

# Violence and the Re-discovery of Place

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Violence imposed on a place bears not only the implicit challenge to the identities associated with it, but it also provokes responses related to a sense of place. In the context of war, place suddenly matters in a more direct and more intense way. The uniqueness of the place based primarily on the social value it has for people becomes visible and reflected upon as concrete and at one with action and thought. In this article, personal narratives on war experiences in the 1990s by the civilians in Dubrovnik, are related to Edward S. Casey's propositions about every place being *encultured* and every culture being *implaced*. The tension is explored, between being "Europeans" and being "war victims" – two types of place-bound identity.

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Whilst collecting war-related narratives for the purpose of a doctoral thesis on dealing with fear in the context of everyday life in war-torn Croatia in 1991–92<sup>1</sup>, I talked to several people in Dubrovnik, a town on Croatia's Adriatic coast with some 60,000 inhabitants. My first question was about their most important war memories. The long narratives induced by this question were predominantly stories about air-raid alarms and shelters, about food, water and hygiene, about neighbours, friends and helpful strategies, about the importance of family ties and the care of children and elderly people, about obstinacy and courage. They outline a war-time politics of identity, based primarily on strategies of survival in the context of siege, military attacks, injury, death, and destruction. These narratives show that everyday routines were an efficient means of coping with war-provoked deprivation, fear and anxiety (see Povrzanović 1997).

Yet the unexpected part of the collected material – and it was its relative frequency that surprised me most – were the statements about people's love for their town, about the feeling of belonging to the region and about feeling like a family with all the people inhabiting the region

("In war, everyone is ours"; cf. Povrzanović 1997: 156–157). People that I interviewed explicitly revealed an awareness of their lives being anchored in the places of daily interactions: this awareness acquired in war was worth remembering and possible to talk about. The war-experiences mentioned above, that were reflected upon in the interview situations some years later, have been significantly embedded in the narration about belonging to the place. In this article, they are analysed in relation to the philosopher Edward S. Casey's claim that "however oblivious to place we may be in our thought and theory, and however much we may prefer to think of what happens in a place rather than of the place itself, we are tied to place undetachably and without reprieve" (Casey 1993: xiii).

## Violence and Belonging

There is certainly neither a singular theoretical connection between place and identity, nor an univocal interpretation of any place characterised by a social and historical complexity and multiple links with the "outer" world. However, it seems that violence imposed on a place bears not only the implicit challenge to the identities

associated with it, but also that it provokes responses “intimately related to a well-developed sense of place” (cf. Tangherlini 1999). A comparative reading of studies of such responses facilitates an understanding of their – as it seems – universal character.

Discussing the Los Angeles riots in 1992, the folklorist Timothy R. Tangherlini (1999) shows how the riots impacted a space that had been transformed into highly specified and culturally charged places by the people living and working in them. The story of the city had been forcibly rewritten by destruction: the landscape that had been defined by the spatial practices of people who worked and lived in it had been deeply scarred and, in some instances, reduced to rubble.

As shown by the anthropologist Michael Jackson (1995) writing about Australian Aborigines’ concepts and practices of appropriating the landscape, it is the activity of those who “own” the place that gives it value. They “own” the place, but at the same time “belong” to it: the value of an inhabited place is embodied by the people living in it.

The Aborigines’ mourning over their destroyed dreaming-places in the Australian landscape, the people whose dwelling and working places have been destroyed in the Los Angeles riots and the civilians trying to keep minimal everyday normality under violent attacks in the 1990s war in Croatia, have indeed been living in very different political, social, cultural and spatial circumstances. Yet, the reactions to the violence imposed on the places they define as their own seem to be similar. Together with the most obvious shock and anger, such violence intensifies the relationship between people and place and provokes a complex and very pronounced feeling of self being fused with the sense of place. Place suddenly matters in a more direct and more intense way; the uniqueness of the place is based primarily on the social value it has for people becomes visible and reflected upon.

Edward S. Casey (1993: 31) claims the truth of two related, yet distinct propositions: about every place being *encultured* and every culture being *implaced*.

“Implacement is an ongoing cultural process with an experimental edge. It acculturates whatever ingredients it borrows from the natural world, whether these ingredients are bodies or landscapes or ordinary ‘things’. Such acculturation is in itself a social, even a communal act. For the most part, we get into places together. We partake in places in common – and reshape them in common. The culture that characterises and shapes a given place is a shared culture, not merely superimposed upon the place but part of its very facticity. (...) The time of cultural implacement (and the time experienced in that implacement) is that which informs a place in concert with other human beings, through one’s bodily agency, within the embrace of a landscape” (Casey 1993: 31–33).

Taken as encultured, places are matters of experience (along with the bodies and landscapes that bound, and sometimes bind, them). We “make trial” of places in culturally specific ways. This principle, according to Casey, applies not only to the familiar places to which we are accustomed but also to faraway places that are visited.

It also applies to the places deprived of their peaceful familiarity. “If a position is a fixed posit of an established culture, then a place, despite its frequently settled appearance, is an essay in experimental living within a changing culture” (Casey 1993: 31). The experimental-experiential “trials” of the *places changed by violence* is the theme of this article.

A comparison of narrative presentations of such “trials” and the experiences and images framed by the concepts of *belonging to Europe* and *mobilising cultural heritage* might be seen as being too far-fetched. Namely, the newly raised awareness of belonging to the place in my examples indeed happened in an abnormal context. It happened in a situation of manifold reversed orders, in the context of restriction or annihilation of most peacetime and peaceful everyday coordinates of identity which imply preferences and choices.

Yet, while illustrating the re-considered, re-discovered and newly discovered relations to the place in which their everyday life has been situated, this article also relates the experiences



The Cathedral immediately after being hit, December 6, 1991. Photo: Milo Kovač.

of modern urban Europeans, for whom belonging to Europe has been an undisputed fact. It has been taken for granted not only by geographical location but first and foremost by inheriting, living with and taking care of some of the most distinguished objects of European architectonic cultural heritage.

The poet, Luko Paljetak, (web site <http://www.dubrovnik.hr>) expresses it like this:

“Like a sea-shell, full of the sounds of life, Dubrovnik lies on the shores of the Adriatic, in Croatia. (...) Without it, you will not be able to complete your mosaic of the world’s beauty. (...) Dubrovnik’s culture, literature, painting, architecture, music, philosophy, science and diplomacy are an integral part of the cultural heritage of Europe and the world. Dubrovnik is a cultural monument under UNESCO’s special protection. (...) Dubrovnik will be just the way you are yourself when you come to it. And you will leave it the way Dubrovnik is. Unique. Perfect.”

This quotation reveals an exalted insider’s conviction in the power of the place “to direct and stabilise us, to memorialise and identify us, to tell us who and what we are in terms of *where we are* (as well as where we are not)” (Casey 1993: xv; italics in original). It is thus valuable

to reflect upon the tension between two types of Dubrovnik inhabitants’ place-bound identity, between being “Europeans” and being “war victims”.

## The War

When the war started in Croatia in Summer 1991 – in the regions with a considerable Serbian population – the people of Dubrovnik did not feel threatened since their region was indisputably Croatian with regard to the ethnic affiliation of the vast majority of its inhabitants. No claims on “Serbian territory” similar to the ones in Eastern Slavonia were imaginable (see Goldstein 1999: 198–238). Besides, the border between the Dubrovnik region and the areas that are today parts of Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina dates from the Middle Ages. However, Dubrovnik was attacked a couple of months later.

