Identities in War

Embodiments of Violence and Places of Belonging

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The article seeks to contribute to the ethnological debate on the meanings of space and place by analysing the processes of identity formation in the context of violence. The personal narratives on the lived experience of war in Croatia 1991–92 point to the prevalent tendency of situating identity in spatial terms: the dwelling place has been perceived as the basic identity category by civilians under siege. Such a tendency is highly liable to be used for nationalist causes, but here its pre-political character is pointed out. The examples of everyday interactions and communications either radically reduced or newly introduced due to the siege and shelling, outline a *wartime politics of identity* based not on choice, but on absence of choice, not on strategies of negotiation, but on strategies of survival.

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Physical Spaces and Emotional Places

The irony of the prevalent (national and international) media image of Croatia as a country of nationalists should be pointed out: it is the *discourse of nationalism* that is constantly being voiced, unlike the *lived experience of war* in 1991–92. That experience is held in the memory of the "forgotten majority" – civilians who were exposed to war dangers and manifold deprivations, uncertainties and fears, but neither became refugees, nor suffered any irreparable losses. The monovocal and unique national narrative on war makes use of the simplified and generalized experience of war victims – be it orphaned children, maimed soldiers or desperate refugees. The variety of experiences and responses of the civilians who are not recognized as victims tends to be forgotten in public discourse (ethnologists being the only ones trying to voice it so far). In that regard, the national narrative and personal narratives on war show considerable differences; in some cases they are even hardly compatible. Also, there is a cleft within the unified complex of the narrative about the nation as victim, since there are direct war victims and those who met the war only on television screens: some parts of Croatia were not physically endangered by war except for men who were called up and sent to the attacked parts of the country.

One of the elements of the ideal nation is a territory where physical space is turned into cultural space. As Löfgren (1996:162–163) points out, the normative strength of the national model of culture is easily detected in the recent processes of construction of new regional and local identities in Europe. The cultural grammar of nationalism underlies the attempts to turn economic regions into cultural ones, or economic space into emotional place.

Introducing the example of Croatia in 1991–92, this article deals with the processes of turning physical spaces (of one's town, region and country) into emotional places, yet in a context radically different from the ones usually implied in the ethnological discussion of the ways in which the local and the national constitute each other, as well as in the wide range of literature on how national identities are constructed in the realms of everyday life. It is the context of violence imposed on civilians who

remained in their homes in the besieged towns and thus endured armed attacks jeopardizing their lives.

Regarding the dominant political discourse in Croatia, the "grammar of nationalism" has defined the wartime identification processes at national level. However, this article aims to show that these processes should not be understood as antecedent to the perceptions of physical spaces as extremely important emotional places, as they are formulated in the personal narratives about war. I am referring here to the narratives collected for the purpose of my dissertation entitled "Culture and Fear: Wartime Everyday Life in Croatia 1991–92", but the same holds for the refugee children's autobiographical essays quoted in Prica & Povrzanović 1996, as well as for the numerous autobiographical accounts of war published in Croatia since 1992.[1] I collected private letters written by people from Zagreb in late 1991, and interviewed women and men of different age and of different social background (mostly Croats, but also Serbs) from Dubrovnik and the Dubrovnik region, Vukovar, Županja, Vinkovci surroundings, Osijek, Zadar, Šibenik and Zagreb in the period from 1991 to 1996. The ethnographic details presented in this article come mostly from the personal narratives on war by people from Dubrovnik collected in early 1996.

Encountering Violence

Identities do not exist prior to social practices and cultural patterns which negotiate and regulate them. This common ethnological point should be taken into consideration also in the context of ruptures of everyday regularities in a war-torn society. Indeed, they are reflected in radical social and cultural changes that bring out new dynamics of identification, very likely to be interpreted as of nationalist origin. Spaces in the grip of war are at the same time political spaces and actual locations of struggle. In this article, *the lived experience of violence* is recognized as an – undesired, but almost inevitable – "essentializing" category which decisively defines identities in spatial terms. The ethnographic accounts in the following chapters will offer some insights into the multilayered na-

ture of space-bound identity formations in war. I shall try to highlight the complex dynamics of the "essentialized" sense of belonging to one's home town and home region.[2]

It is important to stress here that the (ab)use of the lived experience of violence, as well as the possible direct engagement of war victims in nationalist projects, happens only subsequently (and the latter does not happen necessarily). Although the war-induced rooting of identity in spatial categories was a remarkably present theme in their narratives, none of the interviewed persons expressed nationalist essentialism. Their narratives reveal a multiplicity, diversity and complexity of experience that challenge the uniqueness of the national narrative. Their first-hand knowledge about the war sufferings is retained as bodily memories. It gives them a credit of authenticity that needs no media-phrases.

