who guided me during my entire postgraduate studies. I am also very grateful to his assistant, Dr. Petra Rodik, for her help in various stages of my postgraduate work and in the preparation of my thesis. Without her advice it would have been much more difficult for me to cope with entering this new area of study. For their frequent advice in various areas of the sociological approach to my topic, I am also very grateful to Prof. Ognjen Čaldarević and to Valeria Barada and Tijana Trako Poljak, my colleagues in the postgraduate course, who worked as sociology

department assistants. I also thank the many other professors and colleagues with whom I had the pleasure of discussing various aspects of this work and who selflessly helped me even though I was initially an outsider among sociologists.

I am grateful to innumerable vexillological colleagues from the *Flags of the World* group and members of vexillological associations around the world, for helping me, by sharing material and experiences, to compile a historical overview of military vexillology, as well as for their participation in discussions on vexillological theory. Among them, I especially thank Dr. Marcus (Manuela) Schmöger from Munich, the vice president of the German Flag-Studies Association, who kindly provided me with materials gathered from various libraries from around Germany and Prof. Arthur W. Etchells II of the University of Delaware, for materials on military flags in Europe of the 18th and 19th centuries. For advice on the sociological approach to vexillology, I am grateful to Prof. Scot M. Guenter of San José State University, in California. I must express my particular gratitude to Dr. Whitney Smith for his book *Flags and Arms across the World* (in its 1982 Croatian edition), which introduced me to a lasting interest in flags, and for the scientific vexillological papers that he tirelessly published over 50 years which I later had a chance to study.

I am very grateful to Mrs. Željka Fressl Jaklinović, who edited the Croatian text and helped with an initial English translation, and to Ted Kaye, former longtime editor of *Raven, a Journal of Vexillology*, of the North American Vexillological Association, and English editor of *Grb i zastava*, who painstakingly polished the English text of this version with an extensive and complete copy-edit.

And finally, I owe immense gratitude to my parents, who supported me in all of my efforts—private, professional, and scientific—and especially to my grandmother Sofija, who proudly followed my achievements but unfortunately passed on before seeing this one completed.

This book is based on the doctoral thesis I defended in 2013 at the University of Zagreb, "Croatian Armed Forces Identity as Expressed through the Military Unit Flags in the Homeland War and Following It", prepared under the mentorship of Prof. Ozren Žunec, the chair of military sociology in the sociology department of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies at the University of Zagreb. The text presented here is the majority of the theoretical part of the thesis. The study of military unit vexillology in general and the history of flags in militaries, as well as the empirical research portion of the thesis, which deals with the military flags used by Croatian Armed Forces units in the 1990s and 2000s, could not be included in this

edition. However, Ted Kaye has graciously helped prepare a longer English version of the thesis, *Exploring Vexillology through Military Unit Flags*, published on demand.

This text provides a theoretical introduction to vexillology, its subject matter, its place in the scientific endeavors of men, its relationship to other established fields of scientific interest, and its basic founding principles. The text shows that vexillology, while an interdisciplinary field of research, is primarily a social science and has its focus in sociology. It also shows that sociology cannot study society completely without a full awareness of vexillology and its results. These deliberations provide a theoretical framework for vexillological science.

The Flag Heritage Foundation found my study interesting enough to be made available to the wider vexillological public in an English translation. I'm deeply grateful to its directors for publishing this work and allowing it to reach a broader audience.

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A note from the editor:

It has been an honor and a pleasure to work closely with the author to help shepherd this important work into print. Making it widely accessible in English enhances its value to vexillologists (and sociologists) worldwide.

We faced many decisions and alternatives when choosing the style of this text, ultimately settling on some key principles—for example, we use American English spelling and vocabulary but follow the more-logical British convention regarding the placement of punctuation around quotation marks.

Translating from Croatian (a language with seven cases and extensive inflection) into English (a language without cases but a prominent use of articles) can pose a significant challenge, but one I hope we have overcome. The test of the copy-editor is to identify any lapses in fully transmitting the intended meaning. To the extent any such lapses remain, the fault is mine, not the author's.

Introduction

It seems to be the nature of any social group to adopt some symbol representing the group itself, a physical symbol condensing the elements of group identification. Therefore, it is no wonder that flag-like objects (*vexilloids*) have appeared in all cultures since the dawn of time. Once created, such symbols receive a particular and separate meaning for the group they identify, thus beginning their process of "deprofanization" or sacralization. In the other words, such symbols become, in one way or another, sacred (meaning "separated"); group members regard them with particular respect and rituals and ceremonies develop around them. Among the objects in various societies which embody such symbols, the flag has proven the most practical—easily folded for carrying and storage but when unfolded providing exceptional possibilities for graphic representation of the group's symbolism, with its coloring, ornaments, and dynamic movement. Because these characteristics give them an advantage over many similar symbols, flags soon became part of military tradition nearly everywhere. After all, even modern national flags developed, more or less, from military flags as various social groups evolved into modern nations; in Europe that occurred mostly in the 18th and 19th centuries. 1848 was particularly fruitful in that respect—in that year the Croatian tricolor emerged, among several other new national flags.

Flags are studied by vexillology—a field first developed as a separate scientific discipline in the second half of the 20th century and related to several other traditional fields of study such as history, art history, sociology, political science, geography, and anthropology. Vexillology also relates to other disciplines studying symbolic artifacts, such as coats of arms in heraldry, seals in sphragistics, and coins in numismatics. Vexillology is also related to such "hobbyist" activities as collecting stamps (philately), military uniforms (uniformology), and insignia and equipment (militaria), especially when they try to embrace the scientific method. Indeed, the similarity of vexillology to collecting has led some to question its scientific status. However, in spite of such critiques, since the end of the 20th century (especially thanks to the emergence of international forums and the development of communication technologies) the otherwise relatively few and dispersed researchers in various countries have been able to share knowledge and develop methodologies ensuring a high scientific level of vexillological research and forging interdisciplinary links with other, previously established scientific fields. In the 21st century, vexillology is finding its place in the academic community. At certain universities vexillological subjects are taught within related courses as parts of history, political science, sociology, anthropology, diplomacy, and other disciplines.

In Croatia, as in many other countries, the science of vexillology is in its infancy. That, of course, does not mean that Croatian scientists had not previously studied flags in one way or another, however, a systematic vexillological approach, as presented in this thesis, is offered as starting point for future studies.

It is hoped that providing access to this thesis by foreign researchers, through an English translation of its key chapters, will enable them to build on it and correct it using examples and comparative studies from their own nations.

1 Key Concepts

For an effective treatment of the topic, it was necessary to establish the relationship between sociology, the study of society, and vexillology, the study of flags. The goals of the thesis were:

- To show that sociology has a central role in vexillology, but also that sociology is unable to express fully some aspects of social reality and its constructs without researching flags;
- To provide a theoretical framework for vexillology as an interdisciplinary field of study; and
- To apply the resulting theoretical framework to the military unit flags of the Croatian Armed Forces and to conduct research into Croatian Armed Forces identity.[1]

As the first step toward these goals, it was necessary to consider some sociological concepts from the thesis title to provide a sociological framework for further discussions. However, the terms mentioned are among the most complex sociological concepts and each may serve in their own right as the basis for much more than a single thesis, so only the most basic deliberations required for understanding them are given here.

1.1 *Identity*

Identity is an umbrella term used in sociology to describe one's concepts and expressions of individuality or social affiliation, such as national or cultural identity, or in general, social identity—a term that encompasses a set of affiliations with various groups to which an individual feels membership.[2] A number of sociological approaches, theories, and models attempt to explain the concept of social identity; all share the perception that an individual has several levels of identity and that a particular person may hold several separate sets of identity.

Among earliest theories in identity research, the theory of *social identity* by Tajfel and Turner stands out, focusing on relations among groups [Tajfel and Turner, 1979]. The theory of *self-categorization* builds upon it, adding to inter-group relations, introducing the concept of individual identity [Turner et al., 1987]. The model of social identity of *deindividuation* effects focuses on anonymity, contextual factors, and

[1] As noted, the final goal of the PhD thesis is not covered in the English version of this work.

[2] Some other social sciences use the term *identity* with a similar meaning, but sometimes also with some other specific meanings. These fall beyond the scope of this discussion.

strategies an individual chooses and which affect his behavior [Reicher et al., 1995]. In any case, these theories question when and how an individual identifies with a social group, when and how he acts as its member, and when and how he accepts common attitudes. Also, they touch on the issues of interaction among individuals which are interpreted as interactions among the social groups to which they belong. (These deliberations certainly also include psychological issues, which are not covered here, even remotely.) Tajfel, et al. opposed the concept that group behaviors may be explained solely through research into individual psychology—they claimed that people do not act solely as individuals but also act as members of a group. They posited that there is a continuum from the solely individual to the entirely collective pattern of behavior, from which an individual chooses how to react in certain situations. According to the theory of social identity, each individual possesses an entire spectrum of identities, some of which are expressed to a greater or lesser degree depending on the particular social situation in which he finds himself. In some situations, such as war, group identity may be expressed more profoundly than individual identity, and a person may act more readily in way distinct from how he would as an individual—such as making a personal sacrifice for the benefit of the group.

The range of identities possessed by an individual in a military organization may encompass affiliation with a certain basic unit (brigade, battalion, company, and even smaller), affiliation with a higher-level organization unit (corps, branch of service), affiliation with a certain military professional community (military occupational specialty, functional area, etc.), and affiliation with a cohort of military education and training (class of a military school). In some situations in the military and in civil life, an individual may choose to act more like a member of a certain profession (communications officer, physician) than a member of certain unit, in fact he may entirely disregard his military identity, and act according to his identity in civil society (regional and national affiliation, member of a choir, parent, or any other role). Considering that these military identity groups (companies, battalions, brigades, and higher units) are formalized homogeneous groups, while civil society groups are not, as a rule, it may be expected that the former would be more likely to have flags and the latter (except nations) would not. On the other hand, smaller units (squads, platoons, etc.), which may also have strongly developed identity feelings (expressed through shoulder patches), as a rule do not have flags, perhaps due to financial and organizational reasons (but also, cf. further Dunbar's number).

A process of *identification* is, generally, a method one uses to single out one "thing" among items of the same type to refer to it when speaking to others. In this general sense identification is not yet the identification of "self", but very generally an identification of something; the identification of a person is only one of the "things" that we single out with an identification reference. Riceour terms this most general method of identification as *individualization*, and he considers it a reverse process to *classification* [Riceour,

1995:27–28]. Unambiguous identification requires designators which always mark one and the same "thing", so that identity is described as *sameness* (French *mêmeté*), and not as *selfhood* (French *ipséité*), although Riceour highlights that there is no advantage in choosing the first criterion (permanence of the mark) over the other (selfness) for the construction of the concept of identity. In that sense, all modern considerations of individual identity are based upon Descartes's *cogito, ergo sum*, i.e. the identity a person constructs by his own reflection of himself, forming an equivalence of "person" and "self". The capability of *self-consciousness* is necessary for development of personality. Kihlstrom, et al. describe three levels of self-consciousness: "me as concept", "me as picture", and "me as memory", while personal identity is built primarily from the latter [Kihlstrom, et al., 2003]. Self-conscious memory consists of empirical memory (recollection of personal experiences), semantic memory (recollection of knowledge, without personal context), and types of declarative knowledge, which are complemented by procedural knowledge (rules and skills). From all this knowledge, an individual draws characteristics he considers distinctive to himself, and in accordance with which he relates to others. Indeed, these relations to others bring up identity issues of affiliation with some groups and non-affiliation with other groups, i.e. in individual personal identity, relations to others introduce elements of group identity. Tajfel, et al. tried to establish the minimum conditions under which members of a group begin to distinguish themselves as members versus non-members, in an attempt to understand the psychological basis for inter-group discrimination. Based on these experiments, Tajfel and Turner developed the theory of *social identity*, according to which a person does not possess a single "personal self", but rather several levels of "selfness" matching ever-larger circles of group affiliation. Various social contexts, according to Tajfel and Turner, lead a person to reflect, feel, and act based on his personal, family, or national "level of self". Besides these "levels of self", an individual also possesses multitudes of "social identities", i.e. concepts of self, resulting from his understanding of his membership in social groups. In other words, self-perception emanates from things defining "me" as a member of a various groups. Such self-perception may differ from the presentation of personal identity, which results from self-conscious memory, i.e. from an individual's unique attributes.

The theory of social identity claims that membership in a group forms internal group self-categorization and enhances individual identity, favoring membership in the group as opposed to non-members. Turner and Tajfel's experiments showed that with the act of categorizing themselves in a group, individuals tend to raise their level of self-respect, with positive differentiation of that group in relation to others groups based on certain value comparisons. The search for that positive distinctiveness gives people a feeling of who they are in relation to "we" (i.e. the group to which they belong), and not to "me" (i.e. to themselves as individual). This makes clear that the desire for differentiation is inherent to every group, which results in the construction of identity symbols, to be discussed further.

Tajfel and Turner identify three particularly important variables contributing to the emergence of favoring a group: the level of identification of an individual with the group as an aspect of his concept of self; the level to which the context enables comparison among groups and perceived relevance of those groups; and when the group has a central place in individuals' definition of self and when the comparison is meaningful, or when the outcome of identification is rebuttable (i.e. unclear).

It may be noted that identity may be considered on both the individual and collective levels, and that both variants may be called social identity. One variant answers the question "who am I?" and the other the question "who are we?" Both questions may be answered using socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. a male, a Croat, a student…), using group/organizational membership (a member of fire-fighter volunteers, a supporter of a football club…), using social roles (a stepfather, a lawyer…), using social personality types (an intellectual, a leader…), and even relating to personality characteristics (an optimist, a nurturer…) Such social categories, therefore, provide the basis of both individual and collective identity.

Using the Croatian Armed Forces units in the Homeland War as an example, the circles of group affiliation in the Tajfel-Turner model take an individual from the lowest-level unit (squad, platoon) to the higher echelons (battalion, brigade, branch of service) to the organizational (the Croatian Army) and then national level (the Republic of Croatia and Croatian affiliation in general). Perceived favoring of one's own group—such as on a national level in wartime by demonization of the enemy—is similarly expressed at lower levels with competitive favoring—finding characteristics that make "us" in our unit better than neighboring units. The perceived advantage of "us" may be based on actual achievements (victories in battle, acts of heroism, efficient organization, etc.), but also on more-or-less discriminating prejudices about members of other units ("they" are lazy, cowardly, incapable, etc.). In any case, in "our" perception "they" are not as good as "we" are, whatever criteria for being "good" we have constructed. And it is only a small step from the emergence of consciousness of "us" to the need for symbolic representation of the concept.

Symbolic interactionists observed individuals and societies undergoing creation, maintenance, and modification through the processes of symbolic communication. In this approach common symbols are the key to the emergence of identity [Mead, 1934 (1962)]. The symbolic meaning of a word or a gesture, according to symbolic interactionists, lies in the response of the observer, i.e. in the common understanding of a symbol for an unspoken or unexecuted action. Considering that symbols have some determined meaning (in a particular environment), they enable an individual to "take over" the role of another, i.e. to imagine the reaction of another to a certain symbol, so he may change his perspective. Using symbols (i.e. of a language in the broadest sense, not just verbal) enables classification, reflection, and action to reach a meaningful social goal. Symbolic interactionists, therefore, highlight the interrelationship between "me" and society. Society provides a common language and meanings, thus enabling others to play roles, i.e.

enabling the creation of various social concepts of self. Thus individuals always recreate the social order anew as they take on their social identities.

All sociological theories of identity stem from the assumption that identity categories are a result of society, that they are cultural variables. A society may produce categories based on eye color or size of feet, as well as those based on national or sexual affiliation. Also, it is assumed that a society produces multiple categorization patterns, i.e. that individuals form multiple social identities, as in the example of multiple military identities.

Social categorizations considered when researching military unit flags include national identities; military identities of affiliation in armed forces; and identities of affiliation to branches of service, individual brigades, and lower-level units, all the way down to squad or combat team. They also include horizontal identities within the military hierarchy, such as members of certain military occupations and professions, graduates of civil and military schools, and other categorization patterns emerging in the military organization.

A collective identity, a feeling of belonging to a group, may be so strong that a person who identifies himself with the group may yield his individual identity to the group—defending the group and its attitudes and goals, taking more risks than he would otherwise accept, and even the ultimate risk—that of losing his life on behalf of the group. In most examples of military identities, the readiness to make such a sacrifice is considered implicit for each member of the group—and this understanding increases group cohesion. It is, therefore, not unusual that such willingness to sacrifice is explicitly mentioned in the oaths of military service in many armed forces. Similarly, there is a reverse emotional link with a symbol which is seldom mentioned in sociological papers—but is just as indicative—the readiness of an individual to make a personal sacrifice to capture or destroy the symbol, i.e. the flag, of the enemy, even though nowadays such act may have a solely symbolic purpose and no real tactical benefit.

In Tajfel and Turner's research, as well as in the symbolic interactionists' theories, by increasing of number of members of the identification group there is a greater need for formalized abstract symbols to enable interaction between the group members. That is, a larger group size means its members may no longer maintain direct and permanent contact with all other group members. In that sense, the emergence of the flag as an important symbolic object is apparently correlated with groups with membership exceeding *Dunbar's number*, a theoretical cognitive limit to the number of people with whom an individual is able to maintain stable social relations [Dunbar, 1998]. In such a group, each individual knows who each other person is and how he relates to the others. Groups that exceed a certain number, according to Dunbar, generally require more rigorous rules, regulations, and enhanced norms to maintain stability and cohesion. Various authors have proposed different values for Dunbar's number, ranging from 100 to 230, while the

middle approximation of 150 is often stated as a rough estimate. Indeed, this is the usual number of troops in a military company.