As explained by the historian Ivo Goldstein (1999: 235), besides the strategic need to provide the future Greater Serbia with a suitable port, the attack on Dubrovnik was also motivated by the long-standing urge of the Hercegovinian and Montenegrin mountain dwellers to make this city Serbian. In 1991, the old propaganda which claimed that the citizens of Dubrovnik were never Croats, but Serbs who converted to

Roman Catholicism, was repeated in Serbia and Montenegro and among the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The plan was to cut Dubrovnik off from Croatia and force it to join Yugoslavia. The defenders of the city environs were few in numbers and badly armed, so the city was completely surrounded after several days of fighting, from the land, as well as from the sea. Electricity and water supplies were cut off by the enemy in the whole area (for about 90 days in 1991 and again for about 40 days in 1992).

Almost the whole immediate area of Dubrovnik was plundered and set on fire; most of the inhabitants of the surrounding villages fled to the town and found refuge in the hotels. Some 34,000 people were banished from the area, 12,000 of whom were staying in the town of Dubrovnik by the end of 1992. Literally everything they left at home was either destroyed or taken away by the enemy. People talked about even the sockets being taken out of the plundered and then burnt-down houses!<sup>2</sup> In 1991–92, a total of 7,757 dwellings (encompassing 1,353,501 square meters) in the area were damaged. 539 buildings were totally burned down, and 1,051 buildings suffered heavy damage (for the chronology of the wartime events in Dubrovnik, as well as for the photographs of the destruction see Foretić, ed. 2000).

Enemy soldiers positioned on the nearby hill were so close that some of the Dubrovnik inhabitants that I interviewed could see them from their flats through binoculars; and were therefore afraid of stepping out onto their balconies. Fear of snipers was even greater than the fear of shelling, which happened at irregular intervals. In the first months, shelling was directed at the modern parts of the city and to the hotels close to the town, but not at the city centre surrounded by the 15<sup>th</sup> Ct. walls and encompassing the most valuable historical buildings. Therefore, people were fleeing from the outer, attacked ring of the city to their friends and relatives living in the old centre. No one believed that the attackers would dare to harm it: they supposed that it was simply too exposed to the international gaze and too important to the international community.

However, in the fiercest and final attack on 6 December 1991, some six hundred shells fell on

the old city and hardly any of the historical buildings were left undamaged. People were killed while trying to extinguish the fires that raged throughout the town. Twenty-two people were killed and about sixty severely injured (out of 92 civilians killed and 225 wounded in the Dubrovnik area in 1991–92). Luxury hotels in the vicinity were completely destroyed. The Inter-University Centre was burned to the ground, including the library with some 25,000 books. The headquarters of the Dubrovnik Festival – an international summer festival of music and theatre – together with documentation collected over a period of 43 years, went up in flames.

On the same day, the UNICEF representative made a dramatic plea from Dubrovnik, and international notes of protest were sent to the Yugoslav Army's general in charge. Only a day later a cease-fire was agreed under international political pressure. *Europe* stopped the destruction of its monuments. However, the city area remained surrounded by the enemy army and a significant part of Dubrovnik Commune remained occupied. In June 1992, some of the historical monuments were hit in new attacks. With irregular breaks, civilians in the Dubrovnik region were experiencing heavy artillery attacks until July 20, 1992 when another cease-fire was signed. Yet, Dubrovnik airport was bombarded even in Summer 1994, and the city surroundings shelled in Spring and Summer 1995: people being wounded or killed. On August 28, 1995, the main director of UNESCO "warned world public opinion that the attacks on Dubrovnik, which was protected by the inter-national convention, are a war crime" and "reminded the world of the fact that the committers of such crimes must be responsible to the International Court in the Hague" (Foretić, ed. 2000: 116).

The general danger alert remained in force for the whole region until the end of September 1995, three and a half years after Croatia was internationally recognised as an independent state.

So much for the historical facts and frameworks. If interest is directed to the personal narratives mentioned above, the tendency to situate one's own identity in spatial terms is striking. This was significantly intensified due

to the lived encounters of war-violence. From the individual experiential point of view, the siege combined with military violence was indeed “nailing people down” to their dwelling place (the ones who decided not to leave; see Povrzanović 1997).

The phrase “down to earth” resounds here with its most literal implications.

On the one hand, military violence is, in a simple and very much down to earth way, about killing living beings and destroying buildings and natural landscapes.

On the other hand – and this is my focus of interest – people became aware of the importance of their physical position within the surrounding urban and landscape structure. They also became aware of their physical dependency on the surrounding nature (sea, plants and animals), but also on nature in terms of one’s own bodily potential, most importantly health and physical endurance.

When the shells were destroying the town, the buildings were not really a cultural heritage to be proud of; they only served to protect endangered bodies. When the circulation of goods was stopped because of the siege, the palm trees – a tourist area symbol *par excellence* – were chopped down and used for heating. When all the taps were dry in the town, the surrounding sea was not something to be appreciated for its beauty and economic potentials, but for saving people from a humiliating stink and infections. Thus, when talking about *non-mediated experiences* of the place, I talk about bodily experiences of the material world in which places are not merely bare positions in space, but “concrete and at one with action and thought” (Casey 1993: xiii).

New geographies were established in terms of safety and danger: of landscape, of the streets that had to be used e.g. when going to work or to collect water, and even of one’s own home, depending on a certain room’s exposure to potential shelling. During the shelling, the distances measured in meters mattered. A bathroom could be a good place to sleep in if it had no windows. The shape of the nearby hill, from which people in Dubrovnik were shot at, became extremely important too. It did matter in which part of the town one’s house was situated, and on which

floor the flat was. It did matter if one lived close to the sea or not, because 25 litre canisters are very heavy. It mattered very much if one had a traditional water collecting well in the garden, for that water was possible to drink. And so on.

In peaceful normality these common and often trivial experiences of basic safety, water, food and shelter are taken for granted and not reflected upon. However, in a context of violence, people are reminded of their central, existential importance. The sense of belonging to a place is thus intensified by the insights into one’s own dependency on the material qualities of the place. From the point of view of the civilian surrounded by danger, it is the physical qualities of place that are in the foreground, rather than the symbolic ones.

If violence happened to the people in Dubrovnik “by chance”, simply because they were civilians physically present in a place enmeshed in war, I would argue that their reactions did not come about by chance. These reactions follow a cultural logic that seems to reflect the potentials generally present in the relations of people to their dwelling places. In the experiential circumstances defined by violence, these potentials are realised as a pronounced feeling of belonging to the place, and seem to turn into people’s central emotional concern, next to the concern about survival.

## Belonging to Europe

Violence is not only re-inscribing the place in physical terms, through material destruction and creation of local geographies of more or less dangerous places. It is also imposing an overall definition of a place as an attacked or occupied place, as a military territory – a definition that has nothing to do with any wished for, chosen or worked upon definitions of the same place by its inhabitants. Needless to say, the perpetrators of violence have the upper hand: that is why the underlying experience of all civilians under siege is one of humiliation. The choices made in active efforts to oppose the imposed victim-identity are manifold. They might be successful in keeping – in a minimised form – the established forms of urban community and culture (see Povrzanović 1997), but they are



Consequences of the shelling of the Old Town (Stradun), December 7, 1991. Photo: Božidar Đukić.

framed by the overriding definition of place as a military territory to be threatened, shelled, bombed, set on fire, destroyed and/or appropriated, taken away from its “owners”. To quote a Croatian author, Dubrovnik was bombarded by “those who have no affective relation towards it and nor intellectual understanding of it. (...). If they cannot have it, they show clearly, they can destroy it” (Maroević 2000:78).

Who “owned” Dubrovnik when the war started? Was it Croatian or Yugoslav? Was it a European or a Balkan town? To who did the cultural heritage in Dubrovnik belong? Was its protection the responsibility of the town council or UNESCO?