People from towns under direct and constant attack faced a dilemma of escaping or staying behind. In some towns in some phases of the war there was also an official ban on leaving, not only for men who could be called up, but also for women, except for the mothers of small children. Men could be legally prosecuted; women could lose their jobs. But for the majority of people such bans were not the reason for their decisions to stay behind – often it was possible to find an excuse (medical or other) legally good enough to leave. Most of the persons I interviewed did stay in their towns during the entire war regardless of such bans. They felt that it would be absurd to leave their homes, unless they experienced a fear too strong to be dealt with.

"People have different capacity for suffering", a woman in her thirties said, summarizing the knowledge she acquired in war. None of the interviewed persons condemned those who fled for being *unbearably* afraid for their very lives, especially not if they knew them personally. "A friend of mine just saw a bus burning next to her house, and the other day she fled away", another woman from Dubrovnik said with astonishment, but in an understanding manner, although she herself decided not to flee regardless of the fact that her house was damaged and her twin brother almost killed in it. The strik-

ing feature of all the narratives is tolerance towards human weakness. Although the majority of those who stayed behind did not break down, but endured, the interviewed people found it very important to talk about those whose strength and optimism – especially in the shelters – helped the others not to succumb to panic or to laming pessimism.

A modest, humble definition of bravery emerges from their narratives, very distant from the concept of the bravery of the battlefield heroes shared on the basis of war films. The bravery that people recognized and admired in the context discussed here was defined in relation to wartime everyday life in which it was crucial to keep up as many peacetime routines as possible. All these routines were space-bound: the very act of remaining in the besieged towns, not going to the shelters, but staying at home during attacks, going to work regularly, exposing oneself to danger in order to help the community, for example, by fetching water or repairing other people's damaged roofs. They were crucial not only as a means of resistance, but also as a means of linking the imposed (abnormal) identity of war victim to the identity aspects rooted in peaceful normality. In Dubrovnik, literally everyone stressed that they had freshly baked bread every morning. "Honour to the bakers!" "All thanks to them!" These phrases repeatedly revealed true admiration for the people who helped their fellow citizens keep the material link to their prior life in peace – a link that incorporated the promise of the persistence of normality and the hope for a peaceful future. A loaf of bread placed on an improvised "kitchen" table in the shelter became an oasis of normality. The smell and the taste of warm bread (people risked their life to go outdoors to buy it) enabled the embodiment of the (minimal) experience of normality which proved to be of extreme emotional importance.

Many of the narratives explicitly reveal awareness of the meaning of people's lives being anchored in the spaces of their daily interactions encompassing family, friends and work. I met a woman who did not leave Dubrovnik after her flat became impossible to live in because of the damage caused by shelling, but only after her 15-month-old daughter developed dangerous diarrhoea and an ear inflammation by staying in one of the fortresses which served as a public shelter. Arriving at her friend's home in Italy, she couldn't recognize herself in the mirror: for fear, tension, and lack of sleep, she lost a fifth of her normal weight. The shrinking of safe space in her town was reflected in the shrinking of her body.

On the one hand, culture was an efficient means of coping with deprivation, fear and anxiety in war. On the other hand, it proved to be a means not strong enough to encounter lethal violence.

Preserving the minimal normality – and not joining some rhetoric – became the main objective of people under threat. While the efforts to keep their world "everyday" had worn most of them down physically and emotionally, the breeding ground for nationalism seems to have remained distanced from the everyday suffering. Many of the interviewed persons claimed that "the greatest" or "the loudest" Croats (meaning nationalists) were the ones to flee first when their towns became endangered by the approaching war. Accordingly, the fact that they stayed behind was seen as a sufficient proof of their love and support for Croatia. All the interviewed persons even seemed to be inclined to diminish their own suffering (which the promoters of nationalist rhetoric would very likely make use of in the contest-like discourse on "who did more for Croatia"). However, that might also be due to the tragedies of the inhabitants of Vukovar, Sarajevo and several other places in Bosnia, which in the meantime set new standards for "real" suffering.

