No. 19

TRONDHEIM STUDIES
ON EAST EUROPEAN CULTURES & SOCIETIES

Kruno Kardov

RECONSTRUCTING COMMUNITY, RECREATING BOUNDBARIES

Identity Politics and Production of Social Space in Post-War Vukovar

November 2006

Kruno Kardov is Research Assistant at the Department of Sociology, University of Zagreb. His recent articles include «Terrorism and Civil Rights and Liberties» (co-authored with Ozren Žunec) and «Remember Vukovar: Memory, Sense of Place and the National Tradition in Croatia». His current research is concerned with military geographies and the relationship between militarized space and culture.

© 2006 Kruno Kardov and the Program on East European Cultures and Societies, a program of the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences, Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

ISSN 1501-6684

Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies
Editors: **György Péteri** and **Sabrina P. Ramet**
Editorial Board: Trond Berge, Tanja Ellingsen, Knut Andreas Grimstad, Arne Halvorsen

We encourage submissions to the *Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies*. Inclusion in the series will be based on anonymous review. Manuscripts are expected to be in English (exception is made for Norwegian Master's and PhD theses) and not to exceed 150 double spaced pages in length. Postal address for submissions: Editor, Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies, Department of History, NTNU, NO-7491 Trondheim, Norway.

For more information on PEECS and TSEECS, visit our web-site at
http://www.hf.ntnu.no/peecs/home/

Reconstructing Community, Recreating Boundaries:
Identity Politics and Production of Social Space in Post-war Vukovar

Kruno Kardov

The University of Zagreb

Reconstructing Community, Recreating Boundaries:
Identity Politics and Production of Social Space in Post-war Vukovar

Introduction

On the 15th of January 1998, the UN operation in Croatia, which had the task of administering the peaceful reintegration of the Croatian eastern Danube region into the control of the Croatian state, came to an end. This operation is generally regarded as the most successful peacekeeping operation in the UN's history. It fully restored Croatian sovereignty and at the same time maintained ethnic heterogeneity in the wider area of the formerly occupied part of Croatia. This war-torn region thus became a rare example of practices of ethnic cleansing not only being stopped, but also being reversed, thanks to the successful return of displaced people and refugees. However, this positive reversal, which makes the UN mission in Croatia exceptional in relation to comparable territorial transitions, will continue to have many significant consequences on the life of post-war communities. One of the most important of these is the destabilisation of previously established knowledge structures and of violently imposed certainties rooted in ethnically homogeneous territories. I argue that the disappearance of territorial borders was followed by the creation of new group boundaries, of new and distinct identity markers and by the building of a new moral order.

This study, therefore, presents an attempt to grasp some of the underlying changes and transformations of group identities within the overall process of remaking the world after the war. Within this framework, it will focus on a number of central questions of particular analytical concern: What are the present relations between former neighbours and friends? What kind of problems do people face upon return from exile, and how do they repossess their social space? Finally, what happens when two divided ethnic groups, whose separation was followed by massive loss of lives on both sides, find themselves together again, sharing the same space?

To illustrate the complexity of the problems raised by these questions I will analyse social relations amongst the citizens of Vukovar. In terms of the levels of material

damage and human loss incurred during the war, this town shares a common set of problems with most post-war settings. However, because pre-war levels of ethnic heterogeneity were restored in the town, Vukovar is regarded as part of the UN's success story.

Methodology and general framework

The field research which this study is based on was begun in 2001, at a time when the process of Croat resettlement was still under way and when tensions between the Serbian and Croatian communities were extremely high. The first part of the research was carried out within the *Perception of Justice and Social Reconstruction Processes*[1] project (from mid 2001 to the end of 2002). Related field visits were divided into five separate monthly stays followed by a three month period of data compilation and analysis.[2] In addition to on site observations during my visits in the city, 80 interviews were conducted, including interviews with policy and decision-makers from different spheres of social life (religious leaders, politicians, teachers and school principals, directors of cultural organisations, local journalists and directors of radio stations and newspapers, representatives and activists in local non-governmental organisations and workers syndicates, local company directors, etc.). When the fieldwork was completed, I continued the research within the *Social Correlates of Homeland War* project at the Department of Sociology of the University of Zagreb. Several more short visits to the field followed (mostly lasting a few days or a week) with the purpose of following up new developments or obtaining additional data.

The problems discussed in the following passages are located at the intersection of several processes which have had a profound influence on contemporary social life and inter-ethnic relations in Vukovar. The transitional process and the mass return of Croats to their former place of belonging has given rise to much debate, as well as to direct interventions within the field of reconciliation and reconstruction of post-war

[1] A joint project of the Center for Human Rights (University of California, Berkley), The Society for Psychological Assistance (Zagreb) and the Department of Psychology, University of Zagreb.
[2] The first visit was made in June/July 2001, followed by November 2001, March 2002, July 2002 and November 2002.

communities in Croatia. These two terms have been used so frequently in different contexts and by different actors that, as Stover and Weinstein[3] rightly point out, the term "reconciliation" has become devoid of meaning and its usage simplifies complex processes in post-war settings. Analysts who use the terms "community rebuilding" and "social reconstruction", on the other hand, too often artificially cut off the *social* domain from other processes that "construction" designates, such as the rebuilding of houses and of urban infrastructure.[4] Drawing a clear distinction between these two processes runs the risk of creating an image of physical reconstruction as a socially neutral process which is removed from consciousness of personal security, identity politics, establishment of trust, collective memory, trauma and the many other issues that make "social reconstruction" so problematic. As I will demonstrate in this paper, the materiality of urban infrastructure also has a significant influence on the overall social processes and the life of post-war communities. This is especially evident in the city of Vukovar where former ethnically mixed neighbourhoods were preserved (or re-constructed) reproducing the coexistence of two communities and two socially constructed worlds within the same space. The usual term to denote "reconciliation" in Croatian (*pomirenje*) is sometimes replaced by the term "coexistence/cohabitation" (*suživot*) which may well provide a better description of this polarised heterogeneity, since coexistence, in its most passive sense, denotes little more than "living together separately". Thus, when we speak about Vukovar in terms of a divided city, we have to put aside the spatial images of homogenous neighbourhoods and physical borders favoured by urban studies' perspectives. Unlike Mostar, Beirut, Johannesburg, Kosovska Mitrovica and other cities where spatial division is a reality caused by discrimination, economic inequality, war, or immigration, in Vukovar one is faced with the peculiar constellation of a spatially mixed but socially polarised environment. The disappearance of physical borders between former neighbours (and in some cases enemies) will have far reaching consequences for the stability of community identity, for group traditions and for feelings of personal security. As Thomas Jordan argued in a psychologically-orientated analysis, territoriality can serve as an instrument

[3] Eric Stover & Harvey M. Weinstein (eds.) *My Neighbor, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). They mainly focus on the religious connotations of the term and its relationship to one particular aspect of reconciliation process, namely, war crime trials.

[4] Such a distinction, is, for example, explicitly made in Dejan Ajduković, *Socijalna rekonstrukcija zajednice* [The Social Reconstruction of Community] (Zagreb: Društvo za psihološku pomoć, 2003) and in Dinka Corkalo, Dean Ajduković, Harvey Weinstein, Eric Stover, Dino Djipa and Miklos Biro "Neighbours Again? Intercommunity Relations after Ethnic Cleansing" in Stover and Weinstein (2004), pp.143-161.

for acquiring the ability to orient oneself in the world and to control one's immediate environment.[5] Territorial borders are especially important in situations where the social order has collapsed and where traditional systems of meaning, which provided an exclusive place of safety, security and enclosure, are under threat. In "safe spaces", social codes and norms are not challenged by the outside world. Physical borders protect communal identities from external contradictions; they strengthen established social boundaries and provide a stable basis for social interaction, as well as sense of order in relation to the threatening outside world. Clear and fixed borders between the stable inside world and the dangerous outside world are very much needed in post-war settings, where most physical landmarks and external identity structures, such as monuments, homes, and social institutions have been destroyed. In war-torn environments, a community's traditions are put under stress and memories of the pre-war period may appear unreal. Individuals often reach a point where they even question the familiarity of the surroundings they grew up in. In such a fluid and anchorless space, where all familiar fixed locations disappear, they feel distressed and uneasy without being able to locate the source of their feelings.[6] The ontological insecurity, to use Giddens' telling term,[7] and anxiety which permeate social life in stressful post-war urban arenas thus have many sources, some of which will be of particular concern to this study.

My approach draws from the perspective of experience and my interest in the reconstruction of post-war community is therefore primarily oriented towards grasping the processes which are at work within the community and not towards the generation of better reconciliation models and techniques. The underlying argument of this study is that reconstruction processes cannot simply be equated with actions imposed from the outside world, but, more significantly, are tied up with relations which are *internal* to a

---

[5] Thomas Jordan "The Uses of Territories in Conflicts: A Psychological Perspective", *Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 1. No. 2, (1998), URL: http://www.trinstitute.org/ojpcr/ (last time visited 6 February 2002). A similar approach can be found in Hoggett, P. "A Place for Experience: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Boundary, Identity and Culture", *Environment and Planning D*, vol. 10, 1992, pp. 345–56.

[6] For a more general approach regarding the questions of identity, globalisation, late modernity and (ontological) in/security see Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford University Press, 1991); Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity Press, 2000); Marc Augé, *Non-places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, (London: Verso, 2000).