Dubrovnik developed from a city commune

to an independent republic during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, and kept its independence until 1806, when it came under French rule. Later, as part of the Province of Dalmatia, it was subjected to Vienna. Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Dubrovnik Republic was renowned for its social, economic and cultural prosperity. Economic prosperity brought public standards of living similar to that in Western Europe. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century the streets of Dubrovnik were paved and it had sewerage and waterworks, the first system of quarantine in Europe for travellers to the city as a protection against epidemics, one of the first European orphanages, a hospital and a pharmacy (Goldstein 1999: 28f.). Dubrovnik was the first centre in which literature in the

Croatian language developed under the influence of humanism and Italian Petrarchan and Renaissance poetry. Many of the most important Croatian poets, playwrights and scientists came from Dubrovnik. Most of today's cityscape came into being in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The famous walls and towers were built in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Since the mid 1960s, when the tourist boom started on the East Adriatic coast, Dubrovnik has been the most internationally renowned tourist centre. The well preserved historical town is protected by UNESCO as a world cultural heritage centre.

Dubrovnik, sometimes dubbed Croatian Athens, is one of the key symbols of national identity: "the most complete and most distinguished model of civilisation, harmony and subtlety" (Maroević 2000: 78). The historical core of Dubrovnik is called "The Town" (*Grad* written with a capital G) even today, not only locally, but also nation-wide. The Dubrovnik Republic's flag with the word "Libertas" has also in the modern era been invested with pride. It is no surprise that the Croats saw its destiny in the 1990s war as one more – and internationally the most convincing – proof of their rightfulness in fighting for independence.

The popular image of Dubrovnik's history is well-captured in a letter to an Italian friend written by a Croatian art historian when Dubrovnik was under siege in 1991:

"It is a city with a long and rich Catholic tradition, the home of preachers and of the religious orders that promoted scholarship and architecture – Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits. Dubrovnik is a city – and expression – of the cosmopolitan, peaceful, maritime, hardworking, educated and cultured Croatia, the birthplace of great scientists and scholars, writers, sea captains, entrepreneurs, excellent cartographers, and engineers. And despite its historically justified cautiousness, it has always been a very open city, with a Mediterranean atmosphere, with excellent commercial and maritime communications, and displaying full religious and national tolerance. It was neither servile nor xenophobic. It was the home of German craftsmen, Greek and Spanish scholars, Italian physicians, lawyers and artists, painters

and architects. It was the home of people coming all over Croatia and from many parts of Italy. It was also the Frontier: Light on the Borders of Darkness" (Zidić 2000: 62).

The 1990s "frontier" destiny of Dubrovnik was at the same time seen as proof for the accuracy of the existing metaphor of Croatia's current otherness/westernness/betterness in relation to Serbia, namely the metaphor of *Europe* as opposed to *the Balkans*. It became especially relevant and was charged with heated political meaning.

The concern about "belonging to Europe" is widely shared in Eastern European countries. Mattijs van de Port (1998) offered an anthropological analysis of this wish on the basis of Serbian material gathered from 1991. He explains the concern with *being good enough to belong to Europe* as a result of peripheral position and the century-long instability due to many wars. He also discusses that anti-civilisatory extremes like war crimes are not only committed by Serbian paramilitaries, but also openly displayed by the international media, and the discourse opposing Europe which he met during his fieldwork. In that discourse, summarised in the statement "we don't want to be a part of Europe; we know the truer truths, we know what life is really about", Europe is presented as decadent, to say the least, and thus not worth an effort. The same has been mentioned by the Slovene philosopher Slavoj Žižek (1999) – in regard not only to Serbia, but also to the whole of the Balkans. Žižek calls this anti-civilisatory, thus also anti-European attitude "reversed racism", for it is a reverse image of the one that "Europe" has about the Balkans, within what he calls "reflexive", European politically correct racism.<sup>3</sup>

The ending of all formal relations with other former Yugoslav peoples in early 1992 with whom they had been sharing two states since 1918, was perceived by the Croats – and here a general statement is accurate – as a welcome ending of all their connections with the Balkans. The notion of the Balkans – regardless of the variety of its possible meanings – most often became reduced to the opposition of *Europe* in an essentialised, only seemingly explanatory, dichotomy, which is first and foremost a value statement.

*Europe* in the dichotomy *Europe vs. Balkans* stands for high culture, wealth and freedom. Europe is urban, middle-class, civilised, controlled, economical, Western and modern (Port 1998: 61).<sup>4</sup> *The Balkans* is the negative opposite: it means primitivism, poverty and wars. It is rural, peasant, wild, uncontrolled, wasteful, oriental and backward (Port 1998: 61). In Žižek's (1999) words, "there is the old-fashioned, unabashed rejection of the Balkan Other (despotic, barbarian, Orthodox, Muslim, corrupt, Oriental) in favour of true values (Western, civilised, democratic, Christian)".

The military attacks on Dubrovnik thus easily fitted into the metaphors of barbarians attacking civilisation, (Serbian and Montenegrin) primitives destroying (Croatian) cultural heritage, the Balkans invading Europe.<sup>5</sup> The following example was written by a Croatian theatre director who was one out of many intellectuals trying to make "the world" (most importantly, politically influential Western Europeans) understand what was happening in Croatia in 1991.<sup>6</sup> The underlying civilisation-debate is obvious:

"I cannot suppress my need to compare this siege with the conquering of Dubrovnik by Napoleon. It never occurred to Napoleon, that is to his Marshal Marmont, later "the Duke of Dubrovnik", to take the water away from the City. Because he did not come to conquer Dubrovnik in order to remove its cleanliness but to add another clean city to his large French Empire. (...) Dubrovnik could turn over the keys of the city to Marmont but it will not surrender to this army made up of 'dukes of *opanci*' (Serbian moccasins) because cleanliness cannot be surrendered to dirtiness, nor can harmony collapse before harshness. This is a collision between two mutually exclusive worlds, which are not joined in life or death" (Violić 2000: 19).

Such metaphors were not only adopted by the local people or Croats in general, but also by some Western intellectuals, like for example the Italian author Enzo Bettiza (1996):

"It is not by chance that this war (...) for the first time in European history united genocide and

culturocide. The straightforward strategy of 'ethnic cleansing' is permeated by the straightforward doctrine of 'cultural cleansing'. (...) The Serbian attempts to distort more than conquer Dubrovnik, to disfigure its architectonic beauty, its renaissance and Mediterranean uniqueness, is the most obvious example of that project of destroying of cultural symbols of a disliked Slavic civilisation, cosmopolitan, maritime, far from Orthodox cupolas, from Byzantine icons and from sacred documents written in Cyrillic letters. (...) In the Athenian Dubrovnik the Orthodox Sparta has rightfully recognised an extraordinary victim of a new cultural Holocaust that is maddening over the Balkans" (Bettiza 1996: 21–22).

During the war, many Croatian authors and intellectuals wrote in similar vein. The following examples depict the widely adopted understanding of the recent war, for which the special symbolic significance of Dubrovnik is central. The town is presented as "one of the symbols of ancient Europe and one of the deep roots of our Mediterranean origins", as a "metropolis of Croatian culture", as a counter-point to "the disorderly chaos of the eastern, Byzantine-Serbian and Turkish, hinterland", as "a model of an ideal city" in contrast to "the obscure Balkan market towns and brigands' holes", as being "separated from the dark and threatening forests and wild gorges of the distant hinterland by a belt of Arcadian harmony", as "everything that Serbia is not" (Zidić 2000: 62).

"The beauty of Dubrovnik has been transformed into 'harmony' (*skladnost*). The word derives from Dubrovnik and it expands the meaning of beauty, the notion of beauty, enriches it and adds its own character. No language (as far as I know) has this word with the meaning it has in Dubrovnik. The Dubrovnik 'skladnost' means not only refinement but also the connection the people have with the scenery and architecture of the City. (...) When juxtaposed with harmony, I detect a subtext of conflict before the walls of Dubrovnik, a layered meaning. Harshness vs. Harmony" (Violić 2000: 17).