Attachment and Isolation

For the people encountering military attacks, their towns and home regions were not political spaces negotiable in war, but primarily sites of traumatic experience which became places of isolation from the outer world. The everyday was reduced to a minimum. Physical isolation was accompanied by informational isolation: no newspapers could arrive in the towns under heavy attacks, people could not watch television due to lack of electricity. "Radio was our

saviour, it was our link to the world!" However, the batteries were scarce: all the heads in the shelter were pressed together above one transistor at the time, which was switched off immediately after the news was over. Telephone lines, if working at all, could not be used in most shelters. After major attacks it happened regularly that there was a system breakdown when too many people tried to call at the same time, eager to find out what had happened to their friends and relatives.

Afterwards, the experience of isolation was reflected in the incapability – perceived as the impossibility – of communicating experience in narration: "I cannot describe that situation"; "it can't be told"; "it cannot be felt by anyone else but those who lived through it". Sometimes it was intensified by a bitter remembrance of the initial frustration caused by isolation: "Our own misfortune seemed to be so great that we believed we would become the centre of the world at that very instant. However, most people out of Vukovar could not even presume, and definitely could not know what was happening to us" (Mirković 1997:119).

Some people "carried the isolation with them" when leaving the attacked towns, turning the space of isolation into a place longed for. A young woman who left Dubrovnik to help her sister, who was about to give birth in Germany, spent two weeks in Hannover in January 1992 and could not wait to come home. She was returning to a town without water and electricity, endangered by repeated shelling. Her sister returned with her, with a newly born baby and a son of two. "I came from horror into luxury, real luxury… […] And then, a week after my sister gave birth, a German journalist was in Dubrovnik. I saw it on TV: Dubrovnik – the sun in Dubrovnik… I knew it was damaged, I knew what it looked like, I knew what was happening inside, but the sun and the sea – for me it was the most beautiful place in the world! If I only could fly over like a bird that very moment, I would be the calmest. […] My sister just looked at me – she saw me standing up. I went to the kitchen, lit a cigarette, I was on the verge of crying. In fact, I had tears in my eyes – I was crying for the Town… […] I think it was nostalgia. I cannot spend much time anywhere else. Nostalgia drags me back, it simply ties me here…"

Physical distance did not mean emotional absence or exclusion. The same woman had a wonderful time in Barcelona some years earlier and planned to visit it again on the occasion of the Olympic Games in 1992. However, such an idea became absurd due to the war ("… because I could imagine how beautiful it would be there"). She knew she would not be able to be really present in another place, not to mention the impossibility of enjoying some sports competition. The rupture between physical presence and emotional distance would be hardly bearable for her, as it was for many people who became refugees in order to keep their children out of danger, but left their friends and families behind.

A man from Čilipi, a village close to Dubrovnik, took his two 80-year-old aunts to Dubrovnik in the first days of the occupation of Dubrovnik region. They remained in exile just for one day: "Our love for the house and for the animals dragged us back. We couldn't stay there, we returned."

The interviews with the inhabitants of Dubrovnik offered many examples of the simultaneous perceptions of the town as symbolic space and as the place where their friends and family lived. Both were (and are) invested with strong feelings. Some people claimed that they are in love with the town; all of them were sincerely concerned for the monuments in war.

"In war, everyone is ours", an old woman told me. Another, much younger, woman from Dubrovnik, confirmed the aforementioned statement about feeling like a family with all the people inhabiting not only her home town, but also the whole region: "You want to protect yourself, your family, mother, father, sister, brothers, close friends, distant friends, acquaintances… […] It is not a matter of you staying alive. Because, if everyone is to die, and you should stay alive – what kind of life would that be? Terrible, terrible. And then you think: if I only had some power, I would build a glass cupola – so the sun could enter, but no shell. All the shells would be warded off and no one would be hurt, but not only in Dubrovnik – in the whole region from Konavle to Ston. That was

the battlefield line, wasn't it? Later I understood that I was not the only one to think like that."

Danger and Destruction

In peace, home is the site of our individuality, the space of the everyday, the place of intimacy, the symbol of safety. In war, home is easily transformed (de-formed!) into a place of danger. The former space of personal control and pleasure is de-familiarized into a place of anxiety and deprivation.

Home was turned into the place of utmost fear for the woman from the occupied Čilipi who was hiding in a small cellar with her sister and a neighbour – all in their eighties, ceasing to breath and hoping that the soldiers who entered her house would not discover them.