[7] Ontological security, for Anthony Giddens, is "a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual" (Giddens, 1991, p. 243). The concept relates to the confidence which individuals have in the continuity of their self identity as well as in the constancy of their social and physical environments. Central to this understanding of the concept of ontological in/security is the notion of trust and a sense of the reliability of persons and things (Giddens, 1991).

community. Furthermore, the community under stress here does not correspond to the heterogeneous pre-war one. In spite of the usual metaphors of ashes and atomisation (or related mechanistic terms such as "social repair" frequently used in studies of post-war societies), the existence of two separate communities deeply affected by war and pervaded by feelings of grief and loss has to be acknowledged. Moreover, the encounter with the Other after several years of social and spatial separation often brings re-traumatization. Previously clear notions of what a "friend" and an "enemy" represent, may be put into question, leaving individuals without well established knowledge structures and thus deeply uncertain about the "self" and the surrounding life world. From the perspective of experience then, external reconstruction efforts and the “rational” arguments which frame them, are, to a certain extent, perceived as acts of provocation and usurpation. These effects can be seen in their purest and most extreme form in war crimes trials and in attempts to reconcile judicial processes with the processes of enacting the social in community and society. Since judicial courts are places beyond society where (all) victims become witnesses and where (everyone's) memory is transformed into testimony, they create order just as much as they destroy previously constructed worlds. The law is always on the side of the "multiple Other" and social reconciliation which is based solely on trials produces a society where a token individual suffers from what one could call Forrest Gump syndrome. As Robert Zemeckis' movie *Forrest Gump* vividly exemplifies, such a person embodies the multiple and often contradictory historical narratives present within a given society.[8] The price paid for such mechanical unity is an absence of profound social values, for anyone who embodies facts and events without feelings and emotions must be regarded as suffering from some form of autism. Indeed, the bringing together of disparate and contradictory experiences challenges the possibility of a meaningful narrative and gives rise to anxiety and insecurity in everything. So Forrest Gump is constantly running. At first, he is running away from danger but later he

[8] Robert Zemeckis (director), *Forrest Gump* (Paramount Pictures, 1994). The story, by means of following the life trajectory of the mentally handicapped Forrest Gump, succeeds in covering all the important events in American history. By uniting different American cultures, perspectives and histories in a single individual, the story functions as a reconciliatory mechanism. However these perspectives and histories are left to the viewer's imagination (and identification) because they are merely listed in the form of facts. Some of the facts about Forrest Gump are as follows: he is named after General Forrest (Confederate general and an early member of the Ku Klux Klan) and yet his best friend is African American. He is a veteran of the Vietnam War and his girlfriend is an anti-Vietnam war activist. He has met several presidents of the U.S. as well as Elvis Presley and John Lennon. He is a war hero with a medal of honour, a boat captain, a sports star, an alternative lifestyle movement guru and a successful businessperson.

is running simply because he feels like running, because running becomes his "structural condition".

War, separation and peaceful reintegration

Mister! You do not live in the real world! [9]

Before the war and the break-up of Yugoslavia, Vukovar was one of the largest and most important industrial and cultural centres in the region of Eastern Slavonia. In 1991, half of the population of Vukovar municipality lived in the town of Vukovar. The population of the town more than doubled between the Second World War and 1991, rising from 17,223 to 44,639 inhabitants.[10] The slow pace of economic growth in the seventies stabilised the population growth. The most important consequence of the two world wars on the ethnic breakdown of the town's population was its dichotomisation into two dominant ethnic groups, Croats and Serbs.[11] This structure was more or less preserved throughout the socialist period and, by 1991, the majority of the population was Croat (47.2%), with Serbs representing 32.3%, followed by Yugoslavs (9.8%)[12], Ruthenians (2.1%) and Hungarians (1.5%). Until the nineties, the city was thus constituted of a mixed ethnic structure, both in spatial and social terms. Županov provides a very good and interesting description of life in these multiethnic neighbourhoods. Writing about primary social relations, in the context of post Second World War industrialisation, he speaks about the institution of *komšiluk* (neighbourhood):

> "[P]eople are leaving their villages to go to the cities and as a result national and ethnic structures are becoming more and more heterogeneous. Members of different ethnic groups are living in same buildings, working in the same companies. Thus,

---

[9] These are the words of a clerk in Vukovar's police addressed to the author of this paper in 1999 after he showed an inability to understand why two weeks were needed to get hold of a requested document which was normally available within two days.

[10] Alica Wertheimer-Baletić, *Stanovništvo Vukovara i vukovarskog kraja* (Zagreb: Globus, 1993).

[11] The dichotomization of population was primarily a result of the "spontaneous" (as well as organized) migrations (expulsions) of the postwar era followed by spontaneous and organized colonization by Serbs and Croats. For example, the size of the German population in Vukovar was 2,670 persons (or 26,1 %) 1921, and it dropped to mere 54 (or 0.3 %) by 1948. Wertheimer-Baletić, 1993.

[12] The "Yugoslav" category appeared in population censuses for the first time in 1961 with a figure of 1.4%. In the 1971 census the figure rose to 10 %, and in 1981 the percentage of Yugoslavs was given as 28.2 % while, according to Županov, the ratio at the federal state level at the time was 5.4 %. Josip Županov *Poslije potopa* (Zagreb: Globus, 1995). Yugoslav identity weakened alongside the weakening of the Yugoslav state. This resulted in the decrease in the number of Yugoslavs in the 1991 census, both in relative and absolute numbers (from 9,457 to 4,355 inhabitants). Alica Wertheimer-Baletić, 1993.

because of short physical distances and shared activities, primary social relations have been created between them that are similar in nature to those relations in *komšiluk*, in village communities. Briefly, in the cities the essence of community has been created."[13]

In Vukovar, the community Županov writes of was shattered in a matter of months. The war not only led to the almost total destruction of economic facilities and of urban infrastructure and housing, but also to immense human loss. During three months of siege, 85 % of all buildings (houses, apartment buildings, medical facilities, etc.) were destroyed, transforming the urban environment into a pile of debris. After Yugoslav forces captured the city on the 18th of November 1991, citizens were taken out of basements and city shelters to improvised collection and transit centres, where the final division of the population by ethnic criteria was undertaken. The town was completely evacuated and, during the next few months, only military and paramilitary units remained. Citizens of Serbian nationality, who had shared basement life with their Croat neighbours and friends during the attacks by Yugoslav forces, were transported to Serbia and, in most cases, did not return to the city until after February 1992. On the other hand, citizens of Croatian nationality were transported from Serbia to unoccupied Croatian territory. Most of these were women and children since the men were taken to detention camps. It is during this period that the first detention camps in this region were created. Although the precise data about the number of wounded and killed during the battle is unclear (as the figures may include people who were killed immediately after the fall of the city), some estimates claim that 450-600 soldiers and about 1100 civilians lost their lives.[14] Even today, fifteen years after the conflict, around 550 persons are still missing, which suggests that more mass graves, in addition to the numerous small sites that have already been located, are yet to be found. The biggest mass grave in Croatia, holding 200 bodies, was found at the "Ovčara" farm near Vukovar. The bodies were later identified as wounded from the city hospital who were executed after the fall of the city.

---

[13] Županov, 1995, p. 39.

[14] Ozren Žunec "Rat u Hrvatskoj 1991.-1995. 1. dio: Uzroci rata i operacije do sarajevskog primirja" *Polemos* 1(1): 57-89, 1998

It was not until late 1995, when an agreement[15] was reached on the reintegration of the region into Croatia, that significant changes occurred in this region. The peaceful reintegration process, which was administered by UNTAEAS, [16] lasted for two years (from 1996 to 1998) but it was not until 1999, eight years after the beginning of the conflict, that significant number of Croats returned to Vukovar. Thus, from 1991 to 1998 the citizens of Vukovar, divided across ethnic lines, shared different and contrasting experiences of war in separate life settings. They had new friends, they lived under different educational, economic, and political systems, and, most importantly, they lived in ethnically homogeneous areas.

The majority of expelled Croats from Vukovar spent the intervening years as refugees in other parts of Croatia, where they made up 16.4 % of the total number of displaced Croatians, thereby constituting the largest homogeneous group. At the same time, because of its size, this displaced population was also the most dispersed population, its members accommodated in more than 500 different settlements across the country.[17] Although most pre-war social ties were broken, some institutions kept their activities alive in exile. For example, in some of the more densely populated settlements, special kindergarten and school classes were organized just for the children from Vukovar. Other organizations, such as the city's radio station, also managed to continue to function but most had to renounce their normal activities. This was the case for local companies, for many of the civil associations and for cultural institutions, but it was particularly true of local government officials who had been elected in regular "local" elections but who had no clear duties, no specific obligations and no power to influence the life conditions of their constituency. As Michel Agier noted in his analysis of the urbanity of refugee camps, this represents a situation in which "everything is potential, but nothing develops"[18].

---

[15] On the 12th of November 1995, the *Basic Agreement on the Region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium* was signed between the Croatian Government and the local Serb authorities.

[16] As a United Nations peace-keeping operation, United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem (UNTAES) was established on the 15th of January 1996 by the Security Council resolution 1037 (1996) with the task of governing and maintaining peace and security in the region during the transitional period.

[17] Dražen Živić "Basic Demographic Characteristics of the Displaced Population from the Croatian East" *Društvena istraživanja* 6(2-3)28-29: 195-216, 1997.

[18] Michel Agier "Between War and City. Towards an Urban Anthropology of Refugee Camps" *Ethnography* 3(3):317-341, 2002. p. 336. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the position of a permanent state of emergency with its postponement of the future is a result of refugees' inherent inability to plan. It is rather the product of the logic of state intervention in which temporariness is inscribed. Indeed, those refugees who found jobs in state companies (school

On the other hand, before peaceful reintegration began, the majority of people who were living in Vukovar were of Serbian nationality, apart from a small number of Croats and other nationals. Since the town's infrastructure was almost non-existent, the people living there had no streetlights, no regular heating or proper water supply. Paramilitary soldiers within the city killed and maltreated its inhabitants on a daily basis, regardless of their nationality. The first few months following the fall of the city, perceived as the time of "Liberation", was in fact a time of pillage, in which some participated because of necessity and others for profit. Many people had to live in destroyed or burnt-down houses, while others moved into houses and apartments which had formerly belonged to Croats. The stories people recollect from this time sound surreal from today's standpoint, even to the narrators themselves. Saša, one of my informants, laughed while he described how he planted mines around his garden in order to prevent animals encroaching on his plants. Mihajlo's story also raised some nervous laughter amongst his friends. They listened as he told them how he admired the beauty of his neighbour's marble garden table until he saw the epitaph on its reverse side. On the other hand, there are tragic stories, such as that of Zoran, the child of a mixed marriage, who came back from Serbia for a holiday only to find that his mother and grandparents had been killed the day before, the day Catholics celebrate Christmas.