The approximate size of unit of a hundred or so members, therefore, may be the point at which a flag ceases to be a functional object of military skill and drill (e.g. a war communications signal, a weapon [such as a spear] decorated with colorful ribbons, etc.), and begins to assume particular importance as an identity symbol, enabling construction and permanent reconstruction of the social identity of the group, from the company level up through battalion, brigade, branch of service, to the armed forces as a whole.

Sociological theories meet with a problem when groups with which an individual identifies exceed the size of the groups researched by Tajfel, et al., that is, when they become so large that an individual cannot know personally nor maintain personal interaction with all other members of the group. Benedict Anderson deemed that neither Marxist nor liberal theories of nationalism are able to adequately explain the transition. Rather he tried to define nations as a social construct, i.e. being conceived ("*imagined*") by the people who consider themselves members of the group (nation) [Anderson, 1991].

Anderson looks at a nation as an *imaginary community*, inherently limited and sovereign. Unlike smaller communities, in which all members know each other personally and interact daily, the members of a nation constantly create and re-create a mental image of their common affiliation. That may take the form of participation of the nation in the Olympic Games or of feelings in response to political threats from acts of other nations. All members of the nation, even if they do not know each other, have a certain common interest and identify themselves as members of the same nation. Indeed, this identification is accomplished through identity symbols—such as the national coat of arms and the national flag, among others—for which all members have a certain affinity.

Anderson sees the *limitations* of a nation in boundaries, which although elastic are still finite, and beyond which there are other nations. He explains *sovereignty* as a nation's members feeling that no one may impose his own will upon the nation [Anderson, 1991:6–7]. Even if an individual may not see other members of the same nation, he knows they exist thanks to communication with them, where symbols again play a major role.

However, Anderson claims that this is still a *community*, because "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship…Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as to die willingly for such limited imaginings." [Anderson, 1991:7].

With such a social construct, one gets from a group to a nation as an imaginary community, which is the basis of modern states. Max Weber determined that the key element in the definition of a state is its

monopoly on the legitimate use of force (violence) in the territory under its rule. In his essay *Politik als Beruf* (Politics as a Vocation [Weber, 1919]), Weber claims that a necessary condition for an entity to be a state is maintenance of the monopoly in enforcing order, i.e. that the *state is a source of legitimacy for use of force*. Police and military are the most important classical instruments for implementation of the monopoly, even though in modern states other instruments appear as well.

Consequently one of the key elements of a functional state, emerging from the identity of an imagined community, is the armed forces. Also, the concept of an *imaginary community* also may be applied to the construction of unit identity, for those units whose size exceeds Dunbar's number (battalions and higher-level echelons), where, as a rule, military unit flags appear.

1.2 *Symbols*

Because the identity of a group is expressed through symbols, among which may be a flag, one should consider what symbols are in the first place. In its widest sense, a symbol is an object, depiction, written word, sound, or some other marking, representing something else by association, similarity, or convention. It may be shown that these are all socially shaped. However, psychoanalysts, led by Carl Jung, believed that certain archetypes may be discerned among symbols in all societies. People use symbols for communication between each other and a language also consists of symbols. Therefore much social research into symbols is based on the use of symbols in (spoken) language. Associations, similarities, and conventions must be learned in a society, and the society's members constantly create and recreate the meaning of a symbol. Jung and his successors built on Sigmund Freud's concepts of condensation and displacement, originally developed to explain dreams. They extended Freud's concepts to the conscious system of symbols used by a society.

Considering the ever-repeating reinterpretation and recreation of symbols, certain symbols take on very different meanings in various historical and social contexts. An excellent example of the phenomenon is the swastika—the hooked cross—used in a number of ancient cultures to represent the life cycle and energy and as a sacred solar symbol. But in the 20th century Nazi ideology appropriated the symbol, denying any positive association to the swastika in most of the world today. However, away from modern European history the swastika may retain positive meanings in context, so in spite of being defiled by the Nazis, it is still used as sacred Buddhist symbol in Asia and even as the national mark of liberty in Finland. Similar changes in meaning, depending on the social and historical context, have happened to other strong symbols, such as the battle flag of the Confederate States of America, the Roman fasces, the red five-pointed star, and other political or politicized symbols.

Research into symbolic artifacts in sociology emerges in the earliest writings in sociology, such as the role of totems as analyzed by Durkheim. Flags as totemistic symbols in modern society were of particular interest to Robert N. Bellah in his theory of civil religion [Bellah, 1967].

Durkheim argued that sacred and powerful objects are in fact routine items through which a society transmits ideas and their power, thus becoming real and determining human behavior Durkheim, as quoted in Parsons, 1961:1009, wrote "Surely the soldier who falls while defending his flag does not believe that he sacrifices himself for a bit of cloth."

Durkheim mentions the duality of idea and matter, where in the examples of sacralized objects matter is reduced to a minimum—an artifact serving as the basis of an idea is negligible in comparison with the ideal superstructure within which it is lost. The totemic principle, i.e. the religious force, is the superstructure over the item. According to Durkheim, it is because a sacred item not only consists of the impressions it has on human senses, but includes the feeling that the community provides to its members—objectified into an artifact—thus making it sacred. The religious character of a thing is not its integral part, but is added to it by social convention. Durkheim also points out that a detached part of the sacralized artifact can still represent the whole—a fragment of a flag represents the homeland just as well as the entire flag.[3] That concept created a custom that present-day vexillologists find so irritating due to its consequences—the practice of cutting out and presenting pieces of a historically important flag to meritorious people or warriors—damaging many important 19th century flags by presenting their pieces as souvenirs. The famed U.S. *Star-Spangled Banner* (immortalized in the words of the U.S. national anthem, written during the 1812–1815 war against the British), one of the most precious national treasures in the National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian Institution, is today about one third shorter than its original length, mostly due to this custom of "souveniring" (rather than to weather damage) [Thomassen-Krauss, 2011]. Also, polar explorers would leave parts of the national flag buried in the ice at locations in Arctic and Antarctic. Amundsen's partial flag, parts of which he buried during his expedition to the South Pole, is today preserved in the Fram Museum in Oslo.

The most significant theory dealing with the importance of symbols in a society is *symbolic interactionism*, based on the works of George Herbert Mead and Charles Cooley, which may be paraphrased:

> People relate to things based on the importance they ascribe to those things, and that importance is based on social interaction and modified by interpretation.

[3] For more on Durkheim's considerations, see further on.

During the Homeland War in Croatia, an excellent example of the various interpretations of symbols is the "checkerboard shield"—the traditional symbol of statehood to the Croats, but also the symbol of Ustasha terror in World War II to the Serbs. Symbolic interactionism relates to *semiology*, mostly dealing with language structures, but interactionists focus more on how symbols have fluid and ambiguous meanings.

Herbert Blumer, a successor to Mead and Cooley, devised the term "symbolic interactionism" for their theories and set out the paradigm's three basic notions [Blumer, 1969]:

> Humans act toward things (including other individuals) on the basis of the meanings they have for them.
>
> The meaning of things arises out of the social interactions one has with one's fellows.
>
> Meanings are handled in, and modified through, the interpretive process a person uses in dealing with the things him or her encounters.

Like Mead, Blumer claims that people interact by interpreting and defining the acts of another, instead of simply reacting to the acts of the other. Their "response" is not a direct reaction to the action, but is based on the meaning the observer ascribes to the actions of the observed. Therefore human interaction is mediated by using symbols and meanings, through interpretation and clarification of the meaning of the actions. Blumer sets this process against the explanations of the *behaviorists*, who leave no place in their explanation of human interaction for interpretation between stimulus and response.

Symbolic interactionists researched how people create meanings during social interaction, how they present and construct themselves (i.e. their identity), and how they define situations in which others are present. The central idea of symbolic interactionism is that people act based on how they define (or how they interpret) the situation in which they find themselves. Therefore, interactionists observe society as a continuous, dynamic, and dialectic network.

Many critique the methodological and theoretical postulates of symbolic interactionism due to their difficult or impossible applicability to the social structures and macrosociological issues to which the interactionists were trying to get answers. It seems that the paradigm is still too wide and hardly applicable and thus ill-suited for testing.

Still, such dynamic and socially conditioned views toward symbols may be found among 19th century *semiologists*. For example, Charles Sanders Peirce, one of the founders of semiology, defined the interaction of three subjects: a *symbol*, its *object*, and its *interpreter*. Pierce claimed that to use symbols one needed "intelligence capable of learning thorough experience". Ferdinand de Saussure, although considered the father of modern linguistics, was conscious that semiology, the study of symbols, had much broader meaning than just in linguistics, where he primarily used it. Therefore he placed semiology in the field of *social studies*. Unlike the previous thinkers, de Saussure noted that *a symbol is as a rule entirely arbitrary*,

i.e. that there is no substantial link between a symbol and its meaning, but that the link depends on social conventions providing its meaning.

It is essential to note the concept of the arbitrariness of a symbol's meaning, especially its social conditionality, as there is a constant tendency among researchers to ascribe inherent and "permanent, unchanging" meanings to particular symbols. Such a tendency may be observed in heraldry and vexillology as well, and in symbology in general—trying to determine "general" meanings of symbols. Once observing that there are no inherent symbolic meanings, then questions such as "What do the colors of the flag mean?" or "What does a sword pointing up mean?", requiring generalized and socially unconditioned answers, become moot. The answers to such questions may be found only by determining the social context, that is by establishing the unity of the *symbol*, the *object* it symbolizes, and the *interpreter* who "reads" it.

Therefore, the many general dictionaries of symbols are rendered entirely pointless—if they try to provide the definitive meaning of a certain color, shape, or graphical figure—unless they take into account the social context (object and interpreter). For example, a black, red, yellow, or white flag may have an entirely different and quite contradictory (or even contextually incomparable) meaning depending on the social situation.

In his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–1929), Ernst Cassirer focused on the mental meaning of a symbol [Cassirer, 1965]. In his later *Essay on Man* (1944) he called man a "symbolic animal" (*animal symbolicum*)—while animals observe nature through their instincts and through direct stimuli, man has constructed a universe of symbolic meanings that structure and shape his perception of reality [Cassirer, 1953]. To Cassirer the human world is a creation of symbolic shapes of thinking, which through linguistic, scientific, and artistic symbols are interchanged through communication, understanding, discovery, and expression. He stated that spiritual content of a symbol exceeds the field of personality and forms in the world of the senses that may be seen, heard, or touched [Cassirer, 1965].

Edward Sapir divides symbolism into *referential* and *condensational*. Referential symbols are those limited to the items and marks that evoke and draw attention to a person, item, idea, event, or activity linked only vaguely to the symbol or entirely unlinked in any natural sense. He provides such examples as an asterisk, as a reminder to the reader that further explanations are to be found in the footnote, and a black ball, as a symbol of a negative vote in some election systems [Sapir, 1937]. With a gradual expansion of their meaning, the terms "symbol" and "symbolism" include not only such trivial symbols, but also more complex items and devices such as flags or signal lights—not inherently important but pointing to ideas and actions with important societal consequences. Such complex systems of references include language, script,

and mathematical symbols, as they do not include meaning in themselves but make sense to those who know how to interpret them.

Sapir notes two characteristics of symbols that constantly reappear. A symbol is first a replacement of some other more direct type of act. From this it follows that every symbol implies a meaning that may not be directly extracted from the context of the experience. The second characteristic of symbols is condensation, since its actual sense is entirely disproportionate to the apparent triviality of its shape (however complex the symbol actually may be). Among *referential* symbolism Sapir includes such symbolic systems as language, writings, telegraph signals, national flags, signal flags, and other systems adopted as economical devices with referential purpose. The other type of symbolism is *condensational*, where condensed forms replace direct expression, enabling (consciously or not) a quick discharge of emotional tension.

However, Sapir notes that in practice both forms of symbolism often appear together. So, for example, customary orthography, ostensibly entirely referential, easily takes on the character of particular rituals as forms to replace emotional expression.[4] Referential symbols certainly develop before condensational symbols, but Sapir highlights that condensational symbols may, with a degradation of attached emotions, gradually take on a referential character. A hundred years ago, hoisting a Hungarian flag at the Main Railway Station in Zagreb had strong condensational symbolism and provoked a strong social disturbance;[5] today that act would have a simple referential character, for example if it were raised in honor of a visiting Hungarian railroad delegation, and might easily pass quite unobserved in the media.

In her research into *"identity design"* Cerulo points out not only the importance of the choice of symbols, but also the syntactic structure among them [Cerulo, 1995:35–54]. In fact, the importance of syntax in communication through symbols was noted by Ferdinand de Saussure in the early 20th century, a concept which he used in his linguistic theories. De Saussure noted that syntax (the interaction and relationship between parts of a message) is just as important to understanding a message successfully as are its individual parts. Following this, Cerulo analyzed the syntactic structure of modern national flags (and anthems), showing that with the use of a very limited number of elements (basic colors, field shapes, simple graphic figures, etc.) it is possible to successfully transmit a variety of national and ideological messages,

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[4] For example, in Croatian the choice in spelling of the negation of the present tense of the auxiliary verb "to be" in one or two words as "*ne ću"* or "*neću"* easily becomes a symbol of the political preference of the writer. In general, a reader will assume that text using the first was written by a "rightist" and the second by a "leftist", following the official orthography used in different historical periods. The current official grammars consider both correct and leave it to the writer to choose his preference.

[5] In 1903 the decision of the government in Budapest to fly the Hungarian tricolor over railway stations throughout the Hungarian part of the monarchy (including those in Croatia) initiated series of protests and demonstrations in Croatia.

encoded in the design of national flags. Using a series of earlier vexillological works, limited mostly to factography and historiographical facts, her work provides an example of the sociological development of vexillology as a social science in the late 20th century.[6]

1.2.1 Totemism

Totems are a particular type of identity symbols in a society, similar to military insignia and flags. Research into totemism in so-called primitive societies and its consequences in modern societies has intrigued sociologists for generations.

"Totemism" is used, somewhat simply, to denote the phenomenon of elevating a symbol in a society to sacralized status, becoming a particularly important identity symbol of a social group. A casual reader may find it unusual to link totems of primitive societies to modern national and even military flags, and may ask why the discussion focuses so much on Durkheim's writings on totemism. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his work *Le Totemisme aujourd'hui*, rejects classical sociological considerations on totemism and shows how heterogeneous the phenomenon is in various societies, eluding unambiguous explanation [Lévi-Stauss, 1979 (1962)]. He points to Goldenweiser's description of the three characteristics of totemism (the *totemic complex*, as he calls them), as established by previous authors [Goldenweiser, 1918:282]: a tribe organized in clans or *gentes*, a system of beliefs attributing animal or vegetable (and rarely other) names and emblems to those clans, and coherent, if not identical, practices within various clans. Goldenweiser claims that the occurrence of all three elements of the complex happens relatively rarely. He provides examples where totemism appears but with one or more of those three characteristics absent, mostly among indigenous American tribes. He shows that totemism eludes all attempts to be defined absolutely and that ideally it is based on the random distribution of nonspecific elements, as a set of empirically perceptible details in some cases, while having no organic social meaning.

Goldenweiser's critique may be applied to observing unit flags (or more widely, symbols) in modern armies. Although clearly certain elements of totemism may be perceived in them, it is not possible to find a common set of elements that would be globally encompassing. Studying these symbols must include examining their development within each social group (nation) separately, and this has not yet been performed.

Lévi-Strauss provides an example from Linton's study *Totemism and the A.E.F*[7] [Linton, 1924]. According to Lévi-Strauss, Linton's study meant the end of scientific interest in totemism in the U.S.

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[6] However, while useful methodologically, Cerulo's work includes some questionable vexillological issues, cf. the critique of Cerulo's work in [Engene, 1997]; cf. also the discussion under Principle 19 in Chapter 3.3 Principles of Vexillology.

However, it is interesting here because it gives a detailed description of a unit symbol's development. Therefore a longer relevant passage is cited here (quoted from Lévi-Strauss, 1991 (1962):7–8):

> During the First World War, Linton belonged to the 42nd or "Rainbow" Division, a name arbitrarily chosen by a staff officer because the division was composed of units from so many states that their regimental colors were as varied as those of the rainbow. But as soon as the division arrived in France this name became current usage: when soldiers were asked to which unit they belonged, they would answer, "I am a Rainbow."
>
> Around February 1918, i.e. five or six months after the division had been given this name, it was generally agreed that the appearance of a rainbow was a happy omen for it. Three months later, it was said that a rainbow was seen—even in spite of incompatible meteorological conditions—every time the division went into action.
>
> In May 1918 the division found itself deployed near the 77th [Division], which painted its vehicles with its own distinctive emblem, the Statue of Liberty. The Rainbow Division adopted this custom, which it thus imitated from its neighbor, but with the intention also of distinguishing itself from it. By August or September, wearing a badge in the form of a rainbow had become general, in spite of the belief that the wearing of distinctive insignia had its origin in a punishment inflicted on a defeated unit. This went on until at the end of the war the American Expeditionary Force was organized into "a series of well-defined and often mutually jealous groups, each of which had its individual complex of ideas and observances". These the author enumerates as: (1) segmentation into groups conscious of their identity; (2) the bearing by each group of the name of an animal, thing, or natural phenomenon; (3) the use of this name as term of address in conversation with strangers; (4) the use of an emblem, drawn on divisional weapons and vehicles, or as personal ornament, with a corresponding tabu on the use of the emblem by other groups; (5) respect for the "patron" and the design representing it; (6) a vague belief in its protective role and in its value as augury.
>
> Almost any investigator who found such a condition existing among an uncivilized people would class these associated beliefs and practices as a totemic complex. It shows a poverty of content when contrasted with the highly developed totemism of the Australians or Melanesians, but it is fully as rich as the totemic complexes of some of the North American Indian tribes. The main points in which it differs from true totemism is the absence of marriage regulations, or beliefs in descent from, or of blood relationship with, the totem.
>
> However, remarks Linton in conclusion, these regulations are a function of clan organization rather than of totemism properly speaking, since they do not always accompany it.