It was a place of fear for a young woman in Zagreb during her first blackout: "… you feel like a tinned fish, totally isolated from the outer world, you try to suppress the first symptoms of claustrophobia which are intensified when you hear the planes again. Dead silence afterwards…"

However, for some people, home was the place where they "felt safest" regardless of real danger. At the same time, it was the site of their silent resistance and the last resort of their dignity: they never went to the shelters and were proud of it afterwards.

As if trying to embody the very liminality between the place of resistance and the place of victimization, an old man from Dubrovnik refused to go to the shelter: he persisted in sitting in the armchair he constantly sat in throughout his old years. "It was crazy – we all could have got killed for not wanting to leave him alone, but he wouldn't move", his grandson said. For that old man, his home – the space he stubbornly refused to abandon to the attackers – was reduced to a single armchair. (He finally left it after a shell hit the roof and damaged the living room, although not hurting anyone. He died soon afterwards, just a week after his wife passed away. "He decided to die", his grandson said. "He didn't care any more.")

For numerous people their own homes became the sites of first-hand encounters with violence. "A part of my house was set on fire. Then it was hit by three shells, so that the whole roof, the whole ceiling was knocked down. It was all soaked by rain afterwards… Winds, rain, everything…"

"A shell flew over our blockhouse and landed two hundred metres away. A day before it flew into the neighbour's flat, some ten metres from our kitchen table. Well, the table jumped up some ten centimetres from the floor and then we fled to the shelter, of course. We forced the neighbour into the shelter first, and then we went, too. He was in his kitchen with the child – he hid the child under a chair. He was totally lost, he didn't know where he was… It burst into the sleeping room, three or four metres from them. But the next day, almost at the same time, round three p.m., another shell burst through the roof. I was down there at the entrance. There were at least twenty of them, falling in a radius of thirty metres. [...] They could not flee into the cellar where we were hiding – it's rather deep and the walls are thick, too – but it was very dangerous, I can't say it wasn't. The neighbour in the blockhouse next to ours had a bullet shot into his flat while he was at home. From some sniper: they were just three kilometres away [the attackers holding the hill behind Dubrovnik]."

In Dubrovnik, just as in many other war-torn towns, people mentioned shells demolishing the rooms they had left only half a minute earlier. But deadly dangers have been met by so many on so many occasions that the people I interviewed hesitated to talk about it at length. We are alive, we did not even get injured – so what is there to tell about? "*Everyone* has a story like that." However, I had the feeling that what really made them feel uneasy when asked about the details of their close escapes, was the humiliation implied in the passive position of civilians exposed to danger they could not do anything about, but try to hide from. (They were well-aware of the fact that most of the – improvised – shelters could save them only from shrapnel, but not from direct hits.) An old couple was unaware of an unexploded shell in their garden: it was their two-year-old grandson who pointed it out many days after the shelling.

So many "impossible" things have been happening in the war, that people understood that, just as they stayed alive by chance – they could easily have been killed by chance, too. They felt embarrassed about the possibility of such a death with no reason, no meaning, no dignity.

Geographies of Symbols

"Because of all those detonations I was constantly dropping the food – eggs, spinach, rabbit-livers. Eventually, I wasn't taking my meals with much appetite. The unbearable noise also broke many of my flower-pots, the thin glasses and some other delicate things that simply could not stand the violent attacks. At the time of disappearing of Logorište, my kitchen floor turned into a scale model of a battlefield" (Lukšić 1992:17).

The spaces of war are multiple symbolic spaces, but they are primarily perceived as safe or dangerous, free or occupied, our or their spaces. *Our* spaces are not only sites of actual resistance; they can become crystallization points of cultural identity. In the case of Dubrovnik, it is not only the fact of it being the prominent element of national heritage and thus a symbol invested with much pride. There is also the insiders' symbolization: the Town is a prestigious symbol of local identity not only for its inhabitants but also for the people from the whole Dubrovnik region. (Among all Croatian towns, only the historical core of Dubrovnik is called the Town with a capital T – not only locally, but nationwide.) In the war, i.e. because of the war, new local geographies of symbols have been outlined, too. New meanings are ascribed to some formerly a-cultural spaces in the surrounding nature: to a wood or a rock where a decisive defence has been performed, or where someone's son or friend has been killed. (I was told about "the Calvary" of the father who repeatedly visited a wood above Dubrovnik in search for the material remainders of his son – a jacket, a bag and a necklace. Due to the dangerous minefields, he was allowed to do so only three months after his son's death.) Not the grave, but the place of death of the young Dubrovnik photographer Pavo Urban, who "believed that a good photograph is worth dying for", has become a place of remembrance of the war for many of his friends. "This whole space feels that bad energy. In Dubrovnik it seems that nothing has been terribly destroyed, but in fact at every metre you have a certain trace of that. It is present in the air. You can't… People quickly get used to everything, but for me… Still, when I pass where Pavo was killed – you have to think about it every time, do you understand?"