## A Place in National Space

I could hardly expect people who experienced the siege and shelling to frame their narration by the metaphor of Dubrovnik as “Harmony” and “Croatia’s soul” or by the claim that “the beauty of Dubrovnik is a sublime announcement of the spiritual integrity of the Croats” (Violić 2000: 16f.). As I discussed elsewhere (Povrzanović 1997), peoples’ personal narratives about war reveal a multiplicity, diversity and complexity of experience that challenges the uniqueness of the national narrative. Their firsthand knowledge about the sufferings of war is retained as bodily memories. It gives them an authenticity that needs neither media phrases about their heroism, nor narrative frames of suffering for the nation.

The monovocal and unique national narrative on war makes use only of the generalised experience of war victims. Also, there is a cleft within the unified complex of the narrating about the nation as victim, since people from some parts of Croatia suffered terrible losses, while some other parts of the country were not physically affected by war.

Yet, with its cultural dimension and affiliated historical, social and political aspects that contribute to the “density” of a place (cf. Casey 1993: 33), for millions of people outside the town Dubrovnik was an important cultural space that was so easy to identify with rather than a physical space. This is not to say that no one was actively trying to help the civilians under siege, but the dominant media image (equal to the one used in international political negotiations) was not one of the town as a site of actual resistance, but as a crystallisation point of Croatian cultural identity. Culture indeed was put forward as the “third dimension” of place (Casey 1993: 31f.), that affords it a deep historicity and all the positive connotations mentioned earlier.<sup>7</sup>

The intensification of the idea of one’s own cultural relationship to a place also explains the highly emotional reactions to the destruction of Dubrovnik by people throughout Croatia. Although their position was that of an outsider in physical/experiential terms, the manifold identification possibilities relativised the notions of inside and outside (and that holds for

the general reaction of Croats to the 1990s war, regardless to where in Croatia or how far away from Croatia they lived). “Like ‘place’ and ‘space’, notions of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ depend upon cultural and historical context” (Hirsch 1997: 13). Although relatively separate and detached, these notions, just like the notions of (experiential) *foreground actuality* and (political) *background potentiality*, are never completely disconnected (cf. Hirsch 1997: 4).

The “here and now-ness” of Dubrovnik shelled and besieged was of course not excluding the town’s presence in the national narrative on the victimised Europeans expecting rescue. On the contrary, it was the very Europeaness of the town that was invoked as the ultimate reason for the hoped-for international political action.

Actual place was first and foremost a part of political space. The narrative of a victimised nation used in political representation was illustrated by visual images of destruction. The physical landscape being set on fire was heating the symbolic landscape of *Croatia in the flames of war*.

Within the political discourse on the rightfulness of Croatia’s independence, Dubrovnik acted as a prominent piece of national soil. Within the discourse on cultural heritage, it was the most significant proof of Croatia’s belonging to Europe. For the people within the besieged town, Dubrovnik was the site of civilian resistance, consisting of preserving the place’s (minimal) *normality*. People who stayed in the town kept up their everyday routines – including the evening walk along the main street in the historical centre – as a means of not consenting to the violence-imposed transformation of *their town* into a “common” place of destruction (cf. Povrzanović 1997: 158).

Being aware of the importance of cultural heritage, the insiders perceived the historical centre as “protected”. They firmly believed that *Europe* would not let the old town be damaged. As a reverse of the same coin, people also did not believe that the ones shooting at them would have the audacity to damage cultural monuments, for they would then “show their true face” to *the world*, and lose any political support. Yet, the “unbelievable” did happen: UNESCO flags denoting the world’s heritage eventually

served as precise demarcations of the most valuable objects to be destroyed. When crying a day after 6 December 1991 (“everyone was crying in the streets, men, women, elderly, kids”; “it really seemed as if The Town was turned into ruins”), people realised that the historical city walls guaranteed no protection from a common war destiny (Povrzanović 1997: 158). The illusion that their place could be excluded from war because of its cultural heritage was lost. They understood that symbols could not stop the war, that culture – neither in the form of heritage nor as an undisputed “belonging to Europe” – couldn’t overpower violent force.<sup>8</sup>

In the international media, outstanding individuals called for help for the monuments being destroyed only “two hours from London” – to quote the title of a British TV-documentary. In the national media, the image of a “hero-town” was promoted, very much in accordance with Dubrovnik as a national symbol. People who faced the attacks on the town were thus either forgotten in the midst of Heritage, or turned into mute “heroes” inhabiting a place in national space, saturated with symbols which served as a trump card in political negotiations. (Indeed, the international shock provoked by the bombardment of 6 December 1991 seemed to be a decisive gain in Croatia’s struggle for political recognition.) It made them step directly into history, their personal war experiences disappearing in symbols (cf. Povrzanović 1997: 161).

## Being There

Experiences described by the already mentioned spatial metaphors such as position, location, situation, centre or margin, inside or outside, open or closed, change radically due to the *lived experience of violence*. In this context, to Casey’s general claim that “what matters most is the experience of *being* in that place and, more particularly, becoming part of the place” (Casey 1993: 33) should be added a remark about an “essentialising” force of violent destruction, which makes place-related aspects of identities central (cf. Povrzanović 1997: 154). Simply, since people were attacked on the basis of their mere physical presence in the town, the physical

position that a person or a group is occupying while being exposed to violence becomes an unavoidable and non-negotiable starting point (metaphorically, but also literally!) of any identity creation.<sup>9</sup>

In 1991–92, it was obvious that the division of people whose life was at stake and those whose life was not, was not necessarily a dichotomising division. It was possible to see it also as a matter of gradation, as a spatial continuum within which people were occupying a place more or less close to danger. Only the similarity of the lived experience made the bridging of different “grades” of exposure to violence and the probability of dying possible (e.g. the experience of hiding in a shelter was the same for all people, regardless of the fact that in some places that was what the lived war experience consisted of and elsewhere people had many other, more dangerous encounters with violence). In November 1991, the *others* for people in Dubrovnik were even their closest family members who had left the town only a month before; in the meantime, the violence escalated in a way that radically changed the place. So, the ones who were not there could not know what it was like.

The variety of war experiences was not only related to space, but also to time: the war was *coming closer*, slowly but steadily. It was *creeping* from Konavle, the village area east of Dubrovnik, but even from a very short distance, from Lapad, the modern town quarters west of the centre, to the core of the town encompassed by the walls. For months, people staying in different parts of the town had a very different experience of attacks. It is hard to imagine, because these are very short distances indeed. More importantly, many people had even been covering the distances on a daily basis, e.g. going to work in a more dangerous part of the town and coming back home to a less dangerous part. Thinking in terms of a *microgeography of danger* makes a lot of sense here.

“I called work; my boss asked me: ‘F., how is it in The Town?’ I told her: ‘Listen, if Hell exists, then I am in it.’ She sometimes mentions it today, because the next morning I came to work and told that The Town was burnt down, that the

Inter-University centre was burnt down, and she was hiding there in the shelter... She did not believe it she did not believe a word, nothing, not any thing – as if I was in one world, and she in another. Because they didn't hear it in the hospital. Because it's far away, so it wasn't heard all that much. They knew that the wounded are brought in and everything, but they did not know what was happening *in reality*, because they were as if in a bunker.”

When narrating about meeting the war in *their town*, people did not talk about war as History, but about the experiences lived through in the shadow of historical monuments.

The Dubrovnik author, Feđa Šehović, who spent the war in the town, wrote about the parallel existence and the uniting of Dubrovnik as a symbolic space and as the place of his own everyday life (Šehović 1994: 32). The care for cultural monuments is characteristic for Dubrovnik people but at the same time they were worried about their friends and relatives living with, in, or next to these monuments.