The state of emergency that permeated the rebel state of Serbian Krajina, as a result of its exceptional status within the international juridico-political order, its self-exclusion from Croatian jurisdiction and its less than total integration into the state of Serbia, was thus also manifested in all spheres of urban life. The state of being neither at war nor at peace combined with the lack of financial means to rebuild the town created and inscribed temporariness in the life of the town's population. Nevertheless, even given this spatio-temporal no-man's-land, and in the absence of the Other, some institutions existed, identities were formed and narratives about the war were created on both sides. In this

---

teachers, or clerks in postal services), faced an ultimatum during the years of return in 1998 and 1999 – they had to chose between being laid off or returning to their previous jobs in Vukovar. Moreover, those who refused to return risked losing other state entitlements. This partly forced element of the principle of return was overlooked by Corkalo et al. who established causal relationship between rebuilding and return in Vukovar: "The more quickly destroyed houses are repaired and new ones built, the more rapid the return of refugees and the internally displaced." (in Stover and Weinstein, 2004., p. 150).

context, peaceful reintegration was perceived as a necessary evil. An article in *The Alternative Information Network*, dating from the beginning of this process illustrates the atmosphere in the town at that time, as expressed in the words of a Serbian woman:

> "I see what is happening. I have spent one month in the hallway of a building in the Olajnica neighbourhood being shelled by the Yugoslav army. They destroyed two of my houses and burned my daughter's flat. They mobilized my husband and my son-in-law. All that for the integration into Serbia. And now, they will return us to Croatia. Croats will prosecute my husband and son-in-law when they come back. They will force us to leave the flat because I had to move into an empty Croat flat. I have nothing of my own."[19]

The results of a 1996 survey of a sample of 1499 displaced persons in Croatia, assessing their readiness to return, revealed similar attitudes. Amongst the fourteen potential drawbacks presented in relation to peaceful reintegration, the item "living with the Serbs again" was given the highest rating (41.8 %,) by displaced Vukovar citizens.[20] Furthermore, 63 % of the displaced population anticipated "problems with Serbian neighbours" as a difficulty upon their return, and 19.4 % even conditioned their return on the absence of Serbs.[21] Both sides had suspicions about the Other's intentions; the Serbs were not prepared to welcome the Croats and the Croats apprehended renewed contact with the Serbs.

According to data published in the last population census held in March 2001, Vukovar had 31,670 inhabitants, of which 18,199 or 57.46 % were Croats and 10,412 or 32.88 % were Serbs. However, at the beginning of 2002, there were still 8,000 displaced persons

---

[19] Dragan Cicic "Srbija nas ne prima, Hrvatska nas neće", *Alternative Information Network*. Beograd, Friday, 17 November 1995, URL: http://www.aimpress.ch/dyn/pubs/archive/data/199511/51117-004-pubs-beo.htm (last time visited on 17 October 2005).

[20] Antun Šundalić "A Model of Peaceful Reintegration and the Possibility to Live Together", *Društvena istraživanja*. 6(2-3)28-29:217-233, 1997.

[21] In other municipalities of that area, for example, less than 5 % of the displaced conditioned their return on the absence of Serbs. Among the other relevant conditions expressed by the displaced of Vukovar was the guarantee of an acceptable living standard (13.1 %) and the guarantee of personal safety (10.7 %), while only 16.9 % expressed unconditional willingness to return. Vladimir Jelkić "Readiness to Return" *Društvena istraživanja*. 6(2-3)28-29: 293-310, 1997.

in Vukovar, and, given that the majority of these were Croats, one can conclude that there were roughly equivalent numbers of both groups present in the city at that time.[22]

Ontological Security and Polarisation of the City

> *Here fear is being itself. Where can one flee, where find refuge? In what shelter can one take refuge? Space is nothing but a "horrible outside-inside".* [23]

Vukovar has often been taken as an example of a divided city. Even though statistical representations project an image of two separate communities, the borderline between them is anything but clear and fixed. The reintegration process guaranteed the possibility of the return of expellees and, for the Serbs, the possibility of staying in the region, and, as result, ethnic heterogeneity was preserved and re-formed in the wider area. However, it was the legislation on rebuilding[24] and the principle of return that preserved the pre-war population arrangement within the city, by re-creating ethnically mixed neighbourhoods. It is because of this that the division in Vukovar presents an intrinsically different case from divisions in other post-war urban settings, where separation is extended to urban spaces and to the economic sphere. In Vukovar, we are faced with the phenomenon of social polarisation within a spatially mixed environment.[25]

The process of polarisation unfolded as more and more Croats returned. Up until the time of reintegration, the city consisted of an organic whole, but after the return of the Croats, social life "doubled". New shops and coffee bars, opened by Croats, attracted exclusively Croat customers. Parallel institutions, such as local radio stations, sports clubs and citizens' associations were created. Children in schools and kindergartens were separated into different classes according to whether they required Serbian or Croatian as their language of instruction and, as a general rule, this distinction replicated ethnic division.

---

[22] *Vukovarske novine*, 22. March 2002. At the same time as these data appeared, the Regional office for the Displaced announced the arrival of the 10,000th returnee.
[23] Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 218.
[24] "Zakon o obnovi" [Rebuilding Act], *Narodne novine*, No. 24, 1996 (also revisions and amendments, *Narodne novine*, No. 57, 2000).
[25] For example, Boal offers one such classification by the level of ethnic segregation (assimilation, pluralism, segmentation, polarisation and cleansing) which proves simply inadequate in this case. Frederick W. Boal "From Undivided Cities to Undivided Cities: Assimilation to Ethnic Cleansing". *Housing Studies*. 14(5):585-601, (1999).

Although these classes belonged to the same school, administratively speaking, they were often located in different parts of the city either because of the lack of adequate working space or because of fear of violent incidents.

Thus, the changes that started with the territorial and juridico-political reintegration soon embraced all aspects of social life – from education, politics, and economy to urban architecture, identity and cultural boundaries. Again, questions of meaning, security and group identity came to the fore and the anxiety that permeated peoples' lives signalled their need both to identify with and to close their communities' borders. However, before we proceed to the level of the everyday struggle for cultural boundaries and meaning, some structural factors which served as either generators or additional sources of anxiety and insecurity, will be taken into consideration.

As Massey, Hodson and Sekulić demonstrate in their research on ethnic enclaves and intolerance in former Yugoslavia, feelings of insecurity vary according to the size and distribution of majority and minority groups. The authors distinguish three different cases: (1) where the majority group is also numerically dominant, (2) where the majority group is numerically inferior in the local area, and where the minority group in the wider geopolitical space is numerically dominant (the case of the ethnic enclave), (3) where no group has numerical dominance (the case of ethnically mixed area).[26] The second case, which is characterised by the highest level of intolerance, is of particular interest. The members of a majority group who live in a minority enclave can develop feelings of victimization based on the perception that they are treated as a minority in spite of their political dominance and may therefore have higher level of intolerance than majority groups who live outside enclaves. On the other hand, members of minority groups within a wider geopolitical space, who represent a majority within an enclave, can also demonstrate strong feelings of intolerance. In that case, as the aforementioned authors show, a combination of fear and strength is present, together with a sense of injustice and insecurity about the intentions of the majority group within the wider area.

---

[26] Garth Massey, Randy Hodson, Duško Sekulić "Ethnic Enclaves and Intolerance: The Case of Yugoslavia". *Social Forces*. 78(2):669-694, 1999.

Vukovar presents a specific case in relation to these structural factors of population distribution since it has gone "full circle": from ethnic heterogeneity (until 1991), ethnic homogeneity (from 1991 to 1998), and ethnic enclave (from 1998 to 2001) to today's ethnic heterogeneity, albeit heterogeneity of a polarised nature.[27] The fear and insecurity that characterize ethnic relations in enclaves were intensified in this context by the fact that both Serbs and Croats had spent several years living exclusively with members of their own group within the local and wider geopolitical space: Croats in other parts of Croatia, and Serbs in eastern Slavonia and in the city. Thus, in contrast to the rising insecurity in ethnic enclaves during the disintegration of federal Yugoslavia, here one is confronted with the case of rising insecurity during the very creation of an enclave that came to existence *because of* the integration process. Furthermore, as far as the return of displaced peoples is concerned, we are dealing here with members of a community who represented a relative majority in the town before the war but who now feel vulnerable and alienated. The presence of Serbs who participated (in some cases voluntarily) in the attacks on the city has given rise to feelings amongst the returnee population of having been abandoned by both the Croatian state and by international organisations.

Indeed, the complexity of this particular situation, which blurred the usual notions of majority and minority and which problematised the question of whose feelings of endangerment were justifiable and whose fears were real, was almost completely overlooked by international agencies. These agencies acted in accordance with the "national order of things", thereby ignoring the local context. The following are just a few examples. The OSCE field offices and other international organisations which monitored the overall security situation and which initiated the different reconciliation programmes

[27] In a survey study on attitudes toward justice and reconciliation, Miklos Biro et al. showed that Serbs were significantly more open towards Croats and that in Vukovar, the Serbs were less ethnocentric than Croats. They interpret this in relation to the present minority status of Serbs because of which Serbs are more willing to have close family ties with Croats. Their interpretation, which combines structural factors of population arrangement and rational choice theory, is, in my opinion, misleading. Their results assert that the majority of Serbs in Vukovar reported unspoiled friendships with the Croats but that only a minority of Croats reported the same about Serbs. But since they focused on establishing patterns amongst ethnic groups in different cities, they did not provide for an interpretation which would allow for possible discrepancies *within* a particular city. My research also shows that Serbs are more open towards Croats, but that this is the case only on a normative level. In real life, Serbs do not have Croat friends. The only difference between Serbs and Croats therefore, lies in the willingness, or in the case of Serbs, unwillingness, to admit that friendships are broken. Saying that friendships were not spoiled is, I would suggest, merely a self-justifying mechanism, enabling individuals to deny personal involvement in war activities. For the aforementioned results see Miklos Biro, Dean Ajduković, Dinka Corkalo, Dino Djipa, Petra Milin, and Harvey M. Weinstein "Attitudes toward Justice and Social Reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia" in Stover and Weinstein (2004), pp. 183-205.

paid attention to ethnic identity in their employment policies only to the extent that they recruited locals from mixed marriages. Consequently, local employees ended up being drawn exclusively from members of the population who were already present in the town and not from the returnee population.[28] Such policies represent a discrepancy in relation to newly created boundaries between local communities, which are no longer based on ethnic identity but on the experience of exile. Similar skewed perspectives were in evidence in policies aimed at helping stayees to establish NGOs working on reconciliation, while equivalent actions amongst returnees were totally absent. The net effect of such discrepancies was to limit the effectiveness of these policies. Such practices are in accordance with UN policies, by which the situation of internally displaced persons is treated as an internal issue pertaining to the nation-state, in this case the problem of the Croatian government. The predominantly Serbian population which remained in the region (or the "stayees") was therefore implicitly viewed by international agencies as a foreign element within Croatia's body. Paradoxically, this attitude was shared by both warring parties and national agencies.