It is instructive that Linton mentions the belief that wearing insignia had a negative implication—a mark of shame—a belief that apparently existed only among U.S. units in World War I, as it does not appear elsewhere. In any case, even if there were such a belief in the early 20th century (even in other armies as well), by the beginning of the World War II there is no trace of it and the custom of badges/insignia used to mark units became almost global—as evident from numerous monographs on Word War II (and subsequent) unit insignia (to name just one of author's personal favorites [Rosignoli, 1973]). In any case, when Croatian units were being established in the Homeland War, not only was there no social stigma related to such insignia, but they appeared with the formation of the very first units, even the smallest

[7] *American Expeditionary Forces*, the U.S. forces which served, with British and French forces, in Europe during World War I.

squads. Many of these units designed their emblems themselves. Most of the emblems, numbering in the thousands, are shown in the three-volume set *Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje* (Croatian military insignia) [Tuđman, 1994], [Tuđman, 1995], and [Tuđman, 1999].

Lévi-Strauss also mentions Boas's attempt to formalize totemism, which includes an important characteristic common to all totemistic systems. Boas concludes that in every society, differential symbols must be of the same formal type, while differing in their content. If this were not so, one group would be determined by a name, another by rituals, a third by emblems etc. Therefore the homology of distinctive attributes of social divisions within a single tribe proves their origin in the inclination for classification [Boas, 1916:323]. In the Homeland War example, this homology is expressed primarily by the "coat of arms"[8] of the unit and the nickname emerging from it. Unit flags, as a rule, indeed display this "coat of arms" in their most prominent part. The social classification is here, of course, institutionalized by the force structure of the armed forces.

However, Lévi-Strauss criticized Boas' formalism because it failed to explain satisfactorily why the most frequent designators in every society are animals and plants. In Croatia's example, animals are most prominent (military units have nicknames such as Tigers, Martens, Spiders, Falcons, Pumas, Wolves, Hornets, Termites, etc., and their unit emblems, and consequently their flags, display those animals), while some other designators appear (Thunders, Sons of the Plain, The Scrapped, The Counts…) but much less frequently.

Structural anthropologists, such as Malinowski, attempted to explain totemism through three questions covering *naturalistic*, *utilitarian*, and *affective* explanations. The first is the question of why totemism would prefer animals and plants. Malinowski's answer is that it is because they are the source of food, being first in the mind of a primitive human [Malinowski, 1948:27]:

> The road from the wilderness to the savage's belly and consequently to his mind is very short, and for him the world is an indiscriminate background against which there stand out the useful, primarily the edible, species of animals or plants.

The second question asks about the basis for a belief in a relationship between human and animals. Malinowski claims that the relation is easily shown—similar capability of locomotion, creation of sounds, expression of emotions, etc. Animals have a place between man and nature, producing a dual response in humans: admiration/fear and desire for food. According to Malinowski, plants, natural phenomena, and manufactured artifacts appear only as a "secondary formation, an introduction by analogy, of objects which have nothing to do with the substance of totemism" [Malinowski, 1948:28]. Dietary bans emerge from the

[8] Although Croatian military jargon calls these emblems *grb*, the Croatian word for coat of arms, they are hardly heraldic coats of arms even by most generous definition.

establishment of cults, as a response to the desire to harmonize with nature and from the realization that man and the chosen animal exist in the same nature—from which an "obvious prohibition" results—the ban on killing and eating the animal.

The third question is about the existence of sociological and religious elements in totemism. Malinowski states that earlier sociologists mostly ignored these. However, since every ritual tends toward magic, he concludes that totemism is not a cultural phenomenon, but the "natural result of natural conditions" and that at its root and in all its manifestations it stems from biology and psychology, not from ethnology. This conclusion, as applied to the example of insignia and flags of Croatian units in the Homeland War, may be valid for the inherent development of unit "coats of arms"—their totems—even if there had been no such earlier tradition in Croatian culture, lacking the central system that would regulate the processes, prescribing procedures and the design of such emblems.

The views of Malinowski are opposed by the *structural functionalists*, such as Radcliffe-Braun, who attempted to apply totemism theories in modern societies. Radcliffe-Braun admits that Durkheim had primacy in setting out the problem, which he was unable to solve (according to Radcliffe-Braun) because he did not perform a complete analysis of the concept of the sacred. Durkheim's claim that a totem has a sacred character means that there is a "ritual relationship" between a human and his totem, but according to Radcliffe-Braun that points out but does not explain the general issue of ritual relations. Namely, to maintain social order, it is necessary to ensure the permanence and solidarity of the clans which form the society, which may be based only on individual feelings. Manifesting such feelings efficiently requires a collective expression based on an actual item—a representative artifact of the group. In this way Radcliffe-Braun explains the existence of symbols such as flags, kings, presidents, and other symbols in modern societies [Radcliffe-Braun, 1952].

However, Radcliffe-Braun does not accept Durkheim's explanation of the key issue in why totemism regularly addresses animals and plants. Durkheim deemed that permanence and continuity require single emblem, which may—or in fact, which must—be an arbitrary emblem, simple enough that anyone may grasp the idea despite the quality of artistic expression, and that among such symbols animals and plants were "recognized" because they are ubiquitous, affordable, and easy to draw. Therefore, for Durkheim the emergence of animals and plants in totemism is a subsequent occurrence, which, however, came naturally, but it does not state anything of substance. Radcliffe-Braun, however, asserts that the ritualization of the relationship between man and animals provides for much wider frameworks than defined by totemism in such a way [Radcliffe-Braun, 1929:129]. With his analysis he provided an answer—that each item or event

that has had considerable impact on the material or spiritual prosperity of a society tends to become a subject of ritual.

If we return to Linton's example of the introduction of insignia in American units and to modern unit insignia, we may rightfully ask why we do not detect the development of totemic sacralization and the formation of a religious system based on the unit totem, followed by wider differentiation within the military organization. An answer may be in the limited time available for such rituals and differentiations to develop—modern units are, as a rule, not multi-generational; in many cases they exist only during time of conflict (war); and they are arbitrarily formed by members of modern society, who spend only a fraction of their time in their units. Modern social functions are performed through wider society, which conservatively does not allow differentiated ritualization of its segments. Nevertheless, a germ of such sacralization rituals may be observed in examples where members of a unit adopt one or more living animals as their "totem"—as a unit pet or mascot—and provide it with a separate place of honor in unofficial and semi-official rituals. Such living totemization was not recorded within the Croatian units in the Homeland War, but an example occurred in Arkan's paramilitary unit of the Serb Volunteer Guard, acting in the area of the eastern Slavonia, which had a pet tiger (the unit was nicknamed the Tigers, incidentally the same nickname as the Croatian 1st Guard Brigade).

1.3 *Science*

Since one of the key postulates of this thesis is that vexillology—the study of flags—is a part of scientific activities, i.e. that it is a scientific discipline, and since vexillology as science[9] has not received much attention in Croatian scientific publications, it is necessary to consider what scientific activity is, in the first place. Science encompasses such human knowledge which may be objectively verified. Objective verification is a process which includes description and explanation of observations and ideas with enough details to enable other interested scientists to verify them independently. Science is based on the observation and measurement of phenomena occurring in nature and society and on the construction of models and experiments which allow conducting such observations and measurements within set parameters.

[9] In vernacular English the word *science* is often limited in meaning to physical sciences, such as physics and chemistry. The term *science* is used here in the wider sense to include formal sciences (such as logic and mathematics), life sciences (zoology, botany, human biology), social sciences (psychology, sociology, political sciences, law, history), and earth and space sciences (geoscience, astronomy), i.e. all areas of human knowledge-seeking activities that adhere to the scientific method. The terms *studies* or *scientific studies* are sometimes used for this wider meaning in English, while most other European languages do not make the distinction. What is actually meant by the term *science*, as used here, is explained in this chapter.

In its broadest definition, science is any system of knowledge that enables correct prediction or a reliable result. In a slightly narrower sense, science is a system of acquiring knowledge based on the scientific method, i.e. an organized body of knowledge gained by such research. It is an area of human activity in which knowledge is systematically accumulated, to be organized and condensed into laws and theories that can be tested. Both the epistemology[10] and the sociology of science agree that it is the use of scientific method that is the basis for evaluating whether or not some human activity may be considered science.

The scientific method is a set of techniques for researching various phenomena with the goal of acquiring new knowledge or of correcting or integrating previous knowledge. To be scientific, a research method must be based on observable, empirical, and measurable proofs, subjected to certain principles of reasoning. The scientific method consists of acquiring data by observation and/or experiment, creating hypotheses, and testing their viability.

Although various scientific fields use different procedures to pursue the scientific method, all have characteristics in common. Scientists formulate hypotheses that may explain some phenomena and create experiments to test the hypotheses. These procedures must be repeatable, to reliably predict future results. Theories are advanced by linking multiple independently tested hypotheses in a coherent system. The scientific process must be objective to avoid partiality or favoritism in the interpretation of results. During the process everything is documented and the data and applied methodology is provided to other scientists for insight, i.e. critical review, so it may be checked by repeating the procedures.

A study of a problem using the scientific method is an iterative process of formulating hypotheses that might explain some phenomenon, testing them, analyzing the results to formulate new hypotheses providing a better match with the observations, testing again, etc. The four crucial elements of the scientific method are:

- characterization (observing, defining, and measuring the research subject);
- hypothesis (theorizing an explanation of observed and measured characteristics);
- prediction (reasoning by use of logical deduction in accordance to the hypothesis or theory) and
- experimentation (testing the above elements).

All elements of the scientific method must be verifiable (by peer review) to determine the existence of eventual errors. The fourth element of the method, the experiment, is more common in the natural

[10] Epistemology (from Greek ἐπιστήμη—knowledge, understanding, and λόγος—study) is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge; it is also called the theory of knowledge.

sciences. In the social sciences a classical experiment is often very difficult or entirely impossible to perform, although that does not exclude other valid methods of testing the previous elements.

While this view of the scientific method was generally adopted unquestionably by the mid-20th century, later philosophers, historians, and sociologists of science appeared who radically questioned it as the process of formation of new knowledge. Among them is Paul Feyerabend, who, in his book *Against Method* [Feyerabend, 1975] renounces the classical view of the scientific methodology, and claims that scientific progress is not a result of any kind of determined method, but rather that *anything goes*, i.e. that in spite the existence of the scientific method, all successful sciences violate it in some way. The discussion between such post-modernists and "realists" resulted in "scientific wars" fought over the issue of scientific knowledge as any kind of representation of fundamental truth. These discussions, which continue today, resulted in the so-called *strong program* (led by David Bloor and Barry Barnes) as a reaction to the previous *weak program*, which analyzed sociologically only those "sciences that failed" (such as phrenology), while explaining the "successful" sciences by their discoveries of truth. The strong program claims that the same sociological methodology should be applied to both "successful" and "failed" sciences, as both are based on the same social factors and conditions, such as social context and personal interest.

The scientific method attempts to explain phenomena in a repeatable manner in order to make predictions. This is achieved by observation of phenomena, followed by experiments simulating the phenomena under controlled conditions. This enables objectivity; that is, it minimizes subjectivity in the interpretation of results.

A scientist formulates a model based on observation, i.e. he attempts to describe a phenomenon using logical and mathematical representations, which allows the formulation of a hypothesis—a formulation that provides an explanation of the phenomenon observed. In this the principle of "Ockham's Razor" is often used (in one variant: "If one has two theories predicting the same thing, one should prefer the simpler"). The hypothesis should be expressed in such way that it may be tested. A hypothesis that is proved false should be reformulated or rejected. Hypotheses that pass the test may be consolidated into a scientific theory, a consistent model which describes behavior of a certain phenomenon.

During observation and experiments, a scientist is often inclined toward a certain outcome; there is therefore a constant danger of the impact of the scientist's preference on the results. To avoid or minimize such subjectivity, experiments are performed in a way that ensures transparency in the process. Both results and conclusions results are verified by repetition and by independent scientists (peer review). The process usually culminates in the publication of a paper in a scientific journal with review of the paper before publication.

The realm of science is traditionally divided into four groups: the natural, social, formal, and applied sciences. The scientific method is applied slightly differently in each of them, i.e. some of its elements are more or less expressed in each. The natural sciences research phenomena in live and non-living nature; the social sciences deal with phenomena of human behavior and society. Both are considered empirical sciences, as they are based on observable phenomena which may be repeated by other scientists under the same conditions. The formal sciences, such as mathematics, statistics, and computer sciences, employ the *a priori* method to prove hypotheses (using earlier established knowledge to develop new knowledge through a set of logical rules), rather than using empirical proofs as in the empirical sciences. The applied sciences, such as engineering, technology, and health sciences, use knowledge practically. Today there are many scientific fields of study emerging that are interdisciplinary and may not be categorized easily into these four types.

For an area of research (i.e. human activity in general) to be considered a scientific discipline, one has to consider how it uses the scientific method, as well as its relationship with other established scientific disciplines. This thesis shows that vexillology is an interdisciplinary science with roots in the social sciences, especially sociology—in fact, the goal of this thesis is to show that there is a strong interdependence between vexillology and sociology, that vexillology may not succeed in explaining its subject—flags—without sociological tools, but also that sociology is unable to explain fully its subject—society—without an understanding of all aspects of flags used in a society.

This theme of interdependence is a two-way street, and although both disciplines have a wide area of interest that might not require the other, the entire picture of their particular interests can only be understood when they work together. To demonstrate this, we should take a look at what a flag really is and what vexillology deals with.

3 Flags and Vexillology

Vexillology as a scientific discipline began in the middle of the 20th century and has developed ever since in various countries. Considering its interdisciplinary approach to flag research and its origin as a "collectors" activity compared to some of its kindred scientific disciplines, vexillology is still battling for recognition of its scientific status and role in the academic community. By the end of the 20th century, after a half-century of vexillological research, some critics of vexillology arose. Their critique was not aimed so much at denying the discipline's scientific status, but rather at asking vexillologists to embrace the scientific-research approach more widely and to interact more extensively with related established scientific areas of study.

However, before considering vexillology as scientific field and the criticism of it, it is necessary to consider the definition of a flag—i.e. what actually is the primary subject of vexillological research?

3.1 *Flags*

3.1.1 The Concept of a Flag

The encyclopedia and dictionary definitions of "flag" are mostly limited to describing an artifact by that name, usually like this: an item produced in textile or similar material, as a rule in several colors, depicting certain symbols, that is displayed atop a staff or a mast.[11]

A very similar definition is provided by Whitney Smith in his doctoral thesis, generally considered the first and today still one of only a few dissertations on flags [W. Smith, 1969:94]:

> [A] two-dimensional symbol conveying its message through its color(s) and/or design; it is normally made of cloth or another flexible material and normally is displayed from a pole or staff.

These definitions very briefly and generally describe the flag as a utilitarian artifact and do not go into its function or its symbolic value. But Smith went further, describing the functions of such artifacts, which may be summarized in four areas [W. Smith, 1969:94–96]:

1. flag as *ornament* (decorative function),
2. flag as *signal* (signal function),
3. flag as *action* (action function), and
4. flag as *symbol* (identity function).

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[11] For example [Anić et al., 2002:1478]: **zastava** *ž* platnena površina simboličkog značenja; platno određenih kombinacija boja i znakova, obično predviđeno da se pričvrsti na stijeg; barjak ("a textile surface of symbolic meaning; a canvas of certain combinations of colors and symbols, usually for attachment to a staff; a banner").

Flag as ornament is the simplest use of such an artifact, almost devoid of intrinsic meaning. Usually the simplest forms of flags, these are very often of a single color (or, occasionally a set of several flags of a single color each), used to decorate venues such as fairgrounds, celebratory locations, tourist sites, and other locations, for various occasions, serving as simple, colorful, dynamic decoration. Even when in such instances national flags are used, they are usually stripped of their social and political meaning and used simply as "colorful garnish", as may be the case with the small flags which decorate sandwiches or those often displayed at hotel entrances.[12]

Flag as signal is the next, higher level of flag use—as a referential object with a commonly agreed semantic value, based on some social contract (regulation, agreement, rules…). These flags are also mostly of simple graphic design, of a single color or various two-colored combinations, providing good visibility and differentiation. Examples include the flags of the International Code of Signals used at sea, signal flags used in sports (e.g. motor sports), hazard flags used at ski resorts or beaches, and flags denoting meteorological conditions (storm warnings). The function of these flags is to transfer information or a warning. Therefore flags as ornament and flags as signal lack any emotional content; they transfer either an unidentified decorative information or simple prearranged information devoid of intrinsic meaning.

Flag as action is relatively rare concept in Western culture, but such flags appear as important elements of some Asian religious systems, such as the *ex voto* flags used in Hinduism and the Buddhist prayer flags used in the Himalayas, inscribed with a prayer which is "activated" when the flag is displayed and fluttering in the wind. The display of such flags, therefore, represents an action, such as the saying of the prayer. They do not serve for communication among people, but rather between a person and a deity whom the flag addresses. Therefore, even if it includes a strong emotional component, this function of flags is not for communication of emotion to other members of society.

Flag as symbol adds the element of emotion to the previous functions, lodged in the identity symbolism of the social group (or of an individual within that society) which it represents. This creates an intrinsic value for a flag that exceeds its material value, and by which the flag is more or less sacralized. The flag thus becomes the identity of the group in which it develops, and represents its values. Certainly, this is the most complex of the four functions of flag, and no doubt the most interesting for social research. The flags which are subject of this thesis are, almost without an exception, part of this functional group.

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[12] Regarding the hotel example, one could argue that such flags represent a message of welcome to guests from those countries, or perhaps the ability of hotel staff to communicate in those languages, or even the nationality of the hotel's ownership, or some other meaning. However, if the hotel staff were asked, they might say that these were the flags that were somehow "at hand" when needing a display, and do not reflect any deliberate meaning.