The already mentioned regular walk along Stradun, the main historical street, was a means of keeping up an important aspect of urban everyday life. It was not an active resistance to the enemy by means of weapons or political engagement; it was not even an expression of obstinacy directed to the enemy. It was *obstinacy for one's own good*, aimed at preserving integrity by keeping up the segments of everyday life. At the same time, it was an act of non-acknowledging/denying the fact that the symbolic and the physical space of the city had been turned into a war-ground, i.e. degraded to an object of destruction. This non-acceptance of the imposed new, non-cultural or a-cultural categorisation of their place, was realised by *being there* and thus making certain peaceful meanings of the place happen.

The running across Stradun to the dangerous south side (the attackers could not shoot directly at the north side of the street from the hill they were occupying) – done by some teenagers – was also a way of denying that the enemy had an upper hand in the situation. To be there and ignore the danger was not primarily a statement of bravery turned against the enemy, but an

impetus for youthful competition within one's own physical and social space. In peace-time, a willing exposure to certain dangers could be called “crazy”. In war, the weight of meaning is added, since the very lives of the competitors are at stake.

In Mokošica, the western, modern part of the town, as well as in the town centre, several teenage boys were killed because they went out of the shelter in order “to see where the shells are falling”.

The places of suffering are spaces in isolation from the “outer”, peaceful world or from places closer to peace. In narration, that experience of isolation is often expressed as an impossibility of communicating experience to the ones who have not been there: “it can't be told” (cf. Povrzanović 1997: 156).

“I was literally stumbling, like a drunkard. I look at the house: is it possible, it's my mother's colleague's, a teacher's, house – burnt down completely! The policemen standing there, sawing the tears in my eyes, and sawing me zigzag left and right, staggering, they were stepping out of my way.”

“It was ghastly the day after, too (after *the sixth of December*). The day after we all went out, we all wept at Stradun. It really seemed as if The Town was turned into ruins. It really looked as if The Town was demolished.”

Places containing one's material and cultural properties frame everyday activities. In the quotations cited here, if a place-based conditioning of perceptions is obvious, it might mean that it is indeed not possible to communicate certain traumatic experiences, for they are so significantly bound to place. That is also why the humanitarian aid convoy “Libertas” meant so much to people in Dubrovnik. Some participants of the convoy did not sail away after a short visit to the town, but remained in the place (cf. Lang 1997). Like the visits and stays by several people attached to Dubrovnik Inter-University Centre, their remaining in the town was very much a personal statement of emotional – and experiential – links to the place. The concert on 31 December 1991,

performed by the National Orchestra from Toulouse had a similar function, although the presence of Croatian and international officials accompanied by international TV-crews pointed to another, more politically informed, kind of solidarity and the intention to make it public.

Regardless of these differences, it was *being there* that mattered. Seen from the outside, there was no better (no more efficient or convincing) way to express solidarity with those under siege, to restore their importance and dignity along with the importance and dignity ascribed to Dubrovnik monuments. Seen from the inside, the fact that someone came to stay in the attacked town (while many of its inhabitants were fleeing) was not only an expression of solidarity in suffering and enduring, but also an embodied hope in the restoration of normality (in which numerous people wish to visit Dubrovnik). This explains why many were irritated with the “hit and run” journalists who paid very short visits to the town, and angry when such journalists tried to feature them in war-photos from Dubrovnik.

## Home, Town: Physical and Symbolic Destruction

“Buildings are among the most perspicuous instances of the thorough acculturation of places. *A building condenses culture in one place.* Even if it is more confining than a landscape, a building is more densely saturated with culture than is landscape (unless the landscape is a cityscape). As itself a place, a building is a *focus locorum* – indeed, a *locus locorum*, a place for places. It exists between the bodies of those who inhabit or use it and the landscape arranged around it. If it gives dwelling to these bodies, it gives cultural mission to that landscape. Within the ambience of a building, a landscape becomes articulate and begins to speak in emblematic ways” (Casey 1993: 32).

*The Town* has been structured by history; people’s personal histories have been structured by the experience of war violence. Yet, the violence was experienced in a place consisting of cultural monuments – their material quality being the material surroundings of people’s

everyday life. Within the insiders’ perception of monuments as familiar, everyday sites and objects, some spots in the town might be – more or less private – symbols of identity for the insiders themselves.

Dubrovnik is not only a famous stage scenery used during half a century of the Summer Festival; it is also a scenery for the historical and everyday, the national and local, art historians’ and tourists’, private and festive, war and peace plots. Calling the place “a scenery” here by no means implies any imagined character, any artificiality, falseness or un-reality. On the contrary, in all those plots the very materialness of the place is crucial.

As explained above, the insiders’ *geographies of symbols* have been re-considered due to the lived experiences of war violence. But new symbols have been emerging from those experiences too. New meanings are ascribed to some previously a-cultural spaces; a hill or a wood where an armed conflict happened can become symbols of resistance and of the victory that is going to come.

In talking about a friend who died in the middle of Stradun, at a spot he stepped on every day in his daily business, a young man told me that that particular spot is a more important place of mourning than his friend’s grave. He also said that he *has to* remember what happened there every time he passes. Death as the ultimate imprint of violence thus imprinted the street by rupturing its old, peacefully neutral, primarily material character. But, there is no absolute quality in this imprint: it is there only for the ones who are emotionally involved, *the ones who can see it* today because of having been there during the war.

Danger, disaster and evil create places of intense fears. This is why places defined as safe within a peaceful cultural order become deformed into dangerous places in war. Home, usually understood as a place of absolute private control and definitely a safe place, becomes a potentially dangerous place. It is marked by a fear that is perpetuated by the unpredictability of events, instead of being marked by the repetitiveness of daily routines. The contrast is total, radical and very powerful precisely because home or house is the most proximate and the most intimate

place (in Croatian language “home” – *dom*, is often equated with “house” – *kuća*; so “at home” means *kod kuće*, “in the house”).

“My sister couldn’t go home any more. (...) Her house remained intact. Because they didn’t shoot so much at that part by the border, they didn’t burn it down. I suppose they counted in it becoming theirs. (...) One house, belonging to my nephew, burned down, totally. He lost everything. (...) And in my house, one part was on fire, but the house was hit by three shells, so the roof, the ceiling, everything was falling down, and everything was exposed to rain, to the winds, everything...”

“A bullet flew in through my neighbours’ window. From three kilometres away, from some sniper. They were not at home. (...) The first day, it was a shell of eighty millimetres that hit; the other one was hundred and twenty millimetres; it pierced the roof, made a whole one-metre wide – the whole room in dust. The neighbour was in the kitchen with his child; he hid the child under a chair. He was lost, he didn’t know where he was, and then, later, luckily nothing happened afterwards. It hit into his bedroom, some three, four metres from them.”

One’s own flat or house was easily turned into a place of fear and destruction. Yet, some people decided to stay in their homes not only during air raid or artillery attack alarms, but also during the actual attacks. For some the decision was based on a war-acquired fatalism. For others it was a minimal, very private, act of resistance. The same sort of resistance was mentioned when discussing the walks along main street Stradun. Those walks point to the fact that *the town is home* in both a metaphorical and in a literal sense: in Dalmatia people spend a lot of their time in the streets, it is a part of a cultural pattern. Keeping that pattern regardless of danger means – just as the act of not leaving one’s own flat – not accepting the violence-imposed redefinition of the home as a place truly appropriated by the dwellers.

Some people said that they even felt safer in their homes than in the improvised shelters in the cellars. It was *the safety of normality*

surrounding them, the familiarity of the place that could help them “forget” the danger. Refusing to sit in a public shelter was also a statement of resistance to the violence-imposed group identity, in which self-definitions or personally preferred social contacts and ways of behaviour simply do not count. Staying in one’s own flat was very much a matter of keeping one’s personal dignity (unless, of course, the attacks became so intense that staying at home equated suicide).