Other factors which contributed to feelings of insecurity, in addition to the disappearance of territorial borders between the two communities, can be located in the sudden transformation of the urban environment, as well as in the structural transformations in politics and in the economy which were effected in the years following the collapse of communism. The sudden demolition of destroyed houses and the nature of the process of rebuilding made people feel like strangers in their own town. The rebuilding process, which was sponsored by the state as well as, to a lesser extent, international donor agencies, was undertaken without consulting or involving the local population. Because of strict administrative criteria and the rapid pace of rebuilding which resulted in the construction of several houses a day, family houses were simply "produced" on an assembly line.[29] Sometimes the sameness was disturbed only by the number on the front

[28] In my frequent encounters with the workers of different international organisations in the field I have never met a single returnee, regardless of nationality. I have failed to obtain any kind of information from these organisations, despite many attempts to do so, making these organisations, as far as my research is concerned, the most inaccessible institutions in the field. However, it is interesting to note that this was not the case for foreign researchers to whom they often provided significant help.

[29] Kruno Kardov, "Remember Vukovar: Memory, Sense of Place and National Tradition in Croatia" In: Sabrina P. Ramet and Davorka Matić (eds.) *Democratic Transition in Croatia: Value Transformation, Education, Media* (Texas A&M University Press, forthcoming); Ivo Maroević, "Muzeji i razvitak lokalnih zajednica u Hrvatskoj nakon

wall or by the size of a house which indicated the precise number of its occupants.[30] Therefore, the very process of rebuilding could not provide a familiar and personalised environment in which individuals could feel safe and protected from harm. It will take a long time for the people who live in these houses to start feeling at home in them.

Transformations which have taken place on political and economic levels in the transition from a socialist to a democratic system and a capitalist or market economy represent a significant general problem in researching the consequences of the war in former Yugoslavia. The sources of social insecurity, which developed as a result of profound transitional changes, especially within the economic system, are submerged in the current post-war configuration. Although a deeper analysis of these processes is beyond the parameters of this study, it should be noted that such transformations were unfolding in parallel to the process of reintegration and that they had and still have a significant influence on feelings of "ontological insecurity". This is especially important, given the correspondence between economy and politics within the socialist system, and the fact that solidarity, the most needed resource in a post-war environment, was intrinsic to the socialist mode of production. A number of everyday phenomena, such as the sound of the factory siren, which had shaped the community's perception of time and signalled collective work, were lost in the transition to a new market economy. As Charity Scribner observes, the long breaks taken during the production process, which helped to create a specific form of collective, are now perceived as a waste of time, as a sign of workers' lack of commitment or as a general expression of collective laziness in an era of individual initiatives.[31]

In the political realm, on the other hand, the generic term "democratic changes" does not only signify the constitution of a multi-party system but also encompasses a whole range of different modifications and transformations related to the specific nature and fundamental principles of the Yugoslavian political system. In the context of this discussion the very creation of the notion of majority and minority, as we understand it

---

domovinskog rata", *Socijalna ekologija*, Vol. 6, No. 1-2, (1997), pp. 161-167. English version available at: www.maltwood.uvic.ca/tmr/maroevic.html.

[30] Article 24 of the Rebuilding Act prescribed 35 square meters for the first member of the family and 10 additional square meters more for each additional member. "Zakon o obnovi" [Rebuilding Act], *Narodne novine*, No. 24, 1996.

[31] Charity Scribner, *Requiem for Communism* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: MIT Press, 2003).

today, is particularly significant, since it did not and could not exist within the former system of "brotherhood and unity", that is, the unity of "self-governing people(s)", as the socialist mantra went. These political changes had a significant influence on levels of insecurity, within the Serbian community in particular, both at the beginning of the nineties and again during the peaceful reintegration. The current lack of a consistent and well-defined policy regarding cultural and minority rights among the Serbian communities is, to a significant extent, a direct consequence of this new political environment

The peaceful reintegration process therefore halted the state of emergency in this region from the juridico-political point of view, in the sense that what had been "outside" was now "inside" in territorial terms. However, as territorial borders between communities disappeared so did the physical boundaries, which had maintained social order and contained social anxiety. From that point on, the emergency question was no longer a juridico-political issue[32] but a cultural one. It encompassed a situation in which the categories of friend and enemy, us and them, safe and dangerous, inside and outside, collapsed into each other.[33] The influx of the Other at the rapid pace of several returnees' families a day gave birth to feelings of insecurity which were reflected in questions about the number of each group present in the town.[34] How many of them are here? How many of them are amongst us? Furthermore, the notion of "them" being amongst "us" called into question previous narratives and knowledge structures which were established in the absence of the Other and which were now useless and dysfunctional. The loss of a stable social framework and the scarcity of social resources available to ensure security, including within the most private sphere, the place where people feel at home, produced a very real "drama" in the social life of the town.

---

[32] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[33] For an interesting discussion of similar processes that followed the fall of the apartheid regime in Johannesburg, see Lindsay Bremner, "Bounded Spaces: Demographic Anxieties in Post-Apartheid Johannesburg", *Social Identities*. 10(4):455-468, 2004.

[34] It is estimated that, from the end of 1998 to 2002, an average of seven returnees a day went back to Vukovar (*Vukovarske novine,* 22 March 2002). That is also the time when people of Serbian nationality, who refused to live in Croatia or feared revenge attacks emigrated abroad. This was particularly true of the young and educated who took this opportunity to move to western countries. Young and educated Croats, on the other hand, in most cases, never returned.

Politics of difference

But why the neighbour?
– He is the only one I know.[35]

The belief that judicial trials for war crimes and mass murders have limited influence on the processes of reconciliation and on the ordinary life of communities is so widely held that it is almost a truism. This has been demonstrated in the case of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia,[36] where three JNA's officers are currently on trial for the crimes committed in Vukovar[37]. Still, juridical concepts, especially as regards the definition of criminals and victims, have substantial influence on our contemporary understanding of the notion of "the culprit" and on the way criminals are dealt with. This influence is particularly strong within the spheres of international relations, state politics, and economy, where the Weberian understanding of social phenomena characterised by rational actors and agencies is more dominant. However, the clear-cut distinction between individual guilt and collective responsibility, which we find within the order of law or in philosophy[38], seems unreachable at the most quotidian level in the life of community. The "banality of evil"[39] and the fact that formerly ordinary, decent, law-abiding citizens, and good sons and fathers, can and did commit horrible crimes simply blurs the picture further. Furthermore, these "formerly" ordinary and law-abiding citizens are in some cases living as ordinary citizens again, as in the recent case of Slobodan Davidović, a member of the "Scorpions" special military unit which was active in Eastern Slavonia, Bosnia and Kosovo. After a video cassette of the killings of civilians from Srebrenica was found and shown on state television in June 2005, Slobodan Davidović and four other executioners were recognised by their friends and neighbours. Davidović was arrested immediately afterwards in the eastern Croatian

---

[35] This is the answer given to a friend of mine, a German researcher, when she asked one particular Serb during wartime why he burned his neighbour's house.

[36] For a detailed study on the role of ICTY in reconciliation processes see Eric Stover & Harvey M. Weinstein (eds.) *My Neighbor, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[37] Apart from Veselin Šljivančanin, Miroslav Radić and Mile Mrkšić, known as "The Vukovar three", there are seventeen persons, all local volunteers and members of the local territorial defence, who are on trial in the Belgrade court.

[38] At Hannah Arendt for example, "Collective Responsibility" in *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), pp. 147-158

[39] Hannah Arendt "Eichmann u Jeruzalemu: Izvještaj o banalnosti zla" [Eichmann in Jerusalem. Report on the Banality of Evil] *Europski glasnik*. 5(1)5: 75-243, 2000. pp. 75-167.

village of Šidski Banovci, which is mainly populated by Serbs. According to a newspaper article:

> "[H]e was well known. He lived very decently and was beloved by everyone in the village. They say he was always ready to help."[40]

Thus, while judicial trials, with their attempts to isolate guilty individuals and create rational accounts of events, create a gap between perpetrators, collaborators and victims, the real circumstances in which mass violence takes place connect them and make the differences between them unstable.[41] That is particularly evident in the case of bystanders who are morally but not legally complicit (unlike collaborators who are subject to the law). This leads to the absence of bystanders, and in most cases to that of collaborators, in the legal processes of criminal trials. Because of bystanders' perceived moral complicity with crimes, the legal principle by which bystanders are considered innocent makes their presence in post-war settings particularly provocative from the perspective of victims.[42]

In Vukovar particularly, similar situations have led to a ubiquitous climate of suspicion in which the innocence of certain individuals may be permanently in doubt. This problem can be illustrated by the experience of Petra. Although she was not born in Vukovar, Petra is a Croat who decided to move there after reintegration, for work purposes. Petra lived in a rented flat and since its owner, a Serb, had moved to Serbia she was paying the rent to his relatives. One day she met a Croat who refused to talk to her because, as he explained, "she is paying rent to a war criminal". Indeed, as she later found out, the landlord had been indicted for torturing prisoners in detention camps and that was the real reason why he never visited her. This experience was stressful not just because she realised that her landlord was not the person she thought he was, but also because he suddenly became radically different and distant from her, while at the same time

---

[40] Glas Slavonije (Osijek), 14 June 2005. Apart from being accused of killing civilians in Sreberenica, he is also indicted for torturing Croatian prisoners of war.

[41] For an interesting discussion on the notion of "sacred evil" and the application of the cultural/sociological approach to the problem of guilt in the case of Holocaust, see Jeffrey C. Alexander "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The 'Holocaust' from War Crime to Trauma Drama" *European Journal of Social Theory*. 5(1):5-85, 2002.