During the war, the regular evening walk on the main street was not only an effective adaptation strategy of keeping the minimal everyday routines (people were walking on the "safe" north side of Stradun – the central street of the historical core; when it became too dangerous, they used one of the parallel streets). It was also a way of maintaining its symbolic value as an element of Mediterranean urban life. The town was perceived as home not only in a symbolic, but also in a physical sense. People in Dalmatia spend a considerable part of day on the street: they did their best to keep that feature of their way of life in spite of the war. Clinging to the space they used to inhabit at least made them culturally visible: it was at the same time a symbolic and a practical effort against victimization.

Keeping up such everyday routines is thus also to be interpreted as not consenting to the violence-imposed transformation of their hometown into a "common" place of destruction. For it has (naïvely?) been perceived as "protected" by numerous UNESCO flags denoting the world's cultural heritage – which in fact served as precise demarcations for the attackers. When crying the day after 6 December 1991 ("everyone was crying in the streets, men, women, old people, kids…"), Dubrovnik people realized that the historical city walls guarantee no protection from a Vukovar-like destiny. "The day after it was ghastly. We all went out the day after, we all wept at Stradun. It really seemed as if the Town was turned into ruins."

However, their tears (together with the tears of people throughout Croatia) were not so much expressing the fear of ultimate destruction, as the collective shock of the lost illusion that their place could be excluded from war on the basis of being either a town with no military signifi-

cance, or the internationally recognized site of cultural heritage. They were forced to understand that no symbols can stop the war: culture cannot overpower violence.

After the "pilgrimage" on the Stradun street full of broken glass, cracked stone and smells of burning, a young woman washed and wiped her face: the towel was all grey from the ashes covering her face, her hair, her clothes. The body and the town melted into a single physical experience of war.

Becoming the Place

Trying to reach a distant neighbour's house in order to feed the deserted animals she felt pity for, the eighty-year-old woman from the occupied Čilipi had to spend the night in a wood that wasn't any more: she and her sister planned to hide in it, but it was burnt down. So, when the soldiers were passing by, they were lying on the ground and covering each other with ashes ("… on our heads, everywhere – to look like the nature around us, so that they wouldn't kill us"). They blended into the place. Clearly, it was not the "national soil" the old woman was telling me about, but the soil that saved her life enabling mimicry in the moonlight.

The fact of embodiment of experience can be a vantage-point for rethinking the human existential situation. It definitely should be considered crucial in the analysis of the cultural outcomes of the lived encounters with violence. In the context of shelling, bombing, injuring and killing, the body indeed "appears as a threatened vehicle of human being and dignity" (Csordas 1994:4) – the physical aspects of body are prior to the social ones. Violence constitutes a new reality, making people desperately focus on the here and now. Such a here-and-now presence secludes the persons encountering the same deprivations and fears from those from the outer world who do not share their war experience. At the same time, it creates a space recognized as authentic, providing a sense of *communitas*. Although not offering a possibility of action in terms of fighting the attackers back, it is empowering individual dignity and giving meaning to resistance in the form of collective persistence, stubbornness and defiance.

The direct encounters with war destruction and dangers made people perceive their homes and towns as emotional places "where a truer truth prevails, located outside habitual definitions" (Frykman 1997:16). The personal narratives on the war in Croatia 1991–92 reveal that identity formations of people who encountered violence did not depend on public (media-promoted) ideological input, but on the *situated practice* of saving and preserving one's own body and the immediate material surroundings of one's home.[3]