For an old man, an armchair served as the last resort of normality from which he stubbornly did not want to move (Povrzanović 1997: 157). The place he did not want to surrender to the enemy was reduced to just one armchair, but it was *his* armchair. It was the last material oasis of everyday life, and the only remaining *firm point* of his identity.

“It was a strange experience – we couldn’t go to the shelter, because Granddad didn’t want to go anywhere. It is a small house with a flat roof, very stupid... but he didn’t want to move and he was sitting in his armchair, just like in his whole life, and Granny with him, and then the two of us (the grandsons) were squatting there, too. We couldn’t move into the cellar, for we couldn’t leave them up there... I mean, it was stupid. Until a shell hit the house at last. And he remained unharmed. After that... soon after, they both died one after the other. First her, then him, seven days later. Because he decided to die. It didn’t matter to him any more.”

In more common, locally shared geographies of safety and danger, some places have been perceived as places of rescue. Many people felt safe in the public shelters organised in the towers of the city walls. In one narration the feeling of security, peace, comfort and hope in St. John’s tower is explained as an analogy of being in the womb:

“First – you are in a closed space; the wall around you, just stone all around, isn’t it? Second – the water, the sea, it reminds you of water, womb-water. It is rustling all the time; you have a feeling... a feeling of security. However false it may be, you still have a feeling of security.”

Let me end this chapter by another, very different, kind of example of re-considering the practical and the symbolic dimension of places.

It is well known that sacred objects, primarily as signs in the landscape, symbolised for the attackers cultural otherness of the attacked regions (that has to be annihilated, so they could claim those regions were *theirs*). If not destroyed by arms, numerous churches have been desacrificed in the war I am referring to.

Another type of “desacration” was happening in the occupied places of everyday life. They were devalued by ascribing an offensive meaning. In Dubrovnik surroundings, peoples’ kitchens, bedrooms, and living rooms have sometimes been used as toilets by those who conquered them. “They came in and did on the desk the same as they did in Konavle houses: they defecated” (Zglav 1995: 148).

## Nature and Animals: Ecological Order vs. War Dis-order

As explained by Edward S. Casey, place as we experience it – and that goes for the landscapes including nature and animals too – is not altogether natural. “If it were, it could not play the animating, decisive role it plays in our collective lives. Place, already cultural as experienced, insinuates itself into collectivity, altering as well as constituting that collectivity” (Casey 1993:31).

The insiders (like numerous outsiders) see the nature surrounding Dubrovnik as beautiful. Still, they do not love it because it is beautiful, but because it is *theirs*. Casey’s (1993: 31–33) concept of *implacement* explained above, helps to understand this claim.

In a similar vein, Nicholas Green (1997) argues against the idealist “landscape concept”, most evident in art history but also in urban sociology and anthropology, which searches for universal or immanent meanings in landscapes. Landscapes cannot be adequately understood simply as a set of objects and themes that are ideologically loaded, claims Green. A landscape cannot be grasped as text. Rather, it involves a materially-located process of perception and identification, a two-way dialogue that works to shape forms of social identity (cf. Green 1997: 40–41).

Thus “nature”, as discussed in this chapter, does not invoke “landscape” in a static gaze-defined sense, as something laid out before one’s eyes. It is *the proximate nature* – the sea, the hills, the beaches, as well as the vineyards, vegetation and animals – included in daily experiences in peace time through seeing, touching, hearing and smelling.

In the unusual example that follows, nature has been recognised as *protection* for the possibility of hiding by mimicry!

Familiar *grounds* (here also in literal sense of ground as earth) have been physically protecting two sisters in their seventies from being killed in the occupied area east of Dubrovnik. One evening they were trying to reach another village in order to take care of a cow that had recently had a calf and was in need of help. They knew that the owners had fled and left the animal and they didn’t want it to suffer. They planned to sneak through a wood, but to their surprise and horror it had been burnt out. Only ashes were left and enemy soldiers were approaching.

“It happened on the day they started to shoot at Cavtat. They started to shoot at Cavtat – they were less than thirty metres away from us. We hear them, but you can’t go anywhere. And there are no big stones to hide behind. Only a small rock, just like that. So we laid down, both of us – we can’t move, for they will see us. And she covered me with ashes, and I covered her – on the head, everywhere. To look like nature, for them not to kill us.”

In numerous other examples, nature is seen as literally feeding people (“Everything was growing abundantly – it saved us!”), but also as predicting misfortune:

“I don’t remember that she ever went to pick olives – that was the first and the last year that the two of us picked the olives at Babin Kuk. There... where God said good night (*Bogu iza leda*)... There is a hotel complex built on the olive groves, these are the olives that give shade. So, what I remembered was asking what is a war, what is it like: I remembered that (the people were telling that) in the year when World

War II started everything bore fruit in an unbelievable quantity. That everything was extraordinarily fertile. So, when that summer (in 1991) I saw how abundant the grapes were and how many were left unpicked in Konavle, how plentiful the olives were – I was stricken! Instantly it was all clear...”

This quote comes from a woman in her thirties. But all my interview partners who talked about nature claimed that 1991 was a remarkably fruitful year, that all the crops were abundant.

“A new house was finished just before the war; now it isn’t there any more – just ashes. But in front of it – flowers, lemons, oranges, as much as your heart wants! As much as your heart wants! The fruit, the vegetables... it was bearing fruit where you could least expect it, everywhere.”

This of course might be a *post festum* projection, a contrast to the later unfortunate experience of shortages, especially of the scarcity of fruit and vegetables. Still, the narration reminding of the well-known folklore genres should not *a priori* question the reality of the experience of *the feeding nature*. It is also certain that in the story about war people connect important details that otherwise might not be connected and may not even be perceived. People were aware of nature’s abundance because later on they found themselves deprived – not knowing how long it would last. This was more serious and therefore also psychologically, not only physically, hard to bear.

Nature was also seen as a saviour in animals as being sensors of danger. In the context of an overall heightened sensitivity to one’s natural surroundings, people were taking them seriously.

“I got up to see who was making a noise – is it a soldier, who is it... it’s dark, but I might see something. I stepped out, when the dog jumped at me and started to bark – he would not let me go, he was barking and barking. That was strange, he would not let me go there. Well, animals have a sixth sense... So I listened to him, I thought: maybe he sensed something, I won’t go. And I didn’t.”

“The cats were walking on the roofs when it was calm. If the cats are not up there, but down – run away! And the dog would sense it (the attack) in advance and start barking. So I behaved in accordance to the animals. The birds – the birds would fly high when it was calm. When you see them hiding in the walls (the city walls), you hide, too!”

Turning to nature – in the lived situations as well as in the narration about them – explains how and why nature is perceived as being an important part of peoples’ physical surrounding. As the importance of nature intensified, the sea, crops and animals were re-discovered. People’s dependency on nature has been re-considered. Nature has definitely been included in the life-world that people talk about. It is the proximate and familiar nature: *domaća* – “domestic”, intimately appropriated, felt close to, and *zavičajna* – “belonging to the home region”.

The relation to nature as culturally established has also been shown at another level – that of exclusion, incompetence, and lack of cultural understanding of (what has to be done with or done to) nature by those who do not belong to it and (thus) do not own it either.

In his war diary, Niko Zglav (1995: 148) writes with contempt and sadness about the unpicked ripe figs and the picked unripe grapes in his occupied village of Konavle.

The following quotation from another war diary unites the same perspective with the question of who has the right to enjoy the fruits of *our* nature:

“Who is going to pick my beautiful grapes? Are they perhaps going to rot unpicked? And the olives that are going to be ripe soon? Who is going to drink the wine made from our grapes and fill the wine-skins with the oil made of our olives” (Šehović 1994: 15)?

A direct connection to nature has also been expressed as the emotional relation to animals.

“We went to The Town, but our nephew brought us back. Because of our love for the house, for the animals.”