[42] Laurel Fletcher analyses the problem of bystanders from the legal point of view and concludes that the absence of bystanders and collaborators in the courts produces a paradox in international criminal trials: by individualizing guilt, they produce collective innocence. Laurel Fletcher "From Indifference to Engagement: Bystanders and International Criminal Justice" *Michigan Journal of International Law*. Vol. 26:1013-1095, Summer 2005.

appearing so ordinary. The dilemma she experienced will have far-reaching consequences in her ability to trust people again:

> "The problem is that any returnee would have realised what was going on from the very beginning. I simply have not been used to thinking in that way and I believed that man. Why shouldn't I have? Returnees would have connected those things right away. Only now do I understand how this town functions."

The suspicion and uncertainty regarding fellow citizens and former neighbours and friends is not only present between the Serbian and Croatian communities but also within these communities. After graffiti of a nationalistic nature appeared several times on the walls of a particular Serbian café, I asked the Serbian owner of a neighbouring cafe how she felt about it. Instead of expressing feelings of being threatened, she indicated a lack of certainty as to the owner's innocence:

> "I do not know, I think there is always some private thing behind it. Why does it only happen to one cafe, and not to the others? You never know."

Croats would have to have had very strong relationship with former friends and neighbours to be convinced that they did not have anything to do with the war or to discount signs that might lead them to a different conclusion. Zlata, a middle-aged Croat woman, describes one such situation with regard to her stolen belongings:

> "You search through the rubble for at least a piece of a broken cup, something that could serve as a token of memory, because you think that it would make it easier for you but in fact it would only make it harder. Then you are angry with all the Serbs and you think that they are all guilty, but they are not. Some of them are, and some of them are not. […]
>
> I saw some little things that would mean a lot to me to have today. I saw some things at my first neighbour's house, a Serb I was very good friends with. She does not even know or she does not remember how she got these things because if she knew she would hide them when I go to her house. Then, suddenly, I recognise something that is mine and it shocks me. I am thinking, should I tell her or not? Then again… no, I am not going to tell her because she will be embarrassed. She would try to defend herself and claim that it is hers, but I know my things. For

> example, she offered me a cake on a platter that was mine and which I recognised since I got it as a present from another part of the country. I simply know it is mine. Then, I am looking at her, I am looking at those cakes, and I am breaking down and I do not know what to do. Then I restrain myself and it passes. The other day I saw my tablecloth which I had made with my own hands. Who knows how many things I will recognise and which I will not tell her about? I see it, I put a cross on it and I am thinking that I do not really need it, that I can live without it and that is it."

Zlata is one of the few Croats who communicate with Serbs today and, as her story shows, this can lead to unpleasant experiences. Ivan's story, on the other hand, is more tragic and he, like most of Croats, does not communicate with Serbs anymore. He was captured in Vukovar and taken by JNA forces to a nearby Serbian village where Serbian volunteers wanted to execute him on the spot. But at that very moment, his neighbour appeared and saved his life, although he still spent several months in a detention camp. Today he and his family live in the same place and his Serbian neighbour is also there, but they do not communicate. His wife explains:

> "The thing is that, in spite of everything, he was there and he was firing at the city from that place. And he was one of the first who left the town. All of them [Serbs] had been somewhere just as he had been, and now they say that they do not have anything to do with it. Who was it who did the shooting then?! Why didn't they stay here? No one forced them to leave the city."

When Serbian forces entered the town, this led to a very complex situation, in which notions of victim and perpetrator, bystander and betrayer became inextricably entangled. This was the time when former Vukovar citizens (Serbian volunteers and those who were forced to join a JNA unit against their will) came across their own distressed parents leaving the city's shelters together with Croats, after they had rocketed and shelled the town for months. In this chaotic atmosphere, Serbian soldiers, not aware of the fact that their shells were indiscriminately killing people in the town, hugged their parents and comforted them by telling them that they were finally liberated and safe. Almost immediately afterward, the selfsame Serb civilians, who had been just as much victims as their Croatian fellow citizens, started to give them the names of Croats who had given

them a "nasty look" or whom they objected to for some reason, or whom they had seen carrying arms. This act of naming was often equal to a death sentence.[43]

This grey zone of culpability, where clear distinctions between victim and culprit simply disappear, brings into being a situation where rationally created borders seem unstable and ratiocinative arguments inadequate. For, at community level, we are not dealing with isolated individuals but with emotions and relationships, which often function as the "precondition" for betrayal and denunciation since betrayal is more closely related to friendship than to enmity. What is at issue here, therefore, is not the problem of individual guilt or of collective responsibility, that is to say, responsibility primarily and exclusively based on a membership of a given group. The real issue here is the lack of certainty which is stemming from the fact that categorical boundaries are under stress. Therefore, we are faced with the problem of the "sacred-evil" and of "metonymic guilt", a guilt based on pollution by contact.[44] As Mary Douglas notes, the unclear is also unclean and the solution is either purification or separation.[45] The ambivalent status of those who are neither guilty by the written law, nor innocent by the moral law of the community brings the entire social order into question.

The newly created moral order that came into force during the reintegration years will also eventually lead to the redefinition of categories and labels that were created under the strong influence of national agencies. For instance, in the case of the Serbs, those who decided to move to Serbia during the reintegration period called those who decided to stay *Ustaše*, a derogatory name previously used only for denoting Croats. Moreover, in today's Vukovar, both communities differentiate between those Serbs who lived under

---

[43] The whole atmosphere during the fall of the city, including the denunciation and evacuation of the wounded from the city hospital, was documented and recorded by Serbian state television TV cameras. Some of the video clips can be found in the online archives of the *Domovinski rat* organisation at: http://www.lijepanasadomovinahrvatska.com/folder/klek_030705.htm (last time visited on 20 September 2005). The same process of denunciation can be seen in a recent documentary film made by Janko Baljak and Drago Hedl "Vukovar – Final Cut" (produced by Belgrade's media company B92, 2006).

[44] Jeffrey C. Alexander, 2002. It should be noted that this notion is not the same as collective guilt where, as Hannah Arendt noted, everyone is guilty and therefore no one is guilty. Instead of approaching this problem from a juridical point of view, one should approach it from the social and cultural point of view. Metonymic guilt is, therefore, based on a perspective in which one says: "I cannot be sure and therefore I don't want to be in any relation with you".

[45] Mary Douglas, *Čisto i opasno. Analiza pojmova prljavštine i tabua* [Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo], (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2001).

the Krajina regime and those who were in exile with Croats.[46] Mixed marriages in particular have subversive effects on previous knowledge structures and point to the importance assigned to categorical purity. In these circumstances, the understanding of purity and the processes of division and separation that attend it are not, as may be assumed, based on ethnic affiliation, but on an individual's status as a former refugee or stayee. This is a direct consequence of the significant number of pre-war mixed marriages in Vukovar, which led to some Croats staying in Krajina and some Serbs going into exile. In these cases, the divide across ethnic lines does not function, for, unlike citizens in other parts of Croatia, people who live in Vukovar realise that categorical boundaries are not strong and unambiguous as they appear to be from a distance or as national narratives would have them. New categories are coming to life, the categories of "returnee" (*povratnik*) and of "stayee" (*ostalnik*)[47], which are being used in parallel with ethnic categories and sometimes even as equivalents to them. These, I suggest, will serve as a neutralizing mechanism for the condition of categorical dysfunction.

The Croat stayee and the Serb returnee are not pure; they are "contaminated" with alien elements. The Croat stayee is regularly in the company of Serbs, that is, he is more accepted by stayees, and the Serb returnee is regularly in the company of Croats, that is, he is more accepted by returnees. These persons are, in Turner's telling terms, liminal persons found in a state of transition and catharsis.[48] As he notes:

> "…one would expect to find that transitional beings are particularly polluting, since they are neither one thing nor another; or may be both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere (in terms of any recognized cultural topography), and are at the very least 'betwixt and between' all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification."[49]

---

[46] Many significant differentiation factors are present in both communities that are not visible when one is only focused on inter-ethnic relations. For example, amongst the Serbs, during the Krajina regime, there was a clear division between the so-called "creditable Serbs" (*zaslužni*) who fought in the war and the "people from the basements" (*podrumaši*) who were second-class citizens. This distinction between the liberators and the liberated Serbs disappeared with the return of the Croats and with the peaceful reintegration process which gave birth to more important intra-ethnic divisions, namely, the Serbs who lived under the Krajina regime and those who lived in the rest of Croatia (often labelled "Croatian Serbs" or "Zagreb' Serbs"). Divisions among the Croats, on the other hand, are mainly based on participation in the defence of the town ("real defenders" and "fake defenders").

[47] At first the labels of returnee (refugee in the process of return) and stayee were used only as a bureaucratic categories in state and local administration but they soon acquired socio-cultural meaning in people's everyday lives.

[48] Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage" in *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 93-111.

[49] Victor Turner, 1967, p. 97.

That is the reason why, in an interview conducted in November 2001, the leading representative of a locally dominant Serbian political party[50], omitted one particular name, when listing the names of school principals of Serbian nationality working in Vukovar. The missing school principal was a Serb returnee from a mixed marriage. A Croat official described this very same person as an "honest Serb" (*pošten Srbin*)[51] because he had been in exile with the Croats. In a similar vein, Ana, a Croat woman who stayed in Krajina with her Serb husband, described their life during and after Krajina:

> (During Krajina) "I could not get a job, and they [the Serbs] objected to my husband having a Croat wife. At the beginning, I had to be the last one in the queue for rice and food or other things. But later, they turned us away alltogether." [...]
> (After reintegration) "When, on one occasion, I went to the city office to get my personal documents, the woman who worked there said to me: 'If you have waited for them for eight years then you can wait longer'. In the end, I got those documents by going to another person who also works there but he is a Serb and he fulfilled my request."