In general, it is believed that flags developed from similarly functioning objects that were displayed at the top of a pole, such as a tribal totem or a personal symbol of a leader (which by extension symbolized of the identity of the group). Such flag-like objects are called *vexilloids* (from the Latin *vexillum*—a small Roman cavalry flag). Smith explains that the emergence of vexilloids[13] is only one of several manifestations of symbols a society uses to express certain needs of the community. Among those are two needs that are always linked to the symbols of every society—the *unity and identity* of the group (as opposed to all other groups) and the *communication* within the group and its members within some religious form in the widest sense, using Mulago's[14] terms *rôle unificateur* and *rôle hiérophantique* (which might be translated as *unifying role* and *faith-expressing* or *confessional role*). Together with some other internal manifestations of those roles (e.g. the ritual decoration of group members' bodies, tattooing, etc., by which the individuals themselves become a sort of "flag"), the group is associated with external objects, one of which may be a vexilloid, composed of a staff with a totem atop it [W. Smith, 1969:97].

Sociologists' interest in vexilloids began with classical discussions in sociology. Durkheim described how vexilloids[15] of Australian Aborigines (*nurtunya* and *waninga*) had a central, totemic role in their religious rituals [Durkheim, 1915:124]. Analyzing the role of these flags/totems, he concluded and then asked [Durkheim, 1915:206]:

> …it is evident that [the totem] expresses and symbolizes two different sorts of things. In the first place, it is the outward and visible form of what we have called the totemic principle or god. But it is also the symbol of the determined society called the clan. It is its flag; it is the sign by which each clan distinguishes itself from the others, the visible mark of its personality, a mark borne by everything which is a part of the clan under any title whatsoever, men, beasts, or things. So if it is at once the symbol of the god and of the society, is that not because the god and the society are only one? How could the emblem of the group have been able to become the figure of this quasi-divinity, if the group and the divinity were two distinct realities? The god of the clan, the totemic principle, can therefore be nothing else than the clan itself, personified and represented to the imagination under the visible form of the animal or vegetable which serves as totem. But how has this apotheosis been possible, and how did it happen to take place in this fashion?

Durkheim's extremely interesting conclusion about a "clan" identity and its "god" has important sociological consequences, but they lie beyond the scope of this thesis.

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[13] For such flag-like objects [W. Smith, 1969] originally proposed the term "protovexilloid", while "vexilloid" would have been a superior term encompassing both flags and those "protovexilloids" together. Such proposed terminology was not accepted by his colleagues, so in [W. Smith, 1975] he used the term *vexilloid* in its narrower, modern sense as a flag-like object, i.e. what was previously proposed to be covered under the term "protovexilloid", and abandoned the use of "protovexilloid".

[14] Vincent Mulago (1921–2012), a Franciscan theologian and philosopher, who researched the society and religion of the Bantu people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

[15] Although, of course, Durkheim does not use "vexilloid", which was coined by Whitney Smith in the mid-20th century, as noted above.

In his further deliberations, he described a soldier dying for his country (embodied in a flag), which in the soldier's consciousness takes precedence over the imaginary concept of the "country" [Durkheim, 1915:220]:

> Whether one isolated standard remains in the hands of the enemy or not, that does not determine the fate of the country, yet the soldier allows himself to be killed to regain it. He loses sight of the fact that the flag is only a sign, and that it has no value in itself, but only brings to mind the reality that it represents; it is treated as if it were this reality itself.

Durkheim explains the force of such identity—the identification of a symbolic artifact with an abstract concept of a social group, in this way [Durkheim, 1915:220]:

> Now the totem is the flag of the clan. It is therefore natural that the impressions aroused by the clan in individual minds—impressions of dependence and of increased vitality—should fix themselves to the idea of the totem rather than that of the clan: for the clan is too complex a reality to be represented clearly in all its complex unity by such rudimentary intelligences.

In fact, Durkheim claims that the "primitive" individual is unaware that such a notion was imposed on him by the clan (the social group). For further deliberation on totemism, see also [Durkheim and Mauss, 1963].

However, for flag studies there is also another important concept—the secularization of a totem. It happens with the passage of time—a totem gradually loses its religious characteristics and starts to signify the community living in a certain geographic area. As an example, Egyptian totems initially related to certain divinities, but gradually they became simply political symbols of individual cities, i.e. of the *nomes* (provinces). In the depiction of ships marked with such vexilloids in Egyptian art of the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, it is believed that the designs simply represent the affiliation of these ships with this or that local community and have little or no religious meaning. (The opposite process of "religionization" is observable in the modern age by the use of a flag as a "totem" of a civil religion, as discussed by Bellah and his successors. This is especially apparent in modern U.S. society where the national flag is sacralized, one might argue, to a divine level.)

However strong the processes of detotemization of a vexilloid/flag in any period (e.g. in the Soviet Union, see further on), equally strong feelings may be found in each society toward such objects as a form of sacralized items, separated from the profane in one way or another.

In the Middle Ages Catholic popes would present flags to kings about to undertake important military campaigns—often against Islam—as a symbol of papal confirmation and blessing of the campaign, i.e. as a "political blessing" [W. Smith, 1969:106]. Notable cases were also recorded in Croatian history.[16]

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[16] At the coronation of King Demetrius Zvonimir on 8 October 1075 in Solin (near Split), in the Church of St. Peter and Moses, papal legate Gebizon presented Zvonimir with a flag sent by Pope Gregory VII, among other symbols of royal authority [Raukar, 1997:49]. This historic Croatian flag appeared at the same time as the famous Bayeux Tapestry, depicting the Battle at Hastings

Legends even arose claiming that a flag was a direct "gift from the heavens"; among the most notable examples are the Dannebrog, the Labarum, and the Scottish flag of St. Andrew.[17]

From the era of "primitive tribes" to modern societies, the items that fulfill the role of identity symbols change—so markings on the body were replaced by uniforms, totems by flags, mogilas by memorials, sacrifices by official dinners, etc. [Gennep, 1920:49].

In Fredrick Marshall's 1875 book *International Vanities*, in which he presents various forms of state symbols (ceremonies, forms, titles, orders of merit, emblems, privileges, etc.) in much detail, he speculates on their future [Marshall, 1875; reprint 2009]. And while Marshall quite correctly predicted the disappearance of uniforms from battlefields, which happened just a few years after his book was published (fancy, colorful uniforms gave way to camouflage uniforms),[18] his prediction about disappearance of the national flags has still not occurred after a century and a half [Marshall, 2009:233]:

> ...our successors will look back with a sort of envy to what, in their time, will be geologically known as the "flag-period" of the earth's existence. The fossilized relics of the happy generations which went to war ... will be preserved in the museums of the future side by side with the shreds which may then remain of their standards.

At the beginning of the 20th century it seemed that Marshall's flag ideas were coming true in some places—the newly created Soviet Union did not adopt a national flag for quite some time, and adopted one only in 1923 solely for use by the merchant marine, due to the international maritime laws requiring flags to identify ships. However, soon afterwards, flags became one of the main elements of Soviet identity. In the mid-20th century Whitney Smith considered Marshall's predictions unfounded—and that may be considered especially so today, when technology enables, and mass-media culture requires, the production of flags… not only for nations but also for a wide range of various social groups, commercial enterprises, and the administrative subdivisions of countries (provinces/states, counties, municipalities). The mass adoption of such flags was only just beginning when Smith was writing his thesis, and in Marshall's time it was merely a marginal occurrence. The relatively inexpensive production of the most complex flags, and

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of 1066, generally considered the most important historical source for research into the appearance of flags in Europe in the period, as Borošak Marijanović noted [Borošak Marijanović, 1996:21]

[17] According to the legend, the *Dannebrog* ("Danish cloth", the red flag with a white cross throughout) fell from the skies into the hands of King Valdemar II during the battle of Lyndannise (near Tallin, Estonia) on 15 June 1219. The *Labarum*, the flag of the Emperor Constantin the Great (274–337) allegedly resulted from a vision the Byzantine emperor had looking at the sky on 27 October 312, on the eve of the battle at the Milvian Bridge near Rome, when the emperor accepted the protection of the Christian god. The Scottish flag with St. Andrew's cross, according to legend, appeared as a cloud formation of a white saltire against the blue sky during the prayer of Pictish King Óengus II, before a battle against the Angles and Saxons in Lothian in 832.

[18] Similarly, today we see that camouflage uniforms are becoming more similar and thus may prevent distinguishing participants in combat. On the front lines in the Homeland War all sides commonly used similar uniforms without any form of differentiating symbols; this required local and temporary identification by coded colored stripes.

the phenomenon that flags are used by diverse subjects in a society today, clearly contradict Marshall's forecast of the "death of flags".

3.1.2 Terms for "Flag" in Other Languages

The Croatian word "zastava" encompasses several different concepts in other European languages, and a direct translation from one to another is impossible. Table 1 shows several basic terms for some of the objects studied by vexillology as expressed in the three major European languages and the closely related Croatian and Slovenian. Similar differences could be shown using other European languages as well. The Croatian term "zastava" comprises concepts for which English has (at least) five terms, while German has three terms. French has three terms for these five concepts, but they do not match the German terminology. The Croatian term "zastava" covers two of the Slovenian concepts.

Table 1. Some basic vexillological concepts in some European languages.

English	German	French	Slovenian	Croatian
flag	Fahne	drapeau	zastava	zastava
ensign	Flagg	pavillon	zastava	zastava
jack	Gösch	pavillon	zastava	zastava
colour (color US)	Fahne	étandard	prapor	zastava
banner	Fahne	pavillon	prapor	zastava

Considering that in this example the English language differentiates the concepts the most, it is convenient to explain them first. The English term *flag* is the most general and in wider use encompasses all others, but some of them have special names. So an *ensign* is a flag displayed at a ship's stern and denotes the ship's nationality (the term also includes some other less known classes of flags as well), while a *jack* is a flag displayed at the ship's bow in certain circumstances (and for which most European languages have a specific word). The term *colo(u)r* is used for military unit flags, as well as for the flags of similar semi-military or civilian organizations, that are displayed from a staff, often permanently affixed, and often made in a single unique example, holding particular sacralized meaning for the organization.[19] Finally, a *banner* is usually a flag displayed vertically, attached to a crossbar, or in some other similar manner. It is

[19] Besides the term *colo(u)r*, the terms *pennant* and *guidon* are used for some types of military unit flags in English terminology, but this is not important here to illustrate the issue of terminology. Anyway, for the Croatian expression *vojne zastave postrojbi* (military unit flags), the complex term in English *military colo(u)rs, pennants, and guidons* is used.

worth noting that the English term *flag* and the similarly sounding German term *Flagg* encompass different concepts.

When these words are used in the general vernacular (and not in vexillological terminology, military jargon, administrative language, and the like), the overlap of terms is even stronger, so, for example, the English *banner* is used as partial synonym for *flag* (especially in "ceremonial" language). The Croatian language also has synonyms for *zastava* (*barjak*, *bandera-bandira-bandjera-banderij*, *fana*, *horugva-korugva*, *labar*, *sandžak*, and others, to name flag terms appearing in Anić et al., 2005), which are mostly loan words from other languages but are occasionally used to mean ceremonial flag (and might thus match the Slovenian *prapor* in some uses, i.e., the English *colo(u)r* and *banner*). However, these are not synonyms for those particular concepts, but rather for the entire field of meanings of the standard language form *zastava*. In fact, Croatian also has another word synonymous to flag, but covering an even wider set of meanings—namely *stijeg*, which means not only *flag* in its widest sense, but also the flag staff, which is, in fact, its primary meaning (while it means *zastava* by metonymy).

The result of this is a potential ambiguity in the translation of terms. The flag of the Croatian Coast Guard is an example of this potential ambiguity. The Regulations describe the design of the flag, but say nothing about how and where it should be used.[20] Does this flag match the English terms *flag*, *ensign*, or *color* (or some other term)? The Regulations are quite unclear. The Law on which these Regulations are based is just as indeterminate[21]—is this flag hoisted on Coast Guard vessels as an *ensign*, i.e., as a symbol of national affiliation as a stern flag,[22] or as some additional flag to be displayed from a mast or some other appropriate place on the ship, or is this a *color*—the flag of the Coast Guard as a "unit", i.e., an organizational color? This ambiguity in the Regulations is a result of an absence of precise vexillological terminology and probably insufficient understanding of the role of such a flag (or insufficient knowledge of traditional maritime protocol—deliberate or not—or perhaps a reluctance of the legislature to address the issue). Of course that does not mean that the Coast Guard is not sure how to use its flag, nor that it is used erroneously, but only that the legislative text by itself does not provide enough details to guide usage. One

[20] The Regulations only provide the most generalized prescriptions that the "flag…represents the Coast Guard", Art. 2, and that it is "used in accordance with the prescriptions of these Regulations, in manner to display the honor and dignity of the Coast Guard.", Art. 3 [*Pravilnik*, 2009].

[21] "The Coast Guard has a flag ... [which] is hoisted on all vessels, airplanes, vehicles, and other objects of the Coast Guard.", Art. 4. [Zakon, 2007(b)].

[22] Other legislation prescribed the national flag for ships of the merchant marine of the Republic of Croatia, but in the 2:3 ratio, and for the naval ships a similar flag is prescribed with two golden anchors in saltire behind the coat of arms.

needs to research how the flag is actually used on ships to be able to explain what it really is (and then, if necessary, provide accurate translations, if translation is needed…).

The examples presented in Table 1 demonstrate that for a precise understanding of a term in Croatian, the general term *zastava* should be specified more closely—e.g. *pramčana zastava* (*jack*, literally *bow flag*), *pomorska zastava* (*ensign*, literally *maritime flag*), *zastava postrojbe* (*color*, literally *unit flag*), etc.[23]

The topic of this thesis was military unit flags—flags used in the armed forces as symbol of particular units. They usually constitute a particular artifact—a single flag or sometimes a set of several unique flags (in some militaries the units carry two or more unique flags) serving as a symbol of a particular military unit as a social group.

Terms for these vary widely; as names used in various militaries around the world demonstrate: In the nations of the British Commonwealth they are called the *Queen's/King's Colors* and *Unit/Regimental Colors*, and *standards* for heavy and *guidons* for light cavalry units. The armed forces units of the Netherlands carry a *vaandel* or a *standaard* for Hussar regiments. In Belgium an infantry unit carries a *drapeau / vlag*, cavalry and artillery an *étendard / vaandel*, while bicycle and engineering units as well as the air force units carry a *fanion / wimpel*. The Danish armed forces units carry a single *regimentsfane* or *bataljonsfane*, while armoured units have an *estandart*. In the Swedish armed forces military unit flags are generally called *Fälttecken* and include such specific flags as *fana*, *standar*, *dragonfana*, and others depending of type of unit. The Norwegian armed forces are equipped with two flags each, together called *seremoniflagg*: a *nasjonalflagg* and a *regimentsflagg*, also called *standart*. Units of the Spanish armed forces carry, depending of the unit type, a *bandera* or an *estandarte*. Units in Thailand carry a single "flag of victory" (ธงชัยเฉลิมพล, *Thong Chai Chalermphol*).

In the U.S. each unit (from battalion and up) is equipped with a set of flags called a *stand of colors* usually consisting of two flags: the *national color* and the *organizational color*, while smaller units smaller carry a single *guidon*. Units of the German *Bundeswehr* each have a single flag called a *Truppenfahne*. In the French armed forces, army units each carry a single flag called simply a *drapeau*, and an *étandard* for the "cavalry" units. Individual ships in the Navy have a *fanion*. The Finnish armed forces have a single flag

[23] The eight-language encyclopedic dictionary *Osmojezični enciklopedijski rječnik* by Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, Zagreb, provides translations for the basic Croatian term *zastava*: Russian *флаг*, *знамя*, *стяг*, *штандарт*; English *flag*, *banner*, *standard*, *ensign*; German *Banner*, *Fahne*, *Flagge*, *Standarte;* French *drapeau, étandard*, *bannière*, *pavillon*; Italian *bandiera*, *vessilo*, *stendardo*, Spanish *bandera*, *estandarte*, *pabellón*; Latin *vexillum*, *signum* [Ladan, 2010: 1357].

for each brigade-level unit called simply *lipput*. In Italy army and navy units carry a *bandiera di guerra* while "cavalry" units carry a *stendardo*. Greek armed forces units each carry two flags, one used in formal and solemn occasions, the *Πολεμική Σημαία* (*Polemike Semaia*), while the other is symbolic for less formal use and decoration, the *Εμβληματα* (*Emblemata*). The units of the armed forces of Portugal have two flags per unit, an *Estandarte Nacional* and *estandartes heráldicos*, that may be a *guiões* or a *flâmula*. Romanian units each carry a *drapel de luptă*.

Since 1969 when Whitney Smith complained that the scientific terminology of vexillology was still under development [W. Smith, 1969:96], much standardization has taken place since, by Smith himself and other vexillologists, especially in English terminology. Probably the most comprehensive vexillological dictionary appeared in a book by a high-ranking officer of the South African Navy, Andreis Petrus Burgers [Burgers, 2008:35–76]; it was based on the *Dictionary of Vexillology* that Burgers was developing with collaborators in the *Flags of the World* association. After Burgers' untimely death, the author of this thesis joined the editorial team. The *Dictionary* has continued to be updated and upgraded—today it comprises more than 500 richly illustrated pages covering over 2,100 entries, available on-line [Burgers et al., 2005].[24] Particular vexillological terminology has been developed in other languages as well, for example in Dutch [Sierksma, 1971], Spanish [Sastre y Arribas, 1988] and [Álvarez Rodriguez, 2003], Czech [Česák and Tenora, 1990], and German [Herzog, 2005]. The first attempt to generate vexillological terminology in Croatian was published by the author [Heimer, 2000], including a vexillological thesaurus and an English-Croatian vexillological dictionary.