The two old sisters mentioned above were brought to safety (The Town by then was considered to be safe) a few days before the enemy soldiers definitely occupied the region to the east of Dubrovnik. Yet, being peasant women who spent their entire life in the same village, they could not stand being away and returned after only two days.

In situations of total disruption of everyday normality animals are very often seen as members of the family. This is not only true for the pets. In an example from Vukovar, a rat sharing the shelter with people was eventually given a name and referred to as a “family member”. In the narratives referred to in this chapter it was not only one animal that people were talking about, but animals as a living content of nature/the home-region (*zavičaj*). In talking about the fish in Dubrovnik aquarium that served as a public shelter, a young woman explained: “We all got attached to them!” The following story about communicating with a fish sounds almost fantastic:

“One fish – we were all surprised – she was recognising her! She was swimming in circles by the sides of the pool. My mother would sit on the rim, and the fish would open her mouth and let mother caress it, then make a circle again, open her mouth again, let my mother caress it again, and so on. My mother said: come here, look at this! And really, people couldn’t have been more surprised: is it possible?”

The animals and the people were living beings inhabiting the same place defined by violence. In a very basic way they were all sharing the same destiny: they were all exposed to the same shelling. In Dubrovnik under siege, people have been “feeding everything alive” (the Croatian phrase “everything alive”, means all encompassing, non-critically included; here it has a double – also literal – meaning). In the deserted streets, even the otherwise non-homely, non-domestic pigeon has been seen as *our* animal.

“As people were fleeing from Konavle, from Župa, so the animals fled with them. Some people had their dogs and were taking care of them. But some would take care of them to a

certain extent, and then let them go... So, there were many stray dogs, also cats, right here in The Town. And somehow... you neither would kill them, nor... I don’t know. I was giving food to all of them, for I was pitying them all. There are no kids, there is no laughter, there is nothing – sadness, grief, horror, so at least you can feed the animals, isn’t that right? Half of your family is not there...”

Emotional reactions to the killing or any suffering of the animals I was told about, might seem surprising in situations where people are getting killed. Yet, the animals’ victimisation as a part of an all-encompassing re-definition of a place imposed by violence is not the only reason for such reactions. The time of animals might be perceived as running parallel to human time; it may also be seen as a contrast to war. In perpetuating their habits in the same manner, animals *do not know* that a war is going on (although they might *sense* the abnormality of danger). Even if only symbolically, they might be seen as withstanding (or overcoming) war. The animals’ existence is thus symbolically excluded from the war.

Nature in general is persistent in cycles that have nothing to do with human time and war destruction. The cycles of natural normality are perceived in war as a sharp contrast to radical ruptures of human normality. Nature “behaves” on its own accord, as if nothing strange was happening, as if there was no war. The “timeless” ecological order is a sound seed of hope in transience of war dis-order.

## Body: The Last Resort

The body is the smallest and the most intimate physical space of human integrity. It is the last physical refuge of personal identity that – due to psychosomatic reaction to stress and fear – might slip out of personal control. The narration about the body that I am referring to is one about physical, unmediated, bodily experienced encounters with war. It is the narration about restricted mobility, shrivelling, freezing, smells, constant tension due to manifold fears, as well as the tiny pieces of shrapnel carried around in people’s bodies, sometimes remaining there for



their whole life as a physical memory of war (cf. Povrzanović 1997: 159). Also, the vicinity of death, injuries, blood and realistic possibilities of one's own body being (lethally) hurt, enable not only compassion, but also a direct identification with the victims of war.<sup>10</sup>

A soldier's live body, is physically opposing the attacker. Dead, it becomes a symbol that supposedly unites and fortifies a nation in war.

Victimized body can be a dead body, a wounded body, a cramped body, a body in pain, a stumbling body, a body that is falling, wavering in fear, a body falling into a deep sleep in order to escape from reality, a body somnambulically ignoring danger when walking around in the midst of an attack, a body that hides, a body that runs away.

A body in war may also be a sick body. Illness – real and invented – could serve as a legitimate reason for not being called up or for leaving the town. Thus illness can be interpreted as a powerful means of controlling one's own war-destiny.

The ones who remained in the besieged town seem to have “chosen” extreme behaviour. Some became healthy overnight, leaving their chronic and other diseases for peaceful, normal times. They *did not have time* to be ill (having so much else to take care of), or they simply saw their physical difficulties as minor in comparison to the sufferings of war (“we all came healthier out of the war”, Šehović 1994).

In contrast to that, some people became got fixated about their own health, and tried to make the people in their surroundings interested in their pain or simply in their own body as the focus of fears (as if saying: look at me, take care of me, don't leave me alone in this). One's own body is the last “free zone” in war, the last material value one can own. Indulging in worries about the body might also be seen as a way of keeping up one's own interest in oneself, of staying alive. Putting the body at the focus of attention means wanting to go on.

It is not difficult to understand the unease and fear coming out of physical weakness and dependency on other people's help, especially if these people are strangers meeting in a public shelter. All those interviewed confirmed that it was the old people who were most fearful. Although the feeble were “allowed” to fear, people

strongly disapproved of those who panicked (since they were afraid of succumbing to panic themselves).

On the other hand, focusing on one's own body and its functions – the disturbed as well as the healthy ones – was a way of facing a situation in which people felt they were being “left to destiny”. As already noted, one's own body was perceived to be the only remaining space of personal control in the context of reduced access to other spaces and of insights in the arbitrariness of danger. It was also a place of a personal – *bodily* – time measured only by one's own bodily functions.

“Pain dramatises, it forms a natural starting point for narrativity, and provides the framework around the individual, which can be filled with narrative zest”. The experiences of bodily suffering may become “a biographical line around which identities are spun” (Frykman 1998: 15). It is therefore interesting how little I have heard about the physical difficulties that people went through; they were mentioned, but not dwelled upon. The person talking about them most was the oldest one. Although these difficulties were substantial and remembered very clearly, they are perceived as being less important in the context of the narration on war.

This bears witness to the interpretation that the *narration about war* as presented in this chapter, really (and truly) is the *narration about resistance to the war*. This resistance was also significantly realised by not succumbing to fear and lack of cleanliness – by keeping up the dignity of the body.

### *Zavičaj* – the Home-region: Shared Identities of Feeling

What gives a region its specificity is not some long internalised history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus. Instead of thinking of the region as an area with boundaries, it can – to paraphrase Doreen Massey (1994: 154) – be imagined as being articulated in networks of social relations and understandings, bearing in mind that large proportions of those relations,

experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than those we can define in that moment as the region itself.

In the romanticising poetic expression of a theatre director – yet presenting a widely shared image of Dubrovnik’s noble qualities, “(t)he special link among the three fundamental levels of life (so rare in the world) is still alive in Dubrovnik – the level of Man, the level of City, and the level of Nature. The People, the City and the scenery of Dubrava (Dubrovnik’s nickname) are intertwined in harmony which is then transferred to the inhabitants of the City and leaves its marks on every Resident” (Violić 2000: 17).

Dubrovnik, *The Town*, is not only a national symbol, but also an experiential anchor of identity for all the people from the region. It is a point of reference in the landscape bearing the aura of lasting – “eternal” – value and beauty, but it is also the historical and the actual centre of the region. Peasant women from the region come to The Town every day to feed its inhabitants with their agricultural products sold at the market – and the same has been going on for centuries. Just like the intellectuals quoted earlier, they love Dubrovnik; it is theirs as much as it belongs to the people living within the walls. The Town is unthinkable in isolation from the surrounding region. Amputated and preserved only as cultural heritage, as an empty museum piece without life pulsating in it, it would lose all its current meanings except that as a historical *object*. In other words it would cease to be a *place*.<sup>11</sup>

In discussing Vico’s theory of knowledge as opposed to the Cartesianism, Eric Hirsch (1997: 17) points out the central place of imagery, metaphor and “common sense”. For Vico, knowledge is found in socially shared identities of feeling that people and their surroundings create in the flow of activity between them. The identities are what Vico calls “sensory topics” (*topos* means place). These identities give rise to “commonplaces”, i.e. to shared moments in a flow of social activity which afford common reference. “Sensory” refers to the moments in which shared *feelings* for already shared circumstances are created (cf. Hirsch 1997: 17).