These people are often perceived as and sometimes even explicitly called "traitors" by members of their own ethnic group. Moreover, the common term for the children of mixed marriages is *polutani*.[52]

After reintegration, therefore, the people of Vukovar desperately needed the threatening landscape in which they existed to be reordered. New circumstances meant that the previous social order, based on ethnic affiliation, was destabilised. Both the divisions established during the physical absence of the Other and national narratives, in which the enemy, whether Serb or Croat, had a precise social but also geographical positioning, were suddenly destabilised. The new order that came to existence was established not on

---

[50] The Independent Democratic Serbian Party (Samostalna demokratska srpska stranka – SDSS).
[51] The term *pošten* is frequently used in denoting such persons and the best translation is "honest" although the meaning in this context corresponds to the term "loyal". Since in Croatian, just as in English, there are several terms which denote loyalty but which are not used in this context, I am trying here to indicate these telling differences by preserving the literal translation.
[52] The root of the term *polutani* is the word *pola* which means "half".

the basis of primordial ties, as was the case on a national level, but in relation to an association with criminal activity. As Jeffrey Alexander points out:

> "To be guilty of sacred-evil did not mean, any more, that one had committed a legal crime. It was about the imputation of a moral one. One cannot defend oneself against an imputed moral crime by pointing to exculpating circumstances or lack of direct involvement. The issue is one of pollution, guilt by actual association. The solution is not the rational demonstration of innocence but ritual cleansing: purification."[53]

It is at this point that the full significance of the status of former refugee must be noted. For, here the refugee is not perceived as a person with questionable morality, but as precisely the opposite – refugees from Vukovar were regarded as possessing categorical purity.[54] They are not people of incomplete identity, but a deeply moral community whose clarity is guaranteed by the experience of "uprootedness" and exile. Thus, from the Croatian point of view, exile functioned as a journey of purification thanks to which even the most socially ambivalent of persons, such as individuals in mixed marriages, could prove their loyalty. On the other hand, since the killings were performed on a vast scale, and were accompanied by the attendant problems of betrayal and pillage, the notion of a crime was not only associated with an individual evil deed, but extended to encompass the whole system of the rebel state of Serbian Krajina that was constituted through these very deeds. Consequently, those who accepted to live in this state were guilty by association and "polluted by contact". This explains why the stayees from mixed marriages are now accepted amongst the Serbs, and why the returnees from mixed marriages are now accepted amongst the Croats. Within this structure, a Serb returnee becomes invisible to the Serbs, while at the same time is considered to be one of the rare "honest Serbs" amongst the Croats. Therefore, within this social order, it is not ethnic hatred which governs behaviour in everyday life, but the need for separation; it is not the fear of incidents which is the main source of insecurity, but rather the fact that "they"

---

[53] Jeffrey C. Alexander, 2002, p. 45.

[54] Liisa Malkki provides a similar account of exile as a sign of purity amongst the Hutu refugees in Tanzania. Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

cannot be easily recognised and that there are no physical borders acknowledging and fixing the created moral gap.[55]

Identity markers and physical separation

Following Douglas' argumentation, the notion of categorical purity as a moral principle goes hand in hand with the cognitive principle of categorical clarity. Arjun Appadurai, for example, takes these concepts to the extreme when applying them to ethnic cleansing. In his analysis of violent actions against the Other, he argues that the most brutal acts of violence, whether massacres or forceful expulsions, often result precisely because of the unsettling similarities between the members of different communities:

> "These dimensions seem to converge in the collective heat of ethnocide, where the logic of cleansing seems both dialectical and self-perpetuating, as one act of 'purification' calls forth its counterpart both from and within the ethnic 'other'. Likewise, purification and clarification appear to be in a dialectical and productive relationship."[56]

Although we are dealing with similar circumstances of lived experience, where the general labels created at national level become unstable, the path we are following here does not go in the same direction as Appadurai's. To be precise, it goes in exactly the opposite direction. For we are not dealing with the problem of unstable identity categories that result in violently imposed certainties and in ethnic cleansing, but with the destabilisation of these violently imposed certainties. In other words, this is a situation where the results of ethnic cleansing are abolished and reversed. It is not violent acts which are inscribing differences between communities, but ethnic markers.

There are no clear physical differences between Serbs and Croats, returnees and stayees, and since contact between them is almost unavoidable due to spatial proximity, ethnic

---

[55] Many researchers are surprised and baffled by the extremely small number of incidents given past events, the present tense atmosphere and the generally stressful environment. I believe that this can precisely be attributed to avoidance of contact.

[56] Arjun Appadurai, "Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization", *Development & Change*, 29(4): 905-925, (1998).

markers by which one can emphasise one's own identity or reveal and recognise someone else's identity take on enormous importance. The fact that the Croats are Catholics and that the Serbs are Orthodox is an objective fact which means that religious affiliation can serve as a confirmation of difference. Differences in language, however, have an even more significant function – they provide the most important criteria for recognising the Other.[57] Although language differences existed even before the war, the exposure to different influences during the years of separation in the nineties resulted in the almost complete erasure of the specific characteristic of the local dialect. Still, regardless of these influences, differences are being deliberately stressed so that, for example, a Serbian or Croatian store can be easily recognised by the sign denoting its working hours. In everyday communication, ethnic identities can be revealed through greetings. Their advantage as an indicator is in their capacity to be used in completely superficial communication or just in passing (when entering into the store, meeting a new person, etc.). Before the war, the common greeting was *zdravo*. In Vukovar, the greeting *bog* (God) was only used in the Catholic Church together with *hvaljen Isus* (praise be Jesus) and *zbogom* (goodbye, "with-God"). Since 1991, most Croats in Croatia have stopped greeting people with *zdravo*, interpreting it as a throwback to the communist era, and instead use the greeting *bog*, which has since lost any religious connotation it might have had.[58] Serbs in Vukovar, on the other hand, greet people with *zdravo* and younger people often say *ćao* (ciao), which is also frequently used in the coastal parts of Croatia which are closer to Italy. However, in Vukovar Croats do not use *ćao* (ciao) and those who spent the refugee years in the coastal regions simply stopped using it when they returned. The more neutral greetings are *dobro jutro*/*dan*/*večer* (good morning/day/evening) and *do viđenja* (goodbye) but they are only used in formal situations and in situations where one is trying to mask one's identity. In everyday situations, however, the usage of these neutral greetings may in fact increase suspicion and make the other person more reserved and anxious.

[57] It is not our goal here to engage in a discussion on the question of whether the Serbian and Croatian languages are two different languages or one language with two dialects. One has to bear in mind only the fact that the differences are big enough to be noticed and at the same time small enough that Serbs and Croats can understand each other perfectly well.

[58] This raises the interesting question of whether this greeting came into usage amongst the wider population from the religious community or amongst people living in the centre i.e. Zagreb where the greeting *bog* was widely used even before the war or, alternatively, whether there is a combination of religious and political factors at work here.

"The quality of service you get depends on who you are and who the official is. It depends on how you speak. When I speak Croatian, I receive a friendly smile from the Croat officials." (Vesna, Croat)

"Greetings are also very discomforting. There is a Croat I know from pre-war days … and nowadays I say *Zdravo* to everybody because that is what we used to say in Vukovar. I will not say *Bog* on principle and because my people [Serbs] would say, 'look at this groveller'. Now, he on the other hand, cannot say *Zdravo*, and then again, we cannot say *Good day* to each other when we belong to the same generation. That greeting is used for someone older or for more like an official greeting. So we simply nod our heads to each other." (Sara, Serb)

"Whenever you meet someone, you ask yourself 'who is he?'. What should I do if he asks me something? How should I answer? Will he think that I am a Serb or a Croat? How should I behave?" (Nikola, Serb in a mixed marriage)

The numerous identification markers used by both groups are not imposed from the outside but are interactively created amongst the citizens themselves and are the result of a dialectical relationship between the two groups within a local context. This is particularly evident in the case of the Italian greeting "ciao" used by Croats in some other parts of Croatia and only by Serbs in Vukovar. Furthermore, people often use external markers in order to reveal their identity, to "open the door" to the members of the same group and to make the possibility of interaction with them easier, while at the same time closing the possibility of communication with others. These can vary from more subtle signs such as stickers on cars to explicit national or religious emblems placed on private property. That is the case, for example, with the Croatian state sign *šahovnica* that can be seen on fences in front of family houses or with state flags which enable instant recognition of the resident's identity. Serbs, on the other hand, often place wreaths on the front wall of their houses or on the front doors of their flats. Although this is a religious custom, wreaths can also serve this identifying function.

This immense need to recognise the Other, that has become an obsession, has led to the creation of certain prejudices that guide people in everyday life. The following are some of the most interesting examples. There is a widespread belief that the nationality of a

police officer can be recognised by the identification number on his badge (one theory is that if the last three digits consist of numbers higher than three then the officer must be a Serb). Similarly, there is also the belief that car licence plate numbers have secret meanings (among the infinite combination of numbers and letters, the presence of some letters supposedly indicate the nationality of the driver, e.g. the letter "s" supposedly indicates a Serb, and the letter "h" a Croat). Furthermore, some Croats believe that most of the people who have beards are Serbs.[59] On the other hand, during the group interview I conducted in a high school, children of Serbian nationality were trying to convince me that Croats could be recognised not just by their clothing but also by the way they walk.[60]

All these examples show the importance of identifying the Other. The pressure to recognize the Other and the numerous and widespread use of ethnic markers is a direct product of the physical presence of members of both groups within the same space. In this type of urban environment, public space is a source of stress and is perceived as unsafe. Social activity in parks, streets and playgrounds is minimal, as people withdraw into their houses. The following words illustrate this problem:

> "It would be much easier for me to live in Nuštar [a nearby village], where everyone is Croat, than to stay here. For days, I can look at people and not find a single person with a smiling face. Then, you have embarrassing situations all the time. We older people, for example, we don't know … we recognize the faces, but we don't remember the names, so we stop, talk for a while, and then we realize that he is a Croat, and I'm a Serb. After that, when we meet, we don't say hello to each other anymore" (Dragan, a Serb).
>
> "I'm disappointed in people. While they are walking in the streets, they think: 'Is he this or that?' We are all deprived of a normal life. […] In Borovo [a nearby Serbian village], for example, the atmosphere is less tense; people there can sit in front of their houses. Here, such things are almost non-existent" (Slađana, a Serb).

---

[59] It is interesting that some Serbs have themselves started to conceive of the wearing of beards as part of their identity or as a way of indicating their opposition to the perception that all Serbs participated in the war. This is maybe the most bizarre example of how certain labels can be modified and accepted by those who are labelled. Yet, these are very rare cases and one cannot conclude from this that Croats do not wear beards or that beards or moustaches necessarily have secret meanings.

[60] Naturally, I expressed a keen interest in learning that skill, explaining that it would make my research much easier but after few unsuccessful attempts to articulate this knowledge, the children said that one simply "knows it" and that "it" would come to me after I had spent enough time in Vukovar.