3.2 *Vexillology as an Area of Scientific Interest*

Vexillology is the name of the scientific study of flags, their history, meaning, and use, or, in a wider sense, research of flags in general [Heimer, 2006]. In Croatian the synonym occasionally used is *zastavoslovlje*.[25] As described further on, this scientific field developed in the second half of the 20th century, and today is still in a formative state, seeking its place among the classical divisions of scientific

[24] For more on the *Dictionary of Vexillology* and other similar works see in Heimer, 2015.

[25] Literally *"flag science"*, used alongside the internationalism *veksilologija*.

areas and aspiring to academic status.[26] So, in Croatian encyclopedic publications the term first appears as late as 2009, in the *Hrvatska enciklopedija* (The Croatian Encyclopedia), defined thus [Galović, 2009]:[27]

> **Vexillology** (from Latin *vexillum*: flag, banner + -logy) or **flag science**, a newer auxiliary history science studying the appearance and use of flags through history. Initially it was considered a part of heraldry, but also semiotics, sociology, political science, psychology. …"[28]

Galović understandably places vexillology in the field of auxiliary history sciences, as do many other auxiliary history experts. This reflects the strong connection that vexillology has with heraldry, the more traditional and one of the more significant auxiliary history sciences.

However, as the "younger sister" of heraldry, vexillology extends beyond that relationship and deals with issues far beyond the scope of auxiliary history sciences, as this thesis shows; although there is no doubt that auxiliary history sciences provide a firm scientific basis for it.

So, for example, in the first edition of his legendary textbook *Heraldika* [Zmajić, 1971], Zmajić does not even mention vexillology (by any other name) in the list of other auxiliary history sciences related to heraldry, while flags are mentioned in passing only, as an ephemeral area of heraldry. However, in the second, revised, posthumous edition [Zmajić, 1996], vexillology even appears in the book's subtitle. This virtually introduced the term into Croatian scientific literature. However, Zmajić did not attempt to define the subject of this "science" (although he defined the subjects of the other disciplines covered in the textbook), stating only [Zmajić, 1996:113]:

> Vexillology is a newer history science to us [i.e. in Croatia, ŽH], although as early as 1696 Pavao Ritter Vitezović from Senj gave special attention to flags, calling for collecting of, among others, that part of Croatian heritage.

However, the term "vexillology" appeared in a Croatian printed work even before Zmajić's textbook. The first appearance is probably in the translation of the so-called "Little Book" by W. Smith, 1980,[29] where he defined vexillology as [W. Smith, 1982:3]: "…research of the history of flags and their symbolism [... which becomes...] an auxiliary field of the social sciences."

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[26] The appearance of terms for this field of study in Croatian is provided here as a case study. Similar phenomenon may be probably observed in some other languages used in countries where vexillology has developed actively in recent decades.

[27] The complete article on the topic that Galović prepared for the Encyclopedia was editorially abbreviated—the full text was subsequently issued in Galović, 2010.

[28] Translated by ŽH, the original quote is: "**Veksilologija** (engl. *vexillology*, od lat. *vexillum*: zastava, barjak + -logija) ili **zastavoslovlje**, novija pomoćna povijesna znanost koja proučava nastanak i uporabu zastava tijekom povijesti. U početku se smatrala dijelom heraldike, ali i semiotike, sociologije, politologije, psihologije. ..." Other quotes from Croatian sources are also provided here in English translations, with the Croatian original in the footnotes only where essential for the discussion.

[29] Among vexillologists the "Little Book" [W. Smith, 1980] is the pocket-sized issue of Smith's "Big Book" [W. Smith, 1975] in abbreviated form. It consists of the single chapter of the "Big Book" providing the overview of the national flags of the world, omitting the other "Big Book" chapters. Both books were very popular and translated into several languages. By the number of illustrations and the quality of the accompanying text, Smith's book stands out among the classical pocket issues of the "all flags

In Croatian dictionaries "vexillology" first appears at the end of the first decade of the 21st century; it is absent from Anić's dictionaries of 2002 [Anić et al., 2002] and 2005 [Anić et al., 2005] (major modern Croatian dictionaries), but debuts in the *Encyclopedia* of 2009 [Galović, 2009].

The entry *veksilologija* (with the alternative *stjegoslovlje*) appears in various on-line dictionaries [*e-rječnik*, 2007] and *EUdict* [Kuzmić, 2005]. The same appears in *Google Translate* and some other on-line dictionaries.

With the establishment of the Croatian Heraldic and Vexillological Association in 2006 [*Osnivačka*, 2006], the Croatian variant of the term for vexillology appears in its name—*zastavoslovlje*; it has since appeared in some academic papers (such as the *Encyclopedia* quoted above).[30]

Although several works mention that the word *vexillology* was coined by Whitney Smith in 1957, few provide the source for the claim. However, Smith himself and many other vexillologists accept the claim in principle, although perhaps not the year itself. Certainly, by 1958 the term had appeared an article written by Smith in the magazine *Arab World* (Vol. 5, No. 10—October 1958, pp. 12–13, quoted by [Bartlett, 1989:7–10]). By the early 1960s the term was accepted by those studying flags, so that in 1965 the 1st International Congress of Vexillology was held in Muiderberg, the Netherlands [*Info-FIAV*, 2009:15–16]. At the 2nd Congress, in Rüschlikon, Switzerland, work began to create an umbrella organization for flag studies, and at the 3rd Congress in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S., the International Federation of Vexillological Associations (*Fédération internationale des associations vexillologiques*—FIAV) was established.

3.2.1 The Study of Flags before the Founding of Vexillology

Although the term *vexillology* appeared in the second half of the 20th century, flags were studied long before then. The relatively few papers and publications dealing with flags before vexillology became established as a discipline—documenting their design, describing the modes of their use, and exploring other aspects of them—are still of great importance today.

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of the world"-type publications (which all the "better" publishers apparently have issued by all the "better" publishers, unfortunately often resulting in nothing more than a colorful picture book, with imprecise illustrations). The Croatian translation of Smith's "Little Book" was issued by Globus, Zagreb, 1982. It must have influenced the development of the vexillological interest in Croatia considerably, as it did in many other countries.

[30] The Croatization of the term vexillology as *stjegoslovlje*, as suggested by the author in 1996 [Heimer, 1996] has not been widely accepted (even if it did enter some on-line dictionaries, as mentioned), although the word is much easier to pronounce than *zastavoslovlje*, which even if it does appear in print is one of those tongue-twisting words avoided in spoken language by all (although they may look equally unpronounceable to an English speaker).

In fact, flags as symbols have fascinated individuals since ancient times. Among the oldest systematic overviews of the flags of the world (i.e. flags of sovereigns) is the 14th-century book by an unnamed Spanish friar, *El libro del conoscimiento de todos los reinos*[31] depicting and describing (and occasionally, it seems, inventing) flags he supposedly encountered in his journeys throughout the known world [Tovar, 2005]. It was made available to the wider public in 1917 through an abbreviated but detailed translation in the "Flag Number" of the *National Geographic Magazine* [McCandless and Grosvenor, October 1917]. By the end of the 20th century, several high-quality reprints and translations had been issued, with critical comments.

During the Middle Ages, flags were regularly depicted on so-called *portolanos*, the navigational charts of coastal areas which regularly showed port cities ornamented with their flags. Many portolanos depicting the Mediterranean also showed the flags of the important ports in the eastern Adriatic, including those of Croatian cities.

With the advent of printing, charts of flags used on ships became popular (today we would probably call them posters)—as flags came to be used to denote the state affiliation of ships (even if not yet widely used on land as symbols of statehood or nationality). Many of those charts are preserved in Croatian museums and their reprints remain popular today.[32]

By the 19th century many countries began to publish books or charts for use by their navies and merchant marines showing the flags "of the entire world". These depicted not only national ensigns used on ships, but also other flags used in maritime protocol, such as the flags of chiefs of state, military and naval commanders, and services such as customs, sanitary inspections, fisheries, and lighthouses. The editors of such publications thus conducted the first systematic flag research, and gradually began to introduce critical systematization and scientific methodology into their work. Such publications were issued beginning in the mid-19th century in Great Britain, France, Spain, Germany, Russia, and Sweden, as well as in several other countries with a maritime orientation.

In 1873 the British firm Field and Tuer began publishing *Flags and Signals of All Nations*, prepared initially by George C. Hounsell, for the British Admiralty [Hounsell, 1873]; the next year it was entitled *Drawings of the Flags in Use at the Present Time by Various Nations* [Hounsell, 1874] as an official

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[31] The full title is: *El libro del conoscimiento de todos los regnos e tierras e señoríos que son por el mundo, et de las señales e armas que han cada tierra e señorío por sí e de los reyes e señores que los proveen* ("*The Book of Knowledge about all the Kingdoms and Lands and Domains which are in the World and about the Signs and Arms which have each Land and Domain for itself and about the Kings and Lords who provide them*").

[32] For example, reprints of the poster by Vincenzo Scotti *"Prospetto Generale delle Bandiere che Si Alberano a Bordo dei Bastimenti di Guerra e Mercantili di Tutte le Nazioni"*, 1804, Item DM PMD 134, cf. Čizmić, 2010:29–36, are popular tourist souvenirs in Dubrovnik today.

government publication; then it was updated and republished every few years. The seventh issue, in 1930, was entitled *Drawings of the Flags of All Nations* [*Drawings*, 1930], with regular annual corrections issues that were to be inserted into the book. The eighth issue, in 1955, appeared under the title *Flags of All Nations BR 20* [*Flags*, 1955], the title which it has retained to today. The last complete issue was the ninth in 1989 [*Flags*, 1989]. Updates to it are still occasionally issued, now edited by the leading British vexillologist Graham Bartram.

A similar publication by the French Navy began even earlier, in 1858, as *Album des pavillons, guidons et flammes de toutes les puissances maritimes*, edited by Commander M. A. Le Gras, published by the *Dépôt des Cartes et Plans de la Marine* (Office for Charts and Maps of the Navy) [Le Gras, 1858]. From the second issue in 1889, under the title *Album des pavillons nationaux et des marques distinctives des marines de guerre et de commerce*, the authors were no longer named, and it is now published by *Marine et Colonies—Service Hydrographique* (Hydrographic Service of the Ministry of Navy and Colonies) in Paris [*Album*, 1889]. Re-issues followed in 1923, 1954, 1965, and 1978. The seventh issue, the *Album des pavillons nationaux et des marques distinctives des états et des principales organisations internationales* of 1990 was edited by Captain Pierre, issued by the *Service Hydrographique et Océanographique de la Marine* (Hydrographic and Oceanographic Service of the Navy) in Brest, with regular corrections (as many as 30 issues of updates) that were to be replacement pages for the original pages in a binder [*Album*, 1990]. Captain Armand du Payrat edited the eighth issue (after several updates to the seventh) in 2000 [*Album*, 2000], updates since 2007 have been edited by Jean Gacic. Due to the regular update issues, as well as the intensive contacts with vexillological associations and vexillologists in the preparation of the issues in the 1990s, this publication is probably the most trusted source of its type today.

The Russian navy started a similar publication in 1898 as *Альбомъ Штандартовъ, Флаговъ и Вымпеловъ Россійской Имперіи и Иностранныхъ Государствъ* (Alybom' Shtandartov', Flagov' i Vympelov' Rossiyskoy Imperii i Inostrannyh' Gosudarstv'), signed by Belov, with several updates issued by the Revolution [Belov, 1898].

The Swedish navy prepared a similar manual in pocket size in 1912, with at least one update in 1928 [*Flaggbok*, 1912], [*Flaggbok*, 1928].

For its quality, accuracy, and technical details, vexillologists consider the book Ottfried Neubecker prepared for the German navy in 1939 to be the high point of such national-maritime "flags-of-the-world books". *Flaggenbuch (Flg.B.). Bearbeitet und herausgegeben vom Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine* [*Flaggenbuch*, 1939], succeeded several previous similar German publications [*Flaggenbuch*, 1893,[2] 1905,[3] 1926]. Several additional leaflets of updates were issued for it through1945. As Neubecker was ill-suited politically (his wife was Jewish), the Nazi navy hired him under great secrecy and his name was not

mentioned in the book. Today the book is still considered the most meticulous and technically prepared vexillological work of its type.

Today, only the British Admiralty and the French Navy publications are updated regularly. The French *Album* was significantly improved under Commander du Payrat; in its 2000 issue it began to approach the quality and accuracy of Neubecker's work. However, all such books, although without any doubt very valuable, are limited to the flags that may theoretically be found on or be seen from ships, and do not pursue further scientific analysis. They may be considered "collectionary", i.e. descriptive, and it may well be questioned if they belong to any scientific area. They may not be considered part of the auxiliary history sciences, and certainly not sociology.

Scientific methodology was introduced into flag research after World War II through the work of individuals, who gradually organized into associations and institutions. Before the introduction of the term *vexillology*, these initial enthusiasts used the term *banneristics* (*banistiek*) in The Netherlands—coined by Klaes Sierksma in the 1950s and used in [Sierksma, 1963] as well as in the name of his institute *Stichting voor Banistiek en Heraldiek* (Foundation for Banneristics and Heraldry)—and *flag science* or *flag studies*, i.e. German *Fahnenkunde* or *Flaggenkunde*; English *flag studies*, and Dutch *vlaggenkunde*.

3.2.2 The Study of Flags in Croatia

A 1902 note in *Arhivski vjesnik* by Emilij Laszowski, a famous heraldist and the director of the Croatian State Archives, may be the earliest article on flags published in a Croatian scientific journal. Due to its brevity it may be quoted in full [Laszowski, 1902][33]:

> **Prussian flags, donated to Croatia by Queen Maria Theresa.** When capturing Schwednitz in 1757, the Croats led by Ban [Viceroy] Ferenc Count of Nádasdy particularly distinguished themselves. They made a major contribution when the city was conquered. This was confirmed in a letter by Queen Maria Theresa, issued in Vienna on 24 November 1757, sent to the Ban Deputy Francis Thauzy, the Bishop of Zagreb. In recognition of the heroism and "by her motherly love toward her faithful Croatian people", she bestowed on and sent to the Croats four Prussian flags that were captured from the enemy in the battle. According to the Queen's wish, one was to be kept in the Zagreb Cathedral, the second one in the Varaždin parish church, while the remaining two were for the Bishop to place at his discretion. It would be intersting to find out where these flags are located now.

[33] **Pruske zastave, darovane Hrvatskoj po kraljici Mariji Tereziji.** Kod zauzeća Schwednitza g. 1757. osobito se istakoše junaštvom Hrvati vodjeni banom Franjom grofom Nadaždom. Oni su pače najviše doprinijeli, da je rečeni grad osvojen. To potvrdi kraljica Marija Terezija pismom izdanim u Beču 24. novembra 1757. a upravljenim na banskog namjesnika Franju Thauzya, biskupa zagrebačkoga. Za priznanje junaštva i iz majčine ljubavi prema „vjernom svom hrvatskom narodu", darova i posla ona Hrvatima četiri pruske zastave, koje su u boju otete neprijatelju. Po kraljičinoj želji imala se je jedna čuvati u stolnoj crkvi zagrebačkoj, druga u župnoj crkvi varaždinskoj, a ostale dvije mogao je biskup prema svojoj uvidjavnosti kamo god hoće smjestiti. Bilo bi zanimivo doznati, gdje se te zastave sada nalaze.
(Kr. zem. arkiv u Zagrebu. Izvor, medju Act. Congregat. gen. 1757. nr. 3.). E. Laszowski.

That same year another heraldry expert, Ivan Bojničić, published an article on the flag of the city of Zagreb [Bojničić, 1902]; another followed years later on the same topic [Horvat, 1939].

One of the first scientific papers on flags in Croatia is Luetić's piece on the history of the flag of the Republic of Dubrovnik [Luetić, 1967]. In that paper he hinted at the "transformation" of vexillology from a "descriptive" historical science into a sociological one—he not only provided descriptions of the designs and legislative texts and other documentation on the use of the flags, but also deliberated on which among them were "beloved" among the republic's merchants, and which they would try to avoid when possible, even when legally obliged to use them. With that, he entered the domain of social relations with symbols representing Dubrovnik. He mentioned that for a long period its merchants would prefer to fly the flag depicting St. Blasius on their ships rather than the ensign showing Dubrovnik's coat of arms. Until the 16th or 17th century, that coat of arms was still considered an imposed foreign symbol, as was "a flag (*banderias*) with the coat of arms of Lord King of Hungary" [Grakalić, 1990:66]; on several occasions state institutions officially reminded citizens that only the flag with the coat of arms was legislated and internationally recognized. Although that heraldic symbol's feeling of "foreign-ness" was long gone by the 20th century, in the 1990s when the city adopted a flag it preferred the design depicting the city's patron (while the historical arms as used in the 18th and 19th centuries were adopted as the city's arms). This also shows how a social group can persevere in seeking an identity symbol it feels is its own.

Such a preference for "our own old" flag while easily adopting a "foreign" coat of arms is an excellent local example of a phenomenon mentioned by Smith [W. Smith, 1969:94]:

> Flags are more universal as a phenomenon of political significance then certain other classes of symbols, e.g. as coats of arms…

Among the rare examples of scientific papers in Croatian dealing exclusively with flags are the work by [Pavičić, 1994] on the ecclesiastical flags from the Croatian History Museum and the first monograph by Jelena Borošak Marijanović—the catalog of the flags in the Museum [Borošak Marijanović, 1996]. Croatian flags were also documented in general catalogs of collections or catalogs of particular exhibitions by other museums in Croatia with historical flags in their collections, as well as in local monographs, e.g. [Stublić, 1994:92], [Hajduk-Vučić, 1995]; [Šalić, 1995]; [Kraguljac, 1999]; [Ernečić, 2003]; [Šperanda, 2003]; [Vlahović, 2005]. Borošak Marijanović also published several papers on particular flags and on the development of the national flag [Borošak Marijanović, 1998]; [Borošak Marijanović, 2000]; [Borošak Marijanović, 2001]; [Borošak Marijanović et al., 2002].