Although discussing an issue which in comparison with the kinds of bodily experiences people are exposed to in a war situation achieves almost utopian qualities – namely, self-inflicted torment through intense training – Frykman (1997) offers an interpretation that helps to shed more light also on the processes of identity formation in war, which have significant physical demarcations. Understanding the body not as a passive object embodying ideas, but as the very centre of human experience, he points out that "a new bodily awareness cannot be slimmed down to interpretations about other areas of that person's life" (Frykman 1997:14). Here, most importantly, these "other areas" are all kinds of public space in which the individual is exposed to nationalist discourse. The "new bodily experience" acquired in war is the experience of siege, radically restricted mobility, shrivelling in shelters, coldness, bodily smells due to the lack of water, constant tension due to manifold fears, as well as the tiny pieces of shrapnel carried around in civilians' and soldiers' bodies.[4]

The new identification processes started at the intersection of the bodily experience of violence and the people's reflection on that experience. The former Yugoslav ideology of "brotherhood and unity" which insisted on South Slavic "kinship" among its six nations, has succumbed to an overnight deconstruction when the members of one nation started to kill the members of the other.[5] Well-known spaces became invested with new meanings. In an essentializing manner totally bound to space, people were attacked on the basis of their mere physical presence in a certain town. So, paradoxically, the first civilian killed in Dubrovnik, by a shell that

flew into his own flat, was a Dubrovnik poet who happened to be a Serb. At the same time, the attackers were aiming at their victims' ethnic affiliation: in the occupied parts of Croatia, people have been killed or expelled simply for being Croats. Nevertheless, even the "real" war victims do not necessarily adopt the nationalist discourse. Many of them hesitate to use the dichotomizing models of interpretation of their war experience, the ones that point to the "evil otherness" of the entire Serbian nation (cf. Prica & Povrzanović 1996).

Imposed Identities

Although being sites of "multiple disjunctions in need of politicization", identities, after all, at the same time are "unities that enable life" (Connolly 1991, quoted in Daniel 1996:15). Rethinking the usual analytical contempt for essentialism could help to understand that the war-induced essentialism discussed here is a part of an *imposed* identity formation process. The strong sense of belonging to one's town, region and nation as revealed in the personal narratives on war, is a "constructed essentialism" based on a cluster of responses to war violence. It does not primarily emerge from the concepts of nation, history and heritage, but out of the violent destruction of concrete life-worlds of the highest emotional, but also practical, material importance as places of people's daily interactions.[6]

Also, the endeavour of eagerly denouncing nationalism has made some scholars hasten to conclusions about the role of insider ethnologists recognized as "compilers of (the others') testimonies for an ethnography of war and exile (not to say another memorial marathon of others' suffering)… in favor of the nation state" (Greverus 1996:282). They seem to be "guilty by affiliation" regardless of the meaning their work may have in confronting nationalism in their country.[7]

Sharing the general interest in how national identities are constructed in the realms of everyday life, this article is based on such an ethnography of suffering, offering examples of everyday interactions and communications either radically reduced or newly introduced due to the siege and shelling. It outlines a *wartime politics of identity* based not on choice, but on absence of choice, not on strategies of negotiation, but primarily on strategies of physical survival.

The war has relativized the totality of people's lives – it made them highly aware of the relativity, constructedness and frailty of their life-worlds. Therefore, the lived experience of fear, loss and destruction in war may be seen as an unintended, yet extremely efficient kind of "transformation experience" (cf. Cohen & Taylor 1992) – a crucial, basic, overwhelming experience which results in reorientation in space and reevaluation of social bonds and routines. The individuals' conceptions of identity are revised due to (imposed) discontinuity. Subsequent interpretations – in personal narratives on the one hand and in public discourse on the other – interfere with the authenticity (or the questioned "purity") of war experiences. Researchers are thus confronting manifold epistemological problems. However, such problems should not deter us from recognizing different coexisting and interrelated field realities as appropriate courts for understanding the various levels of power and struggle (cf. Nordstrom & Martin 1992:14). Only detailed, ethnography-based answers to the questions about the connections between national identity and identity categories changed through the quandaries of war experience can help to understand local ambivalences associated with the nation state as a generator of conflict, anxiety and discontent (cf. Povrzanović & Jambrešić Kirin 1996). The narrative topos of the native place or the dwelling place should not be "elegantly" dismissed by analytically nailing it into the frame of national mythologies: it does not necessarily point to the identity based in the "sacred national soil" (cf. Prica & Povrzanović 1996).