The public urban space is therefore a transitional space that lacks repetitive and continuous social activity. It is just an empty space between ethnically homogeneous places, where most of the social activity is enclosed. Private houses, cafes, restaurants, schools, etc. are "benign spaces", as Hoggett puts it, that are "reliable, thoughtful and bounded – which can allow the movement from the self-as-object to self-as-subject, a self capable of containing difference and therefore capable of making a difference."[61] They are rare "places for experience", places where people feel safe, where cultural codes and norms are not constantly challenged, and where the surroundings have order and meaning.

Nationalisation of urban space

During my fieldwork, one of the local non-governmental organisations began an initiative for developing urban identity and raising awareness of public good amongst the city's citizens. They designed several posters, one of which depicted a sand beach on an island on the Danube which had been a well-known summer resort before the war. The text presented a question followed by three potential answers: "Whose beach is this? a) ours, b) theirs, c) no one's". While different people might well have chosen any one of these three answers, the fact is that in this particular case, only a fourth answer could be correct, namely that the beach is not ours. For, the very presence of such a question already indicates that "it" does not belong to us, not administratively-speaking, but in the sense of "our" identity and of "our" sense of belonging. This question, which illustrates the citizens' alienation and their lack of control over their immediate surroundings, is related to the fact that the post-war city was established on pre-existing territory. The foundations of post-war Vukovar were obviously not erected on wasteland. Unlike the case of expellees and travellers who founded new cities on empty plots of land, in Vukovar everything had been already marked out in advance. These marks were not, however, sources of orientation but of trauma, and this particular kind of formlessness forced people to dwell in the presence of the absent. The destructive power of war is

[61] Hoggett, P. "A Place for Experience: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Boundary, Identity and Culture", *Environment and Planning D*, vol. 10, 1992, pp. 345–56, p. 352.

inscribed in the mutilated branches of trees, in burned factory buildings and in demolished houses. It is these ruins and the urban rubble as a whole which constitute the main challenge to the city dwellers' hopes or fantasies of normalcy. One is faced with a struggle between the semblance of normalcy and order which one can sustain amongst friends and family, on the one hand, and the lack of order and constant reminders of loss that pervade everyday life, on the other. The Serbian husband of the aforementioned Ana talks about this:

> "Here, in this flat, it was fine. Fine as long as you did not look through the window, just like today. When you looked out, you would experience blackout. […] Sometimes, we would go to Novi Sad ... ah, I hated those people in Novi Sad and Belgrade so much. I hated them … because they walked, because there were so many of them outside, because they were so normal. We were astonished by everything; the lights during the night, the shop windows; my children could not see enough of that."

> "When I found a job I started to feel better. I had some obligations. Before that, I was inside my house for 24 hours a day and then you have a lot of time to think, and when you started to think, because of the environment, that was not good. A friend of mine never goes anywhere, never leaves her house because of this. Not even to the store. She always sends her child or asks her husband to go with her. She has withdrawn into herself too much." (Zlata, Croat)

The islands of social life or safe places in which meaning and anxiety are contained thus function as a material part of fantasy structures which stand in contradiction to outside reality. As Mirjana Lozanovska remarks in her analysis of the role of architecture in post-war environments:

> "Our fantasy about the city and the architectural edifice urges us to fabricate a ground for reconstruction, to fabricate a renewed reality. If war is a traumatic element, then the architectural edifice is a part of the structure of desire and fantasy

that enables a link to a new social reality. The traumatic element, however, remains unsymbolized, and therefore undiscursive".[62]

The urban public space that is permeated with debris, where members of both groups intermingle and where the destructive body of war is still present, is the spatial counterpart of "traumatic time". This time-space nexus "literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood"[63].

During those foundational years, local political and cultural leaders had an enormous responsibility to help resolve these contradictions by supporting the new social reality and by extending and rooting it in external, public, material structures. Still, from the perspective of newly-created identities and that of the reconstruction of local tradition, the root of the problem is not simply that the ruins recalled the war in people's minds but that they also, more importantly, evoked that which was ruined. For, to name what has been lost is to challenge the fantasy structures and the new social reality.

Postcards that can be found in Vukovar can provide us with telling conclusions in this regard, since they provide particularly interesting examples of citizens' relations to the history of town. There was only one series of postcards in Vukovar, published by the town's museum. These were reproductions of old postcards originating in the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The greetings on the front picture are printed in both Croatian and German. Thus, depending on the particular scene depicted, one could read: "Pozdrav iz Vukovara. Dvor Grofa Eltza. – Gruss aus Vukovar. Graf Eltz'sches Schloss", "Pogled na Dunav – Blick auf die Donau" or "Pozdrav iz Vukovara. Franje Josipa ulica – Gruss

[62] Mirjana Lozanovska, "The Architectural Edifice and the Phantoms of History" *Space & Culture* Vol. 6, No. 3, August 2003, pp. 249-260, p.254

[63] Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past: Introduction", in *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*. (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). pp. 151-157, p.153. A deep trauma is also evident in these citizens' failure to appropriate war experiences, unlike citizens of some other cities in the region which transformed their war experiences into tourist attractions. The processes of "trivialisation of war" which are for example, at work in Mostar and Sarajevo in the form of the design of souvenirs (flowerpots made of shell casings or pencils made of gun bullets) are absent in Vukovar. The most influential works of popular or of high culture aimed at representing the war in Vukovar are, on the whole, being produced at national level. For more on the issue of the representation of Vukovar in the Croatian public arena see Kruno Kardov "Remember Vukovar: Memory, Sense of Place and National Tradition in Croatia" In: Sabrina P. Ramet and Davorka Matić (eds.) *Democratic Transition in Croatia: Value Transformation, Education, Media* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, forthcoming).

aus Vukovar. Franz-Josef-Gasse". These postcards illustrate the direction in which local government and cultural elites shaped the new identity of the town. They also indicate how unsettling the socialist past is for them today. For this is the period when members of both communities lived together in harmony. Indeed, from the Croatian point of view, to go back to images from the period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire is to revive the last examples of unproblematic historical and cultural materials. Moreover, this material conforms to the dominant self-image of the Croatian state as a country that has always belonged to Europe, an image conveyed in the use of the German term "Mitteleuropa".[64] This is exemplified in a Vukovar-born Croatian writer's comment on the fact that previous urban planners in Vukovar chose to develop the city in the direction of a waterlogged area which was particularly difficult to develop – that direction, he pointedly emphasized, was towards the west.[65] Another writer, who builds on this argument, points to the various cultural influences which left their marks on Croatian society only to conclude that:

> "Cosmogonic differences do not guarantee any special gains. They are just more profoundly inscribed traces of something that was already affirmed […] by a life world. Just like Vukovar, Croatia is alive by its westerliness."[66]

The idea of a local cultural heritage and tradition, which in the case of the postcards, is directed towards the outside world, beyond the borders of the city, is also translated into everyday life in the city and rooted in urban spaces by means of street names. By comparing three different city maps, the first dating from the pre-war period, the second published during Serbian Krajina, and a contemporary map, one can observe the dominant ideological matrices of the politico-administrative regimes of the times. In order to avoid extensive descriptions and explanations of the meanings and micro-histories of the numerous figures and events inscribed in the street names in question, I will limit myself to general remarks and to particularly interesting examples. Several different clusters of street names can be found in Vukovar. These may relate to

---

[64] For example, the Croatian Prime Minister expressed similar views in an interview given after Croatia received the official status of an EU candidate country. By referring to the socialist period, he stressed that Croatia had "lost seventy years outside of the space where Croatia belong[ed]". (Prime Minister Ivo Sanader in an interview conducted by Branimir Bilić, "Dnevnik Plus", *HRT 1*, Croatian state television, 4 October 2005).
[65] Pavao Pavličić, *Nevidljivo pismo* (Zagreb: Znanje, 1993) as referred to in Ivan Rogić Nehajev, *Smaragdni brid. Vukovar 91 and Croatian identity* (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 1998), p. 50.
[66] Ivan Rogić Nehajev, *Smaragdni brid*, p. 156.

individuals (important historical figures), to groups of people or collectives (military brigades, groups of martyrs and victims), to geographic places or regions, to historical events, to abstract values (freedom, solidarity, etc.) or may be purely descriptive (i.e. as in the name *wooden market* which describes the former function of a particular town square).[67]

Both administrations, the Serbian and the new Croatian one, acted in the interests of erasing both the communist heritage and the presence of the other group. So for example, within the name cluster of "values", the "Brotherhood and Unity Street" was given the name "Serbian Concord Street" and then renamed King Zvonimir Street (a medieval Croatian king). The "Yugoslav People's Army Street", within the collective cluster of names, was named "Vukovar's Liberators" and then renamed "Ban Josip Jelačić Street". Moving onto streets recalling individual historical figures, the name of a writer was often replaced by the name of another writer, or a soldier's by that of another soldier. The most interesting example of this is "Marshal Tito Street" which was renamed "18 November 1991" (the day of Vukovar's "Liberation") and which is now called "Franjo Tuđman Street".[68] The most bizarre change made by the Serbian Krajina administration relates to "Stjepan Radić Street" (a Croat politician assassinated in the Yugoslav Assembly in 1928) which was renamed "Puniša Račić Street" (Radić's assassin). Although the Krajina administration changed the names of some of the most significant symbolic figures of the communist and socialist past, when dealing with the names of less important individuals, it concentrated primarily on changing Croat names, while retaining Serb names. In contrast to this, today's Croat-dominated administration has changed the street names which recall the socialist past, regardless of nationality. Finally, changes within the geographical cluster provide some very interesting insights into the processes of urban networking and re-orientation. While the general turn in the politico-cultural sphere is visible in the previous clusters discussed, the changes in geographical names reveal how the city is rooted in a wider but bounded politico-territorial space. In the old Yugoslav

---

[67] Analysis by similar clusters can be found in Brenda S. A. Yeoh, "Street Names in Colonial Singapore", *Geographical Review*, Vol. 82, No. 3, July 1992, pp. 313-323,.