A number of the author's papers and publications may also be found in the bibliography of this thesis. Among those specifically on vexillology and visual identity are [Heimer, 2005; 2006; 2008; 2009(a)] as well as on military identity [Heimer, 2007; 2009(b); 2009(c); 2011]. Military identity in general

is covered by Tomislav and Višeslav Aralica in their series [Aralica and Aralica, 2006(a); 2006(b); 2010; 2011] dealing with the uniforms, weapons, equipment, and occasionally also the military flags of Croatian warriors from the early Middle Ages to 1945. In his monograph, Božo Kokan, the most prolific author on the topic, presented the unit emblems and other insignia he designed for the Croatian Armed Forces [Kokan, 2006]. Occasional articles have appeared in the military journal *Hrvatski vojnik* (e.g. [Purić and Heimer, 2010a; 2010b, 2010c; Čutura and Heimer, 2010]), but more frequently flags appear in photographs illustrating articles which do not expressly mention them. Since 2012 the author has also published a number of articles in that journal's *Vexillology* column [Heimer, 2012].

The visual identity of Croatian Armed Forces units is most thoroughly illustrated in a four-volume monograph on Croatian War and Military Insignia. The first three books mostly cover shoulder unit insignia—the first two treat the Homeland War era [A. Tuđman, 1994; 1995], the third deals with the subsequent era [A. Tuđman, 1999]—while the fourth covers souvenir table flags [A. Tuđman, 2000].

However, most of the works mentioned deal with flags (and emblems) on the level of description, sometimes on the level of legislation, and rarely on the level of usage, while hardly any provides sociological analysis of the symbols and their social importance. On the other hand, the most comprehensive bibliography of heraldic works in the region (including infrequent vexillological papers) is a bibliographic overview of Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian heraldic publications by Galović and Filipović [Galović and Filipović, 2008]. Among the few Croatian works discussing symbols in their social context is the monograph by Reana Senjković on the use of symbols in the turbulent 1990s and the link between the military and "civilian" iconography of national identity [Senjković, 2002].

3.2.3 The Relationship between Vexillology, Heraldry, and Sociology

The heraldic approach to the study of flags is mostly limited to those flags derived from the basic subject of heraldic research—coats of arms. Too often heraldists overlook how flags appear in the entire range of non-heraldic activities and are inclined to consider flag research as just a small and accessory part of heraldry—itself a long-established and much-esteemed discipline of the auxiliary history sciences.

The claim—that vexillology is (only) an auxiliary history science developed from heraldry, as may be found or implied in some heraldic works and as believed by some heraldists—is easily refuted. In heraldry, flags are studied only as ephemeral objects depicting coats of arms, or as patterns derived from coats of arms, while the wide range of flags not developed from heraldic elements and heraldic practice is widely ignored. In addition, as a phenomenon, heraldry is mostly limited to a part of Europe; only recently has it spread to some other parts of the world under European influence. On the other hand, flags developed independently, either as "primitive vexilloids" or as artifacts developed independently from the heraldic

systems, even in those parts of the world where heraldry had not developed at all. In fact, some flags appeared before the development of coats of arms and heraldry in the 11th and 12th centuries in Europe, some flags emerged independently in areas where heraldry never took root (such as Japan), and some flags also appear in areas of human activity with no common ground with heraldry at all (e.g. shipping house flags). In fact, that 12th-century Spanish friar reported on flags in regions where heraldry was unknown (and would never develop). The fact is that many maritime flags developed quite apart from heraldic systems, one of an entire series of flags entirely "outside" the scope of heraldic interest. Some of those areas include maritime signal flags, civic societies' flags (e.g. choirs, sports clubs, cultural societies, fire-fighters), guild flags, ecclesiastic communities' flags, flags of sailing and yachting clubs, and flags in sports (signal and identification). Therefore, even if there are a number of points of contact between heraldry and vexillology and even if the two often go hand in hand, there are a number of vexillological areas of study that have no connection with heraldry. Therefore, vexillology cannot be considered the "younger sister" of heraldry.

Also, in the same vein, vexillology may not be limited just to the field of auxiliary history sciences, because the topics vexillology deals with often expand the scope of historical research into the areas of semiotics, sociology, political science, and ethnology, as well as some other fields of study such as shipping, military sciences, textile technology, etc. Among those is art history, which in fact is how some flags and flag collections in museums are most often processed in scientific publications.

Therefore, it is the best to define vexillology as an interdisciplinary area primarily encompassing parts of auxiliary history sciences, art history, political science, and sociology, but other fields of scientific study as well.

A hypothesis of this thesis is that sociology indeed has a central part in this spectrum of scientific fields. Only sociology can provide answers to questions about the social circumstances in which flags appear and are used, about the way in which certain social groups identify with a flag, and about the link formed between the flag as identification symbol and the group it represents within a wider social community. And in that sense, only sociology has developed a methodology offering tools for research into the emergence and use of flags, and also into the possible predictive mechanisms about the appearance of new flags (if such a prediction is possible in the social sciences and indeed if such a prediction is required). All other interdisciplinary areas (auxiliary history sciences, art history, political science, ethnology, anthropology, and others—mentioned above or not) are only, in a certain way, "technical" auxiliary areas, enabling a determination of the previous and the current states. As sociology provides vexillology with the tools for predicting "outcomes", that provides it with a scientific focus.

On the other hand, the goal of sociology to study society may not be fully achieved without the study of flags as social phenomena. Sociology, given its sheer breadth, may successfully avoid facing this minor aspect of social phenomenology. However, if sociology truly aspires to explain society in its entirety, it cannot do so without vexillological deliberations, entering into interdisciplinary fields outside its traditional scientific scope. As shown in previous chapters on identity and symbols, prominent sociologists since the 19th century have considered the role of flags in society; flags appear, although sometimes incidentally, in many sociological discussions.

This establishes a two-way interdependence between vexillology and sociology. Of course, vexillological research is only a small and so far relatively insignificant part of the wide scope of sociological study, and the sociological approach is an even smaller part of vexillology today, even if it should stand at its very center.

A number of prominent vexillologists, at least in the last decade, have strongly promoted such an approach to vexillology. Their papers presented at international vexillological congresses, as well as in other publications, insist on approaching vexillology as a social science. Among them one may mention scientists from the U.S., such as Carolyn Marvin, communications scholar, and David Ingle, psychologist, who study the issue of ritualization and sacralization of flags; Robert Goldstein, a political scientist studying the phenomena surrounding U.S. flag desecration; and a number of active vexillologists such as Whitney Smith, political scientist and "father of vexillology"; Scot M. Guenter, American Studies professor; Anne M. Platoff, historian and political scientist; and many others. In Great Britain, William Crampton, founder of the *Flag Institute* and advisor on flags to the British government, stands out. In South Africa, the works of retired officers Hugh Hamilton Smith and Andreis Burgers should be mentioned; in Norway, political scientist Jan Oskar Engene; in Australia, economist Ralph Kelly; in Austria, sociologist Peter Diem. This list of prominent contemporary scientific vexillologists is in no way complete, others are mentioned throughout this thesis.

3.3 *Principles of Vexillology*

At the 23rd International Congress of Vexillology in Yokohama, Japan, 2009, Dr. Whitney Smith's paper, *Principles of Vexillology* [W. Smith, 2011], constituted a preliminary attempt to present the basic principles of vexillological science—a summation of his theoretical postulates and practical problems that he had observed during his half-century study of the discipline. In the introduction Smith, as a political scientist, defines vexillology as a political science. But as demonstrated above, that is too limiting a context, as there are considerable areas of vexillological interest beyond the scope of political science and

extending to social sciences in general. However, Smith proposes a mission—that future vexillologists should grow vexillology beyond a "collector's passion", and even systematic information gathering, into a science capable of predicting outcomes [W. Smith, 2011:1]:

> Vexillology needs to develop and test major and minor hypotheses about flags and their study so that the activity of vexillologists will not be random or purposeless or trivial.

This is, no doubt, a reaction to critiques heard among "serious" vexillologists during flag-studies congresses at the end of the 20th century. They pointed out that the time had come for vexillology to go beyond the collection and systematization of materials and move toward scientific research and drawing conclusions—toward creating new knowledge beyond the trivially obvious and achieving the "capability of scientific prediction".

This critique is most clearly articulated in a paper by the late Dr. Peter Orenski [Orenski, 2001], which he soon expanded and published as a monograph [Orenski, 2003]. In a dialogue with the fictional character *Malevexor*, Orenski tried to legitimize vexillology as science, i.e. to show its current state and recognize (or reveal) the obstacles that vexillology had to overcome to become a valid science. In a picturesque expression typical of Dr. Orenski, a vexillologist should become more than a child running up shouting "Mummy, mummy, see the nice flower I have found!", he has to overcome the state where he only reports on "curiosities" he finds in the archives, on his journeys into "exotic locations", or in documents, and make his work be more than simply a "herbarium of flags". Orenski concludes that vexillology has not yet reached the level of a science, that it has not yet developed its own scientific paradigm but only satisfies the minimal criteria required for a science. Orenski claims that vexillology may be considered a science only in the sense of "systematic knowledge", and not as a higher level of science which, besides facts, also determines laws that govern among those facts—that is, it hasn't reached the level of science that encompasses the full scientific method of making observations, posing hypotheses, and testing them through experiment and/or by further observation [Orenski, 2003:55].

Perhaps in response to this rather harsh critique, Smith presented his 19 principles of vexillology, in their preliminary formulation. Listed here, with some comments, they should be considered fully and checked rigorously.

> *1. Flags are artifacts conceived of and constructed by human beings interacting within their cultures.*

Here Smith correctly highlights that flags are a product of deliberate human activity and that their design is influenced by the cultural surroundings in which they appear (and such objects, once created, in turn affect their environment). Cerulo takes this a step further, claiming that flags are constructs of contrived actions of society elites, and not a common construct of the entire society [Cerulo, 1995], which is

a valid and far-reaching point worthy of further discussion (however, such detail exceeds the scope of Smith's principles and certainly of this thesis).

> *2. All flags are messages of intentional (and, sometimes, unintentional) content made by one or more individuals and addressed to themselves and to others; i.e. flags are a form of social communication.*

With these first two principles, Smith defines the framework of vexillology as wider than political science, to which he seemed to limit it in his introduction—flags are about social communication that is not necessarily political. The same wider scope is expressed in the following principle.

> *3. The purpose of the analysis of flags is to understand more accurately and more completely the nature of human society.*
>
> *4. While flags can be analyzed from the standpoint of history, esthetics, usefulness, commercial value, and other aspects, the scientific study of flags is properly part of the social sciences.*
>
> *5. The study of flags must be undertaken in coordination with, or at least with an understanding of, other social sciences.*
>
> *6. No understanding of flags in general or of a particular flag is complete until the relationships the flag has with the society in which it is utilized are understood.*
>
> *7. No understanding of human society in general or of a particular society is complete until such flags as it uses are understood, i.e. until the study of its flags is taken into account as part of the social sciences.*

The last two principles clearly indicate the interaction and two-way relationship between sociology and vexillology, supplementing one another with the goal of understanding society as a whole. Smith's remaining principles are based on the acceptance of the first seven and they express the conditions which vexillological research should fulfill.

> *8. The study of flags must be undertaken from a scientific standpoint.*
>
> *9. Objectivity, comprehensiveness, open-mindedness, and rationalism are necessary for the study of flags.*

These principles seem almost trivially axiomatic—if vexillology aspires to be a science, research should be carried out in scientific manner. Those attributes: objectivity, comprehensiveness, etc., are essential in any scientific research. However, this point should nevertheless be stated clearly in such a "manifesto". The usual scientific procedures—starting from the most basic activities, such as quoting sources, deducing conclusions from clearly stated premises, conducting systematic and comprehensive research, etc.—were for various reasons indeed missing from some "quasi-vexillological" papers. Sometimes the author's political agenda or other non-scientific intent could be noticed in papers claiming to be vexillological. Clearly, such works should be identified and the claims they introduce into the field should be confirmed or rejected in a scientific manner.

10. The study of flags must be value-neutral and analytical, not hortative[34] *or normative.*

This is the first among the principles that should be considered more seriously. It is clear that Smith intends to support an analytical approach and avoid traps that might emerge when vexillologists impose or promote certain views or solutions. On the other hand, who better than vexillologists can point out how flags should be used, what the correct ways are, and which errors should be rectified? The solely academic approach to research ("armchair vexillology") may be alluring and may provide certain satisfaction to the researcher, but what is the benefit of such research if it is not applied? If a vexillologist discovers that a form of flag use deviates from norms, either due to ignorance of standard practice or due to some other reason, isn't it his duty to point it out? Shouldn't the vexillologist be expected to indicate what makes a flag design effective, separating it from those that may be unreadable, unsuited to their function in social communication? With his wide knowledge of the subject, shouldn't the vexillologist help when flag-use standards are being created or rectified? Just as we should ask a sociologist for opinions on measures to improve a society, or an economist about economic policy, one mission of a vexillologist is to provide, through the results of his research, proposals for rectifying irregularities in his area of social studies. (An issue, of course, is defining the limits of such vexillologist feedback.)

11. Hypotheses derived from observation must be tested by further observation, by logical analysis, and by experimentation. Hypotheses found wanting must be revised accordingly or discarded.

This is, of course, the basis of the scientific method, valid in any science.

12. Scientific knowledge of flags presupposes the existence of accurate data concerning flag symbolism, usage, design, and history.

Certainly, scientific research may be conducted only with accurate and precise data and the acquiring of those precedes the creation of hypotheses. Therefore the meticulous acquisition of such data should not be scorned—even when the one who acquires it may have no intention of performing any other analysis himself. The half-century of organized "collector's vexillology" (if we accept the term from Orenski's critique) provided a solid base for its growth into a scientific discipline. Only with such meticulously acquired data may one begin creating hypotheses and continue with the subsequent steps of the scientific method.

13. Regularities, similarities, special cases, changes over time, casual relationships, and the social functions of flags require statistical analysis.

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[34] Smith uses term "hortative" for actions that promote the use of certain flag, i.e. such activities that advocate the introduction, display, or change of some flag for political and other non-vexillological reasons.

Statistical analysis is certainly an important tool in any scientific research; nevertheless it is not the only analytical method. Accordingly, this principle should be expanded. Statistical analysis is successfully employed, for example, in Kelly's paper analyzing the change of national flags in Latin American countries [Kelly, 2005], showing an almost regular reciprocal probability of flag change as a function of the time elapsed since independence, with notable peaks at 20, 50, and 100 years—providing conclusions about the temporal component in the construction of a national symbol and its "separation" from the particular political group ("social elite") which introduced it. It shows that national flag change is more likely if political turnover occurs after less time has passed since the flag's introduction. It also provides other forms of "vexillological prediction", details of which exceed the scope of this thesis.

Aside from statistical analysis, other methods should be valid for vexillology as well, e.g. contents analysis, hermeneutics, grounded theory, comparative research, ethno-methodology, and probably others among the many quantitative and qualitative methods used in social studies.

> *14. Scientific knowledge of flags presumes that data are organized into meaningful statements which convey an understanding about flags above and beyond the information directly implicit in the data themselves.*

This is consistent with the requirement that vexillology create new knowledge beyond the trivially obvious information derived from simply observing flags. Non-trivial new understanding implies the creation of hypotheses, derived using logic from existing knowledge (by *a priori* method) or by conducting further research, that may then confirm or reject those hypotheses (i.e. modify them). In other words, vexillologists should organize knowledge in such way that the scientific method may be applied to it.

> *15. Recognition of the legitimacy of the scientific approach to the study of flags means neither that such a study is completely autonomous nor that it is subsumed in the study of another subject.*

In other words, the scientific approach in vexillology only confirms its interdisciplinary nature; it is close to a number of other "classical" scientific fields but not, however, identical to any of them.

Smith's four final principles result from his practical experience in vexillology.

> *16. The study of data on any aspect of flags does not impute the existence of, nor must it entail the development of, a partisanship toward the existence (or maintenance or expansion) of the forms and functions under study. Promoting flags is fundamentally different from seeking to understand them.*

Here, Smith sets a boundary between vexillology and the activities of individuals and organizations who promote the use of particular flags, mostly with political motives. This expands the concept in principle No. 10 of rejecting "hortative" activities, stating clearly that such activities do not constitute vexillology. This pertains to some members of vexillological associations, particularly in the U.S., Australia, but elsewhere as well, and even some "vexillological" organizations that actually have no

aspirations to being "scientific". They actively, and even aggressively, promote the display of a national flag, or advocate flag change, or engage in activities promoting the introduction of flags for various political-administrative entities, etc. Some of them consider such activities part of vexillology, or, even worse, they use this scientific study as argument for their unscientific goals.

On the other hand, who else, if not vexillologists, should work to promote social awareness of the importance of flags and their role in the society, to popularize its vexillological heritage, and to advocate for adoption of new flags (if needed)? Certainly, vexillologists should not act in such matters with political motives. However, as with all other members of society, vexillologists may also have legitimate political persuasions. In this, one should agree with Smith that an organization promoting the use of flags (or of a specific flag) is not *ipso facto* a vexillological organization, just as, for example, an animal friends organization is not automatically a veterinary association.