In this context, the definition of *segregated identity* produced "when we identify ourselves and affirm our difference without this being recognized by the others" (Melucci 1996:34) helps to highlight the example of Dubrovnik in 1991–92. People who remained under siege recognized themselves as different from their fellow-citizens who left the town, but it was the latter who became "the voice of Dubrovnik" in

the outer world. In the international media, they called for help for the monuments. In the national media, they helped to promote the image of a "hero town", very much in accordance with Dubrovnik being one of the key symbols of Croatian national identity.[8]

The space-related identity imposed on people who faced the attacks on Dubrovnik thus became double-segregated in an inversion of the aforementioned definition. They were either forgotten in the shadow of historical buildings, or turned into mute "heroes" inhabiting the space saturated with symbols, which served as a trump card in political negotiations. Indeed, the international shock provoked by the heavy bombarding of the historical core of Dubrovnik on 6 December 1991 proved to be a decisive gain in Croatia's struggle for recognition. The people I interviewed were well aware of that, but at the same time very bitter about the "heroization" that almost entirely deprived them of the chance to voice their encounters with violence, fear and grief (even in the local media). It forced them to step directly into history, their personal war experiences disappearing in symbols.

Ethnographies based on personal narratives of war may therefore prove to be crucial in the process of understanding that identities based on experience, situation and resistance are primarily defined by changed political landscapes and *lived encounters of violence*. Such identities are not only more persistent than those created and enhanced by nationalist rhetoric, but also, under close ethnological scrutiny, do not offer any good reason for being reduced to national(ist) kitsch. In the context of war destruction, the physical space in which peaceful everyday life has been situated becomes emotionally even more important: it is precisely where the struggle to preserve the minimum of normality crucial for physical, psychological and cultural survival is *taking place*.

Notes

1. An especially important (and so far most insightful from the ethnological point of view) autobiographical account on the war in Croatia is Alenka Mirković's book (1997) on pre-war situation, the siege and the fall of Vukovar.

2. Thomas J. Csordas points to the theoretical recognition of *location*, that is, "non-equivalent positions in a substantive web of connections. The emphasis on location accepts the interpretative consequences of relatedness, partial grasp of any situation, and imperfect communication" (1994:2). Although location is considered primarily as a spatial category in this article, it goes without saying that the interpretative consequences of relatedness, partiality and hindered communication are implied in any discussion of war experiences.

3. It is therefore not surprising that many of the interviewed persons were very critical about the roles played by local and national political élites who used their lived experience in political negotiations, not to mention the disgust caused by some experience-detached media presentations of their life in war, especially by "see-and-run" journalists. (At the public presentation of Alenka Mirković's book (1997), the author made a joke when explaining her choice of the journalist who was one of the presenters. She said that she wanted to find a journalist who spent more than four hours in Vukovar in late 1991.) Regarding the rather touchy political implications, together with the still not forgotten lesson from the communist period that it is dangerous to criticize the regime, their statements could be considered very brave. However, people who met ultimate life dangers and did so because they believed that staying behind is a form of efficient resistance to the war enemy, are not only morally entitled to criticize the (ab)use of their efforts, but also cannot really fear the dangers that seem to be trivial compared to the ones they met in war.

4. The parents of an eleven-year-old girl who got some shrapnel under her eye took her to Zagreb and to Vienna, only to have the Dubrovnik surgeons' opinion confirmed: it had to be left there.

5. For a short outline of pre-war situation in Croatia, as well as of the major political and cultural traits of the former Yugoslavia, see the chapter on history, ideology and symbols in Povrzanović 1997. For ethnographic accounts on wartime everyday life see Čale Feldman, Senjković, Prica (eds) 1993.

6. The antiessentialism advocated by ethnologists and anthropologists should not be directed "at what is essentially human – a debatable and refinable list that should include, besides language, a sense of dignity, a need to love and be loved, the capacity to reason, the ability to laugh and to cry, be sad and be happy" (Daniel 1996:198).

7. An admirably eloquent and complex insight into

the burdens dealt with in the endeavour of writing an ethnography (or "anthropography") of violence has recently been offered by Valentine E. Daniel, who reminds us that "it is often forgotten that even ordinary life is not transparent to theory. Violence just brings this point home" (Daniel 1996:6).

8. Since autumn 1991, the identity of suffering has, for well-known reasons, been "reserved" for Vukovar. Dubrovnik, also occupying the central position in the national narrative, is ascribed the identity of pride and recognized as *the site* of resistance, although the same pride, endurance and resistance were met in many other Croatian towns, too.

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