[68] As a main street in the city centre, it had always carried the names of various state leaders: "Franz Josef" during the Austrio-Hungarian empire, "King Petar I" during the Yugoslavian kingdom (and "Aleksander" from 1934, after the death of king Aleksander Karađorđević), "*Poglavnikova* (Ante Pavelić)" during the Second World War's Independent State of Croatia, and "Marshal Tito" after the war (Brane Crlenjak, *Razvitak vukovarskih ulica*, Vukovar: Vukovar town museum, 2005).

maps, the places and regions from all the republics were represented equally, while in maps relating to the two following administrations, geographic denotations were changed to correspond to ethnically homogeneous areas or to areas under state control at that particular time. The Serbian Krajina administration, for example, preserved the street names of places from Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia that were under Serbian control. "Belgrade Street" kept its name, as did the "Bosnian Diverging Road", but "Herzegovina Street" was changed to "Romanija Street" (a mountain in Bosnia). Similarly, names of places from Croatia were preserved only if they were under the control of rebel state authorities. "Slavonia Street" thus became "Western Slavonia Street" since only the western part of the Slavonia region was under Serb control; "Kumrovec Street" (a village in north-west Croatia and Tito's place of birth) was changed to "Šid Street" (a town in Serbia). The most interesting example is "Vinkovci Street" which led towards the town of Vinkovci. It was changed to "Brsadin Street" since Vinkovci was under Croatian control and Brsadin was the furthest village in the same direction which was under Serb control. The new Croat-dominated administration engaged in the same processes of re-orientation, changing the geographical names by the same principles. "Belgrade Street" now became "Varaždin Street" (a town in north-west Croatia) and "Durmitor Street" (a mountain in Montenegro) was changed to "Boka Kotorska Street" (a bay in Montenegro with a significant population of Croats). Furthermore, "Borovo Road", which leads to a nearby Serbian village "Borovo" (known as the place where twelve Croatian police officers were killed in 1991), was renamed "Twelve police officers Street". However, "Trpinja Road", which leads to another Serbian village, was preserved because that name became well known in Croatia because of the number of Serbian military tanks that had been destroyed there. This is what a Croatian writer had to say about that name:

> "Surprisingly, this name does not bother me. The reason is that the adjective *trpinjska* sounds close to a noun *trpnja* [suffering, pain]. Therefore, Trpinja Road is not a road which takes its meaning from the village it heads towards, but a road on which one suffers pain. Trpinja Road means a road of suffering."[69]

The new Croat-dominated administration thus erased all Serbian related names within the geographical clusters. Its representation of Serbs within the cluster of individual figures

---

[69] Ivan Rogić Nehajev, *Smaragdni brid*, p. 58.

was reduced to writers and important figures from the cultural sphere. Thus the newly established network of street names projected an image of a desirable form of relationship between the Serbian and Croatian communities – a relationship defined in terms of the political and cultural dominance of the majority and, as far as the ethnic minority are concerned, autonomy in the cultural sphere. Furthermore, this short analysis shows how both administrations tried to root their communities in urban tradition, and most importantly, how both communities, by erasing the communist past, ordered the image of society by separating the population into recognisable ethnic units. This leads us to an important point regarding the communal urban heritage. From the perspective of today's order of things, the past which belongs equally to both communities, that it is to say which is neither solely Serbian nor Croatian, and the past which is not just communist, but also communal, represents the most unsettling historical episode of all. Furthermore, this past is equally unsettling for both communities. Although the different interpretations of war events to be found within the two communities can, from time to time, lead to extreme tensions, it is nevertheless the war and war-related phenomena that serve and provide a basis for social certainty.

Concluding remarks: Remaking of the world

In the last decade, a vast body of literature has been published on various aspects of the recent war in Croatia. This is, of course, not surprising since wars in the Balkan region have attracted much scholarly interest. The war in Croatia has also had a significant role in the process of the formation of Croatian national identity and nation-state tradition.[70] However, it is surprising that there is an immense disproportion between the numerous studies focused on the nature, causes and dynamics or war and the small number of studies which deal with its consequences. Thus, even after ten years of peace, we have no precise data on military and civil casualties, direct and indirect economic damage or on war-related environmental pollution, not to mention more profound social and psycho-social consequences. It would be wrong, I think, to attribute the causes of this

[70] Kruno Kardov "Remember Vukovar: Memory, Sense of Place and National Tradition in Croatia" In: Sabrina P. Ramet and Davorka Matić (eds.) *Democratic Transition in Croatia: Value Transformation, Education, Media* (Texas A&M University Press, forthcoming).

disproportion to some kind of belief within the scientific community that the causes of wars are worth researching in the interests of finding conflict prevention models or even of banishing war from the face of the earth. The question, rather, is whether this very need to identify causes and to mark beginnings is, in fact, just another part of the profound changes that follow war. I would argue that the this body of research, which focuses on the causes and dynamics of conflict and which is dominated by an approach which seeks to define key events and figures, in other words, by an approach which provides order to the world, may itself be one of the most significant consequences of the war. This tendency towards retrospective ordering, which has overtaken scholars, politicians and ordinary citizens alike, can be understood in terms of a need to find meaning, to create a stable social framework and to restore order in a world that was once known but that has now fallen apart.

It seems that post-war communities are once again entrapped by the search for order, only this time entrapment occurs, not because of war, but because of its end. Watching people who were lost in their own hometown and who were frightened for their own and their children's safety forced me to question what is generally taken to be the positive outcome of these refugees' return. It became clear to me that this apparently positive move backwards, which effected the reversal of practices of ethnic cleansing, also, perversely, constituted an act of cultural violence against the very same people it had saved from life in exile. As this study has demonstrated, the end of war in Vukovar was followed by a state of cultural siege in which previous knowledge structures collapsed, violently imposed certainties disappeared, and containers of meaning and anxiety fell apart. Social resources that could have provided a stable framework were either scarce or non-existent and there was no place from which one could just "observe". Human relations were disembedded and released from all physical borders and cultural boundaries and, as a result, urban space became a place of fear and terror, rather than a medium of experience. As social dichotomies collapsed, the socially marginal, the dangerous, the "outside" suddenly appeared inside the borders of urban walls. These inverted positions resulted in the stressing of differences and in the creation of new boundaries and identity markers. A constant need to be able to recognise the other

developed alongside new territorial strategies which resulted in the creation of scattered homogeneous places within an undefined urban space. These dispersed social containers created a specific structural form of social life in post-war Vukovar – a *punctiform* social life.

The general atmosphere in Vukovar is less tense today. The existing safe places have enabled people to develop feelings of safety and have stabilised the surrounding environment, providing the potential for stable inter-ethnic relations and communication between groups to develop. Still, there are crucial problems which have not yet been resolved. People are still trying to find missing members of their families, the reconstruction of the town is still in progress and the fundamental questions of political representation and of cultural heritage and tradition are still open and still haunted by the past.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Ozren Žunec, my mentor, and to Petra Rodik, a friend and colleague, for their suggestions and helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper, as well as for numerous discussions we have had over the past few years. I also wish to thank Annette Iskra, a psychologist and researcher I met in Vukovar, and Mara for sometimes just listening and sharing thoughts which made my stays in the field less strenuous. I am grateful to Marita Eastmond of the Department of Social Anthropology, Göteborg University, for enabling me to see anthropology and anthropological concepts in a fresh new light. I would also like to thank Priscilla Ringrose for her time, patience and instructive suggestions during the editing process, and the editorial board of the *Polemos* journal for allowing me to use and to extend some ideas previously published in my article "Od politike razlika do politike prostora: posljedice rata na društveni život u Vukovaru".[71]

[71] *Polemos*, vol. 5, No. 1-2, pp. 99-115.

Previous issues of TSEECS

No. 1 Michael David-Fox, Masquerade: Sources, Resistance and Early Soviet Political Culture. May 1999

No. 2 Gábor Klaniczay, The Annales and Medieval Studies in Hungary. August 2000

No. 3 Mark B. Adams, Networks in Action: The Khruschev Era, the Cold War, and the Transformation of Soviet Science. October 2000

No. 4 Frode Overland Andersen, Fragile Democracies: A Study of Institutional Consolidation in Six Eastern and Central European Democracies 1989-1997. November 2000. ISBN 82-995792-0-1

No. 5 Jon Raundalen, Indianeren som westernhelt. En studie av den østtyske westernfilmen (The Indian as a Western Hero. A Study of the East German Western-films). In Norwegian, with an English Summary of 11 pages. February 2001. ISBN 82-995972-2-8

Nr. 6 György Péteri, ed., Intellectual Life and the First Crisis of State Socialism in East Central Europe, 1953-1956. November 2001. ISBN 82-995792-3-6

Nr. 7 Victoria de Grazia, American Supermarkets versus European Small Shops. Or how transnational capitalism crossed paths with moral economy in Italy during the 1960s. ("Approaches to Globality" sub-series). March 2002.

Nr. 8 Catriona Kelly, "The Little Citizens of a Big Country": Childhood and International Relations in the Soviet Union ("Approaches to Globality" sub-series). March 2002

Nr. 9 Scott M. Eddie & Christa Kouschil, The Ethnopolitics of Land Ownership in Prussian Poland, 1886-1918: The land purchases of the Aussiedlungskommissionen. May 2002.

Nr. 10 Knut Andreas Grimstad, The Globalization of Biography. On Multilocation in the Transatlantic Writings of Witold Gombrowicz, 1939-1969 ("Approaches to Globality" sub-series). June 2002.

Nr. 11 Vjeran Pavlaković, Sabrina P. Ramet, and Philip Lyon, Sovereign Law vs. Sovereign Nation: The Cases of Kosovo and Montenegro. October 2002.

Nr. 12 Ingmar Oldberg, Uneasy Neighbours: Russia and the Baltic States in the Context of NATO and EU Enlargements. December 2002.

Nr. 13 György Péteri, ed., Patronage, Personal Networks and the Party-State: Everyday Life in the Cultural Sphere in Communist Russia and East Central Europe. March 2004. ISBN 82-995792-4-4

Nr. 14 John Connelly, Reflections of Social Change: Polish Rural Sociology, 1930-1965. September 2004.

Nr. 15 Constantin Iordachi, Charisma, Politics, and Violence: The Legion of 'Archangel Michael' in Inter-war Romania. ISBN 82-995792-5-2

Nr. 16 János M. Rainer & György Péteri, eds., Muddling Through in the Long 1960s. Ideas and Everyday Life in High Politics and the Lower Classes of Communist Hungary. May 2005. ISBN 82-995792-6-0

Nr. 17 Jim Samson, Placing Genius. The Case of George Enescu. May 2006.

Nr. 18 György Péteri, ed., Nylon Curtain. Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe. August 2006. ISBN 82-995792-7-9

ISSN 1501-6684