> *17. The designing and making of flags, the display of flags, promotion of flag usage, collecting of flags, the use of flags to achieve certain ends, and analysis of the relative artistic merits of various flags are not subsumed in the study of flags, although the study of any of the above activities is.*

Vexillology researches all aspects of flag use, including the abovementioned activities constituting the function of flags in a society. However, these activities in themselves are not vexillology. Smith highlights that point particularly, due to his experience in the vexillological community, where such activities were sometimes presented as an integral part of vexillological science. This may be rather obvious; however, the frequency of attempts to present such activities as vexillology itself must have led Smith to clearly distinguish them. Certainly, any vexillologist, just as any other society member, may be engaged in such activities, but he should be aware that they are not scientific activities. (At least one of these has its own name: *vexillography* describes the discipline of flag design.)

> *18. Involvement in nonscientific aspects of flags, especially for ideological, political, or commercial ends, may distort perspectives of data and/or relevance in the pursuit of scientific knowledge of the subject.*

This is more of a warning than a principle. It is quite possible that a person engaging in the non-scientific aspects of flags, mentioned in the previous principle, could maintain scientific objectivity in his research. However, the allure of such activities is often too great, and Smith rightfully calls attention to this.

> *19. The value of a parallel study of related symbols (such as heraldry) is proportional to its adherence to the scientific principles and procedures applicable to the study of flags itself.*

In other words, to be able to research other related symbols in parallel with flags, one should adhere to the same scientific principles set forth here. Considering that they may be applied to a number of symbols (not only coats of arms, but also military insignia, coins and paper money, postage stamps, and possibly less traditional items such as matchboxes, pins, political posters, industrial packaging, and many

others), such parallel research may further contribute to understanding the social role of flags. A non-scientific approach to those other subjects, cannot, of course, benefit vexillological analysis.

The opposite is also true—data on flags used in other scientific areas may be useful only if processed scientifically. Unfortunately, there are far too many examples of information on flags gleaned randomly by other scientific fields which certainly do not contribute to the value of such papers. As an example, the comparative analysis of national flags by [Cerulo, 1995] is very interesting methodologically and very thorough sociologically. Unfortunately, the author derived too much of her national flag data from vexillologically unfounded sources and without a critical vexillological apparatus, producing an analysis with considerably less authentic and less applicable conclusions (cf. the critique of her work by Engene, 1997). Far too often social science researchers take for granted and derive conclusions from unscientific publications of the "All Flags of the World" type, which are edited by non-vexillologists and replete with inaccurate data. In this manner, it is thus not difficult to find papers that repeat the claim of the "Ustashi origin of the Croatian flag" found in such "booklets" issued abroad in the early 1990s. From these they derive far-reaching but poorly founded conclusions about the nature of modern Croatian society, the reasons for the Serb rebellion in Croatia, and many other topics unrelated to flags. By identifying such "misuses of vexillology", a vexillologist becomes aware of the possible traps of relying on untested data in non-scientific publications in other fields. See more on this issue in Chapter 3.5.1, Pure Vexillology.

3.4 *A Critique of Vexillology*

As mentioned, the most important and most encompassing critical work on the development of vexillology as a discipline, from the 1960s to the end of the 1990s, is Peter Orenski's *Quo Vadimus?* [Orenski, 2003]. His objection to vexillology as a scientific discipline is the lack of elements that would classify it as a scientific activity—the creation of hypotheses, testing them, determining principles (scientific laws), and making scientific predictions based on them. Orenski states in the introduction of his chapter "Is Vexillology a Science?" [Orenski, 2003:9; italics in the original]:

> ...I have long regarded as suspect the notion that collecting, describing, and tracing the history of flags—however methodically and precisely done—confer on vexillology the "mantle" of science. In my view these activities do nothing of the kind. They constitute necessary *first steps* in scientific work, of course. But are they sufficient? Not in any definition or practice of science I know of.

Similar to Whitney Smith's principles, Ned Smith (no relation) tried to summarize the characteristics that a researcher must have to be a successful vexillologist. His criteria are [N. Smith, 2002]:

- A sustained effort to familiarize oneself with all the relevant sources (of course not necessarily for the entire field, but in the area in which one is specializing) and to uncover new sources,
- An ability to analyze conflicting evidence to reach a logical conclusion (or to conclude the evidence is insufficient to support a conclusion),

- A willingness to submit one's conclusions to peer review (including frank acknowledgment of all contrary evidence),
- An ability to defend logically one's conclusions, and a willingness to revise them when appropriate.

Ned Smith's criteria are not particularly specific to vexillology, but are indeed the basis of the scientific method, logical reasoning, and the concept of *peer review*. This may indicate, probably more than anything else, a certain "crisis" among vexillologists that developed in the early 21st century. It seems that too many individuals suddenly arose in the vexillological community who were incapable of grasping the basic scientific approach. This example may well indicate quite the opposite of what might be concluded at first glance—it wasn't that there were too many individuals among vexillologists engaging in non-scientific work, but, on the contrary, that vexillology had matured enough to be able to identify their work as alien and useless "weeds".

At the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, papers began appearing which attempted to do that which Orenski expected from the science of vexillology, whether the authors were aware of Orenski's critique or not—for example, Kelly's appropriate use of statistics in vexillology. Due to the promotion of vexillology as a topic, proven scientists in various social sciences began to deal with it—political scientists, anthropologists, ethnologists, and even sociologists. Among them are Scot M. Guenter, professor of American Studies, the founder of the vexillological journal *Raven* and author of an important book on the cultural influence of the American flag [Guenter, 1990], and Norwegian political scientists such as Jan Oskar Engene (in a series of articles in *Nordisk Flaggkontakt*, which he also edited between 2000 and 2011). A series of political science and historical theses with flags as topics were defended in Norway (e.g. [Ensrud, 2004], [Imsen, 2005], [Hofstad, 2006]). Indeed, American and Scandinavian sociologists prepared the first sociological anthology on flags in society [Eriksen and Jenkins, 2007]. Most of its research still deals with national flags and the flags of minority groups (ethnical, gender, subcultural…) through papers by a dozen authors covering the emergence of national flags in Europe as well as flag phenomena in the United States (national, minority, Confederacy), in the United Kingdom (particularly Northern Ireland), and in Scandinavia (in relation to nationalism). Many sociological papers examined the issue of flag-burning and the legality of such demonstrations of free speech—mostly in the U.S. (e.g. [Goldstein, 2000])—and other forms of public flag desecration. Warren S. Apel provided a fairly thorough bibliography on flag desecration including burning [Apel, 2009], again mostly concentrated on the U.S.

3.4.1 Predictive Possibilities in Vexillology

One of Orenski's key objections to vexillology as a scientific study, noted during his long-time membership in the North American Vexillological Association, is his claim that vexillology will never be able to provide scientifically based predictions—about what a flag will look like in the future. However, is that really so? And is that really necessary?

Orenski, like some other vexillologists, expects vexillology to be able to predict with some certainty what will be adopted tomorrow as the flag for a new nation, region, city, military unit, or some other social group.

It is quite certain that a vexillologist will never be able to predict with "crystal ball" certainty what a future flag would look like. However, that does not mean that some level of scientific prediction may not be derived and causality be confirmed (or denied).

On FOTW, Nelson quotes from his unpublished article discussing the current state and future of vexillology [Nelson, 2005]:

> A prime example is the flag of the territory of Nunavut in Canada (unveiled and hoisted in 1999). In the days prior to the formal creation of the territory, and the unveiling of the coat-of-arms and flag, numerous flags, purported to be the one that would be adopted, were sent to the FOTW mailing list, all asking if anyone had heard if this was the new flag. These were based upon speculation, proposals that people had made, and or speculative and erroneous information.

And he continues immediately: "All that could be predicted was the presence of an *inukshuk* somewhere on the flag." [35]

However, such speculations and proposals were not the result of scientific deliberation ("vexillological prediction"), but a result of "information" accumulated by "amateur vexillologists", "hobbyists" from even less-scientific sources (newspapers, TV reports, "rumors"…). FOTW members, whose "speculations" are quoted by Nelson, did not derive their conclusions from scientific analysis.

On the other hand, the choice of the final design reflects the creativity of the designer and may contain elements of unpredictability and coincidence—randomness—which no vexillological deliberation may predict.

However, the designer[36] is not entirely free in making that choice. Social circumstances directly affect the elements of the design (symbols, colors, geometrical patterns), determining which are acceptable

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[35] The *inukshuk* is a traditional anthropomorphic figure in the Nunavut native tradition.

[36] Here the term 'designer' is used in a wider sense as the one who chooses/approves the design, not necessary the graphic artist who executes the actual drawing.

and which are not—either by seeking similarity with existing symbols within the social group, or by intentionally avoiding other existing symbols (such as those used by an opposing group). The cultural circumstances, historical symbols, and aspirations of the group adopting a new flag all must be taken into account and may allow plausible hypotheses about what a future flag might look like, i.e. which graphic elements it is likely to contain and which are likely to be avoided. Of course, such a hypothesis may not take the form of a final artistic rendition (drawing), which Nelson and many others apparently expect.

Perhaps Nelson's critique of FOTW members' "educated guesses" would have been more lenient in the case of the adoption of the flag of Kosovo—more on this later.

Kolstø analyzed how the choice of state symbols depends on the relationship with other states and relationships between individual ethnic and ideological groups within those states, using the examples of new state symbols (coats of arms and flags) in the countries of the former Yugoslavia (Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the former Soviet Union (Belarus, Russia) [Kolstø, 2006]. From his analysis he derives several conclusions that may be summarized:

- there are no inherent characteristics of state symbols that prevent their adoption, just as there are no designs or details that would in themselves guarantee success;
- if a symbol or a design is perceived as belonging to a certain political or ethnic group more than to others, it will be extremely difficult, sometimes impossible, to have those other groups and parties in the country accept it as their own;
- the best way to achieve agreement on unifying state symbols is probably inclusion of all interested groups in process leading to their adoption—but such a strategy does not guarantee success, if there is no political will or political trust;
- the compromise need not be aesthetically or artistically consistent; it may be a collage of seemingly incompatible elements. As minimal condition, however, the design must be recognizable as state symbol, and not as something else, e.g. as a commercial logo;
- reaching for history as inspiration—the designer may choose something that another nation considers its own (as in the notable example of Macedonia, whose symbols were contested by Greece. There are more examples, some less "painful" and now in the past—the three lions of Denmark and Estonia; the white knight of Lithuania and Belarus; the double cross of Hungary and Slovakia).

But Kolstø's most important conclusion is probably that [Kolstø, 2006:35]:

> In the beginning, a national symbol for a new state will, inevitably, always be regarded as novel and unfamiliar. However, the flags of today's consolidated nation-states were also at one point new and 'artificial'. Since there are no inherent qualities in any symbol that link it emotionally or cognitively to the entity which it symbolizes, this linkage has to be learned.

Kolstø mentions two basic mechanisms that may ensure such a "habituation process": the first, which he calls the "normative force of what actually is", how by force of legislation certain symbols become ubiquitous, while their alternatives are slowly forgotten; and the second, which he relates to Pavlov's "law of association" (Pavlovian conditioning), namely, if the new symbols are related with important events and

situations that citizens associate with pride, joy, and delight, they will embrace those symbols and increase their emotional value (Kolstø mentions international sports achievements as the most important such events). However, Kolstø does not provide an answer as to how to predict (vexillologically) and even successfully choose a new national symbol (nor that was his intention).

Sometimes the elements that are desirable and elements that are to be avoided are explicitly expressed. In other cases, when the actual process of choosing a symbol is not transparent, these mechanisms are not so obvious, but a comprehensive analysis of the society may make them quite evident. In the case of a competition for a new national flag the conditions may be described explicitly. Indeed, in the competition for the new flag of Kosovo, some of the required elements were expressed in advance. So, besides the general conditions prescribed, such as the design should be simple, original, recognizable, and so on, the 2007 *Competition for the Flag and Emblem of Kosovo* explicitly stated that the proposed symbols [*Competition*, 2007]:

- must not represent or approximate the flag or emblem of any state, or the flag or emblem of any political party, movement, or institution of Kosovo, or imply any allegiance to any ethnic community of Kosovo;
- must not utilize the representation of any eagle symbol, particularly with regard to such depictions in the symbols of other states; and
- must not solely utilize red and black color schemes, or red, white, and blue color schemes.

These conditions eliminated the possibility of adopting a flag that would include the national symbols of Albanians or Serbs or the political symbols of their respective parties.

A comprehensive vexillological analysis would probably prove that it was possible, to some level, to predict the final outcome, that is, designs that would have been considered. Regarding the choice of color combinations, the competition rules did not prevent mixing Serb and Albanian colors—red-white-black. And, indeed, among the final proposals were many designs that employed this "neutral" and yet relevant combination. It could have been supposed that neither green or yellow would be chosen as the basic colors, as they have no strong tradition in national symbolism anywhere in the entire region (in addition, green has connotations of Islam, symbolism that would likely be considered inappropriate, although that was not explicitly stated). Therefore, only white and blue remained for the basic colors of the design, and indeed many proposals for the flag used these colors. The existing symbols (above all, eagles) were not acceptable, so the designers looked to history—as if following Kolstø's "recipe" (likely unknown to the designers)—to elements inspired by pre-Roman archaeological finds.

However, before the results of the competition were published and the new flag of Kosovo was raised, the most frequent "educated guess" among the comments on FOTW was a claim (or "fear") that the

most likely flag would be a "bureaucratic design" with minimal symbolism, similar to the neutral Cypriot compromise design. And, indeed, this vexillological analysis provided hints of the design eventually adopted, very much in line with the Cypriot design: a neutral, single-colored flag (white in Cyprus, blue in Kosovo) with a map (itself a neutral symbol)[37] to which was added an aspirational and neutral element symbolizing the international community (olive branches from the United Nations symbol in Cyprus, the stars from European Union symbolism in Kosovo).

The "victory" of the vexillological prediction would have been more impressive had a systematic analysis been conducted and published in a relevant journal before Kosovo's symbols were adopted, instead just a discussion on the FOTW mailing list. However, it seems that none of the vexillologists involved had the foresight or courage to do so at time.[38] Nevertheless, the example demonstrates that "scientific vexillological prediction" (i.e. creation of a hypothesis and its testing by further observation) is possible in principle and that it would be useful to have such research attempted in the future.

Beyond predicting a state flag, the same methodology may be employed with some success to "predict" flags of any social group, depending on the data available about the group and its social surroundings. For example, such a "prediction" may be made about flags of those communities and cities that have not yet adopted flags, based on observation of other flags adopted in their country, analysis of legislation (laws, regulations, heraldic guidelines) regarding those flags, analysis of municipal history and societal conditions, etc.

Of course, circumstances might change drastically—e.g., the legislature may change some requirements almost "on a whim". For example, in the Republic of Croatia the legislature allows cities and communities to adopt coats of arms and flags, with the approval of a central state body (today, the Ministry of Administration). Initially, there were no conditions for that approval, so some cities began adopting coats of arms and flags as best as they knew and could—some in following existing tradition, others "from scratch". At first the ministry approved those arms and flags without any criteria—so among them some tricolor and bicolor city flags were approved (e.g., Senj, Osijek, Đakovo). However, the ministry soon established the "Heraldic Commission" (the Commission for Approval of Coats of Arms and Flags to the

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[37] While some vexillologists scorn the use of maps on flag for their graphical complexity and difficulty in proper representation on the reverse, , they seem to be popular device. Mason Kaye attributes the popularity of maps on flags to two reasons: they are unique—a distinctive and recognizable symbol of a territory, and they are neutral—a symbol without bias: political, ethnic, or national [Kaye, 2009].

[38] Ironically, the author himself ventured a Kosovo flag prediction in a lecture presented in a scientific setting—that it "may prove to be another flag designed by some committee and fail in its function". Cf. Heimer, Željko: *Flags as Symbols of Socio-Political Integration*. Lecture delivered at the postgraduate course Social Structures and Institutions: The Quest for Social Justice, Interuniversity Centre, Dubrovnik, 18–23 June, 2007. http://www.academia.edu/28128406/Flags_as_Symbols_of_Socio-political_Integration_SSI-QSJ_Dubrovnik_2007_

Units of Local Self-Government), which prepared rules and brought order to the random and arbitrary process. It prescribed that city flags should have a single-color field bearing the coat of arms. Since then, it can be predicted that newly approved flags will be of a single color, but not without exception—some cities (e.g., Varaždin, Bakar), able to prove the historical continuity of multi-colored flags, gained approval from the ministry to continue using such flags, despite the guidelines (which do provide for such historical exceptions). However, eventual "arbitrary" change of the design guidelines (hardly likely any time soon, except after a "revolutionary" change of the "regime" i.e., of the state structure), is out of the scope of vexillological prediction.[39]

In another example of successful prediction using vexillological methodology, Ted Kaye was able to predict the ratings that the public might give for the design quality of various flags. In the case of city flags of the U.S., the score for each design based on the five basic principles of flag design successfully predicted the scores given by the public for each of 150 flags with an r-squared correlation of 0.83 (a very high number). [Kaye, 2005]

These examples, I believe, clearly illustrate the possibility of "vexillological prediction", as well as the potential for the construction of vexillological hypotheses. It demonstrates that Orenski's claim—that vexillology will "never be able to provide scientifically founded predictions"—does not hold up; indeed, such hypotheses, which Smith anticipated as an essential element of vexillology as a scientific discipline, have much value.

Finally, one may ask, is such "vexillological prediction" indeed necessary? Vexillology as a scientific discipline has enough other subjects of interest where valid scientific hypotheses may be constructed, then proved or disproved using the scientific method. Such hypotheses may cover various topics, such as eventual links among various flags; the existence of common patterns of later apparently unconnected flags; the social impact, acceptance, and use of individual flags; and an entire series of other issues regarding aspects of flags and their use.

3.5 *Vexillology as an Interdisciplinary Research Field*

Some historians place vexillology among the auxiliary history sciences, as a "younger sister" to heraldry or as a part of some other established science. Others have argued against such a limited scope for vexillology. Of course, basic vexillological research uses methodology very similar to other auxiliary history sciences which study symbolic artifacts of human activities, such as sphragistics and sigillography

[39] For more on legal and practical issues in modern Croatian municipal heraldry, see Kolanović, 2008 and Heimer, 2016.

(seals), heraldry (coats of arms), numismatics (coins and paper money), or phaleristics (medals). However, while those auxiliary history sciences aim to document the historical use of various functional objects (seals, coats of arms, coins, medals…), vexillology has a greater ambition. Besides documentation, it aspires to explain and even, to some level, predict: vexillologists want to know not only what some flags look(ed) like, but they want (and try) to determine: why flags look as they look, how they appeared in a society, how they are used in a society, how social circumstances influenced their design, and how flags and their use influenced the development of society (politics, history…). Therefore, understanding flag phenomena requires an interdisciplinary approach, with connections to various scientific fields, including some that at first may seem to have little or nothing in common. Some of these fields supplement "pure vexillology" by providing mechanisms (methodology and scientific tools) for its wider ambitions, while others use vexillology to provide flag knowledge in their specific area of interest.

3.5.1 Pure Vexillology

For these deliberations, it may be useful to introduce the tentative terms "pure vexillology" and "applied vexillology" (paralleling other scientific fields that are traditionally divided the same way). Following the discussions above, the scope of "pure vexillology" (or perhaps "basic vexillology"?) indeed generally coincides with what makes vexillology an auxiliary history science. "Pure vexillology" is the traditional part of vexillology that considers the appearance (design) of flags, with prescribed (or customary) colors, graphic elements, proportions, areas of flag use (vexillological usage classes, such as "civil flag on land", "naval ensign", etc.), dates of adoption or introduction, and physical characteristics of flags (materials, accessories—spears, finials, fringe, streamers, etc.). The result of "pure vexillology" is a sort of "catalog" documenting certain flags as actual artifacts (or idealized imagined artifacts upon which the actual items are modeled). This includes prescribed or habitual symbolism, i.e. the declared interpretation of the flag's symbolic elements.

In that sense, most vexillologists have been pursuing "pure vexillology" since the mid-20th century and it still constitutes the majority of vexillological works. Critiques of vexillological science mockingly called it "collector's vexillology", understanding that such scientific research, however thorough and correctly performed, represented only the first step, the point of origin that establishes the factual state—a set of undisputable facts on the subject that merely provide the potential for relevant deliberations of more complex relationships, such as the mutual influence between the society or a social group and the flag, as well as other kinds of higher vexillological considerations (this is Whitney Smith's principle 14, "…understanding about flags above and beyond the information directly implicit in the data themselves".)

In fact, the majority of papers published in vexillological journals deal with "pure vexillology", while papers beyond this scope—into other parts of vexillology as an interdisciplinary area—are still relatively rare, and appear only occasionally in vexillological congress proceedings and other scientific publications. However, vexillological analyses in the social and historical sciences may be found in the journals of those fields (which do not publish specifically on vexillological topics). That may be easily understood, since "higher vexillological considerations" reach into established scientific fields that have already developed scientific publications and other infrastructure, and where scientifically valuable papers may be published. Such a paper becomes available to scholars in a particular scientific discipline; while not dealing specifically with flags, the results of such vexillological papers may be compared with other papers, researching other fields of interest of the discipline, and may contribute or compare to results acquired by other scientific approaches.

Unfortunately, on the other hand, it is not difficult to find papers in other fields of research that derive scientific conclusions based on flags without a sound foundation in "pure vexillology". For example, in the 1990s a number of journal papers dealt with the breakup of the Soviet bloc and the former Yugoslavia through the prism of symbols, including flags, where the authors obviously did not have a clear picture of the facts that "pure vexillology", if consulted, would have provided. The papers' authors did not even know exactly what the flags looked like, let alone their symbolism and origins, but still they felt comfortable deriving far-reaching social or political conclusions—which were necessarily false as they were based on false premises. For example, it is not unusual to find "scientific" papers from the early 1990s saying the flag of the Republic of Croatia was same as that of the World War II-era puppet Independent State of Croatia, based on sensationalist, and even propagandist, media information which branded the Croats as "fascist". It is not easy to fight such "science" with scientific tools, but that is the only correct way. Therefore it is not surprising that many heraldic and vexillological papers published in Croatia after 1990 emerged in reaction to such ill-based and openly malicious accusations. Among such papers were many by Croatian heraldists, vexillologists, and historians that used "pure vexillology" (and heraldry), to deny easily such "generalized" claims as stretched and taken out of context. Among the examples of scientific research on national symbols which provide firm arguments against malicious "generalizations", one may mention papers presented at international congresses or published as monographs by Peić Čaldarović [2000; 2002; 2004; 2006; 2008], Jareb [2010], and the author [Heimer, 1999; 2005; 2006; 2008; 2009(a); 2009(b)]. These works may easily show that those "generalized" papers would have led to different conclusions if

their authors had researched "pure vexillological" issues before initiating discussions in their respective "classical" scientific areas.[40]

3.5.2 Applied Vexillology

As stated, vexillology has the ambition to exceed the scope of "pure vexillology" and observe flag phenomena in a wider social context and even in the context of other sciences. It has been shown that some eminent vexillologists, especially Whitney Smith, initially placed vexillology within the scope of political science. Arguments were provided above showing why such a view is far too limited—flags as political objects are only a part of the entire range of flags used in a society. For example, political science is not concerned with the flags of yacht clubs, shipping companies, choirs, schools, hunting and fire-fighting associations, sports associations, and formal and informal sports-fan groups, to mention a few of the most important "non-political" flag users. However, by 2011 Smith [W. Smith, 2011] had enlarged the scope to encompass the entire range of social science fields.

Concurrent with this "step forward", a step back into that part of social sciences covered by sociology may be due. The earliest sociologists "discovered" that symbols of identity exist that are identical with the entire society or social group, among them flags. The identity extends on this line: flag = social group = divinity. The identity of the three concepts is reached with the embodiment of the abstract concept of the social group into a symbolic artifact of a flag, on one hand, and with its sacralization into the religious concept of divinity, on the other. Therefore, if sociology deals with deliberations about social groups and divinity, it would not be pretentious to say that, due to their identity, it should research flags as well. This confirm the basic hypothesis: it is impossible to explain a society without understanding the flags it uses.

The reverse is also true: it is impossible to explain a flag without understanding the society which produced and uses it. In the other words, there is a two-way relationship between research into flags and research into society. The same concept was expressed in the Principles of Vexillology 3 through 7 as presented by W. Smith [2011] and discussed above.

Thus, beyond "pure vexillology" representing the core, sociological vexillology represents the framework for interdisciplinary vexillological study that is linked with other scientific areas. The expansion of "pure vexillology" through sociology to other scientific fields, may thus, by analogy, be termed "applied vexillology".

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[40] However, in this case the political, sociological, historical, or other hypotheses that such quasi-scientists might have proposed would have been much more complicated and difficult to prove, and might have "ruined" their simplified narratives (which often had non-scientific motives).

3.6 *A Sociological Approach to Vexillology*

The sociological theory of vexillology should be based on Durkheim's theories of (civil) religion (the "production of coats of arms and flags, as pure social facts, is structurally embedded in society" [Durkheim, 1915]) and Bellah [Bellah, 1967].

Flags may be a good example for Paul Riceour's deliberations on the *modern role of ideology* [Riceour, 1985]. The group of flags studied in this thesis (military unit flags of the Croatian Armed Forces in the Homeland War), which emerged almost entirely on the initiative of the social group, may serve as an example illustrating the three modern functions of ideology according to Riceour: *enchantment*, *integration*, and *legitimization*. Under *enchantment*, Riceour considers the function of "making of false self-image" (although in this context one might use the "desirable" instead of the pejorative "false"). Namely, by the choice of graphic elements of visual identity, the unit chooses symbols of self-identification which it considers important for itself—desirable, not necessarily "false" (on the other hand, one may argue, as did Riceour, that with the process of choice based on desirability the symbols would always be false). Riceour's second function, *integration*, is obvious, since these flags as a rule include the unit insignia, which is worn as shoulder patch by each member of the unit and also used as table flag, as a symbol painted on vehicles, at prominent locations in barracks, etc. As a rule, the unit chooses a nickname for itself inspired by an element of the insignia, such as Tigers, Pumas, or Falcons. This all helps create a feeling of affiliation and common identity, beyond mere visual identity. This thus leads to Riceour's third function—*legitimization*. He states that it is the "concrete creation of social movements". A permanent feeling of interconnection emerges from common symbolism, through which members of a military unit identify themselves. This persists even after they might be transferred, through various reorganizations and personal professional development, to other organizational units of the armed forces or even out of the armed forces—when they join veterans' organizations they identify most strongly with that war unit identity[41] rather than on other identity characteristics (such as political affiliation).

Further on, the sociological theory of vexillology should take into account Ernst Cassirer's explanation of symbols, i.e. the concept of human as *animal symbolicum* [Cassirer, 1953] and should consider the ideological and symbolic function of flags, as well as the modern claim of Norbert Elias, that the creation of symbols is the highest level of human evolutionary development [Elias, 1995].

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[41] For example, rather than opposing the preference of older soldiers to display their wartime unit shoulder patches as symbols of honor on their current uniforms, in the 2008 reorganizations the Croatian Armed Forces allowed them to wear their old unit symbols as small emblems above the current unit symbol on the sleeve of the military uniform. The decision proved to be successful and popular among troops.

These theories, data, and available literature provide a theoretical framework explaining the emergence and role of flags as identity symbols of a social group, their functions where their symbolic meaning exceeds their material aspect (i.e. the process of flag sacralization and totemization), and their role in a social group's rituals.

It is supposed that symbols used in a flag's design represent the basic values and attitudes which the social group considers most important for self-identification. Therefore the intention is to show that a flag, consisting of just a few or several symbolic elements (however complex the design may be in some cases), is a form of summary of the values the particular group deems most important. Condensing social values into a handful of symbolic elements makes the flag a simple and easily readable message for those who can read it, whether members of the social group, members of a wider social community, or even members of an opposing group—who read from it, indeed, the system of values they fight against. In such manner, the flag plays a double role, of readability "inward", for group members, and "outward", for members of other groups (cf. *symbols of in-groups* and *symbols of out-groups* in [W. Smith, 1969:133–146]). Indeed, it may be shown that the latter may be even more important in the development of flags, as it seems that those groups having no "outer readers" find no need to produce identifying flags.

Within this theoretical framework, this thesis will show that flag research—vexillology—is in its essence a social science and that the understanding of the symbolic and the function of a flag may be grasped only by studying the wider social context in which it appears and in which it is used. Such a theory should put vexillology primarily in the field of social studies, specifically sociology, and it is interdisciplinary with other scientific fields which have studied some aspects of flags (even if flags were always a marginal subject for them, e.g. history, art history, political science, communications, design science, textile technology, etc.). These other fields should be linked with vexillology through sociology, so that one may grasp the entire meaning of flag as a particular identity artifact, having a separate place in a society.

4 Literature and Sources

4.1 *Bibliography*

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5 About the Author

5.1 *Biography*

Lt. Col. Željko Heimer, Ph.D., FF, was born in 1971 in Zagreb, Croatia. He graduated in Industrial Electronics in 1997 from the University of Zagreb's Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing; since 1999 he has served as an officer in the Croatian Armed Forces, currently holding the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Information Technologies Service. He earned his Master of Science in Electronics in 2005. He was awarded a Ph.D. in sociology in 2013 by the University of Zagreb's Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies, focusing on the topic of military flags from the Homeland War and the visual identity of the Armed Forces.

Since 1995 he has been an active member of the international association maintaining the Internet's largest site devoted to vexillology, Flags of the World (FOTW), serving since 1996 as its website editor and since 1996–1997 as its vice-director. He participated in *International Congresses of Vexillology* held in York (2001), Stockholm (2003), Buenos Aires (2005), Berlin (2007), Yokohama (2009), Washington (2011), Rotterdam (2013), and Sydney (2015), and the *International Congresses of Heraldic and Genealogical Sciences* in Stuttgart (2010) and Maastricht (2012).

In 2005 he prepared an exhibition of Norwegian flags in Zagreb followed by exhibitions in other venues in Croatia and Norway. In 2006 he co-founded the *Croatian Heraldic and Vexillological Association* (HGZD) and became its president and the editor of its semi-annual journal, *Grb i zastava*. He maintains the website *Flags and Arms of the Modern Era* (FAME) where he publishes the results of his study of current and historical flags, mainly in the region of Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

He has published monographs on the coats of arms and flags of Croatia (2008) and Zagreb (2009), a study of heraldic and vexillological descriptions (2016), and a number of scientific, professional, and popular articles in Croatia and abroad. He is an associate member of the *Académie internationale d'héraldique* and has been an honorary member of the *Bulgarian Heraldic and Vexillological Society* (BHVS) since 2009 and the *Macedonian Heraldic Association* (MHZ) since 2011. For his work promoting and preserving this part of his country's heritage, in 2010 he was awarded the *Order of Croatian Wattle* by the president of Croatia.

In 2015 he was made a Fellow of the Federation by FIAV, the *Fédération international des associations vexillologiques*, recognizing his contributions to vexillology (denoted by the honorific "FF").

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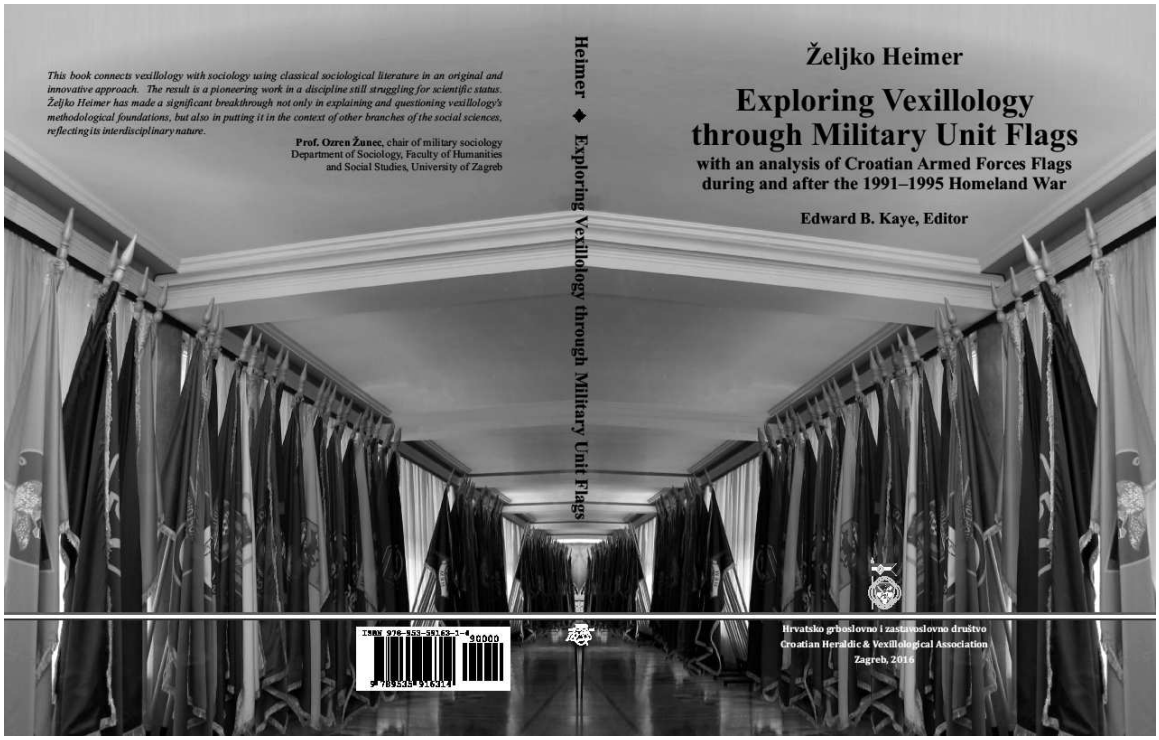

This book, made available for the first time in English by the Flag Heritage Foundation, is based on the doctoral thesis Željko Heimer defended in 2013 at the University of Zagreb, titled *Croatian Armed Forces Identity as Expressed through the Military Unit Flags in the Homeland War and Following It*. The thesis was prepared under the mentorship of Prof. Ozren Žunec, the Chair of Military Sociology in the Sociology Department of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies at the University. The text presented here is the majority of the theoretical part of the thesis.

The entire thesis, including chapters on military unit vexillology. the history of flags in military use, and the empirical research portion of the thesis, focuses on the military flags used by Croatian Armed Forces units in the 1990s and 2000s. The book, whose 188 pages include over 200 high-quality color illustrations, is available through publishing-on-demand at Lulu, under the title *Exploring Vexillology through Military Unit Flags*. It may be ordered on line at a discounted price at **www.tinyurl.com/heimerphd**. The matrix barcode at left may be used for ordering. The ISBN number is 978-953-59163-1-4); the dimensions are 8½ × 11 inches (21.5 × 28 cm).

Those interested in Croatian flags may also wish to visit the author's website *The Flags and Arms of the Modern Era* at **zeljko-heimer-fame.from.hr**, and the website of the Croatian Heraldic and Vexillological Association at **www.hgzd.hr**.

ŽELJKO HEIMER

Vexillology is the study of flags. At least since the 1960s, practitioners of vexillology have worked to apply modern historical techniques and research methods to the field. Scholarly publications and conferences have professionalized a study once approached through narrative and anecdotal methods. It has long been recognized that vexillology is a useful auxiliary to history, political science, sociology, semiology, and design among other fields of study.

But is vexillology a social science of its own rather than a mere adjunct to more traditional fields? Many years of scholarly debate have not settled this question. In this excerpt from his PhD thesis at the University of Zagreb in Croatia, made available for the first time in English by the Flag Heritage Foundation, Dr. Željko Heimer reviews the arguments and evidence and offers a reasoned conclusion in support of vexillology as a social science.

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