This can help to explain the strong sense of belonging to the home-region expressed by the people I interviewed. It is important to note that region here is meant in terms of *zavičaj*, which is Croatian for “Heimat”, but defined strictly as local region. In Croatian language the concept of *zavičaj* cannot be extended to the national territory (which is called *domovina*, homeland).

“One should stay. Remain true to oneself, to one’s own proper being. Remain a *gospar* (ancient term for a nobleman, today locally meaning a person from Dubrovnik region, who, precisely for living there, is noble; it’s a standard local term for Dubrovnik citizens; MPF). Stay alive. Then live again. Freely. In dignity. For oneself and for the others. Openly. It starts in the ashes of the burnt down house. And like in a few places in the world, in this place, in this Dubrovnik, Croatian ashes, *the challenge of place as destiny* is being confirmed” (Nodari 1994: 224; italics MPF).

*The challenge of place as destiny*. Imagined and experienced belonging. The concept of *zavičaj*, connecting local landscape, animals and people. The importance of *being there*, not to be encompassed by military maps, but by the insiders’ cognitive maps and emotional geographies of belonging in which moments, things and symbols are united in a concrete locality.

In a way that leaves no doubt, the paradox of *belonging to Europe* in terms of geography and cultural heritage, but not in terms of everyday experience, became clear to the people engulfed by violence aimed at territory and targeting civilians. For their perceptions of place and the definitions of concepts such as position, situation, centre, margin, inside, and outside (in their spatial but also political meanings), the lived experience of violence became crucial.

After the “pilgrimage” on the Stradun street full of broken glass, cracked stones from the historical buildings 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 place melted into a single physical experience of war (Povrzanović 1997: 159).

Previously being used to take a peaceful life

in a modern urban European setting for granted, people enmeshed in war re-considered their links with the surrounding urban structure and re-discovered their essential dependency on nature. There was no relation to priority: spatial and social aspects were united in the violence-imposed intensified experience of the place.

## Notes

1. Being a Croatian ethnologist, I was working on the dissertation entitled "Culture and Fear: Wartime Everyday Life in Croatia 1991–92" (University of Zagreb, 1997) in the capacity of research assistant at the Zagreb Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research. I collected private letters written by people from Zagreb in late 1991, and interviewed women and men of different ages and of different social backgrounds (mostly Croats, but also Serbs) not only from Dubrovnik and the Dubrovnik region, but also from Vukovar, Županja, Vinkovci surroundings, Osijek, Zadar, Šibenik and Zagreb in the period from 1991 to 1996. See Povrzanović 1997 for an analysis of the processes of identity formation in war based on the same material. If not otherwise noted, the ethnographic details presented in this article come from the personal narratives about war by people from Dubrovnik and the Dubrovnik region collected in early 1996.
2. My interview partners have been united in recognising war loot in its classical form of material goods as being one of the reasons for the attacks. Many also feared that the irregular groups of plunderers that followed the Yugoslav Army to the occupied territories might pay night visits to the still unoccupied parts of the region. Ivo Goldstein shows that plundering was approved of by the Yugoslav state: "in the first days of the aggression Montenegrin television included in its news an appeal by Montenegrin school hostels to be sent several hundreds pairs of trainers from the Dubrovnik area" (Goldstein 1999: 235).
3. Slavoj Žižek (1999) defines "reflexive", politically correct racism as "the liberal, multiculturalist perception of the Balkans as a site of ethnic horrors and intolerance, of primitive, tribal, irrational passions, as opposed to the reasonableness of post-nation-state conflict resolution by negotiation and compromise. Racism is a disease of the Balkan Other, while we in the West are merely observers, neutral, benevolent and righteously dismayed". Because the Balkans are part of Europe, they can be spoken of in racist clichés which nobody would dare to apply to Africa or Asia. Political struggles in the Balkans are compared to ridiculous operetta plots; Ceausescu was presented as a contemporary reincarnation of Count Dracula. Slovenia is most exposed to this displaced racism, explains Žižek, since it is closest to Western Europe. He also points to "reverse racism" which celebrates the exotic authenticity of the Balkan Other, as in the notion of Serbs who, in contrast with inhibited, anaemic Western Europeans, still exhibit a prodigious lust for life (cf. Port 1997). Žižek claims that such reverse racism plays a crucial role in the success of Emir Kusturica's films in the West. "When Kusturica, talking about his film *Underground*, dismissed the Slovenes as a nation of Austrian grooms, nobody reacted: an 'authentic' artist from the less developed part of former Yugoslavia was attacking the most developed part of it. When discussing the Balkans, the tolerant multiculturalist is allowed to act out his repressed racism" (Žižek 1999).
4. *Europe* – in the Croatian public and vernacular discourse most often referred to in a personified way – is *good* also for its political stability and standards of living. Besides, liberal and left-wing politicians do not just want to be "considered European" and "given what is deserved", i.e. be valued as equals in relation to Western Europeans; they also want to establish "European" – democratic – standards in Croatian politics.
5. For a comprehensive insight in Croatian history see Goldstein 1999. For an analysis of the perception and active efforts in establishing cultural boundaries towards "the Balkans" see Povrzanović Frykman 2002.
6. See Ines Prica's "Notes on ordinary life in war" (1993) for an illuminated insight into the Croatian intellectuals' dilemma regarding the writing on and within the war, questioning the value of "fighting with the pen", as well as of the already ironized "writing for eternity". In one of the best ethnographic pieces about the war in Croatia in 1990's (for a complete bibliography see Povrzanović 2000), Prica analyses different kinds of letters and appeals sent abroad (always westwards), and the political conditioning of the (non)reactions to them. "The general point of these reactions is the priority of the grief over monumental and cultural richness before the misery of people", states Prica, claiming that such reactions were following the dominant Western official treatments of aggression as "culture-cide". "The most controversial is the case of Dubrovnik, which evidently was, with the help of the world, saved from total destruction as 'walls', not as a human settlement" (Prca 1993: 47).
7. Place becomes social because it is already cultural. For the same reason it is also historical. It is by the mediation of culture that places gain historical depth. We might even say that culture is the third dimension of place, affording them a deep historicity, a *longue durée*, which they would lack if they were entirely natural in constitution (Casey 1993:31f.).

8. A theatre director wrote about the conviction that Dubrovnik “would serve as a refuge from warfare, would exclude us, with our unquestioned pedigree, from the horrors which descended upon unlucky regions of Croatia. (...) Have we been able to perceive its soul, we would have understood that the refinement of its shape had to be hurt, the nobility of its structure maimed and the finesse of the carved stone, chipped” (Violić 2000: 16).
  9. Paradoxically, the first civilian killed in Dubrovnik (by a shell that landed in 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 (Povrzanović 1997: 160).
  10. Therefore, many people from the Dubrovnik region talked about their own emotional affiliation to the towns undergoing war-histories similar to their own. They could very well imagine – or rather, they *knew* – what it was like to live in Sarajevo under siege. Interestingly enough, the Sarajevo situation, generally seen as much worse than theirs, was often a reason for embarrassment: their experiences were “nothing” in comparison to Sarajevans; they were not worth telling, since someone else had it so much worse. Hence a double embarrassment for being called “heroes” in the national discourse on *Dubrovnik, the hero-town*.
  11. Such a “solution” had been feared during the war in 1991–92, and bitterly criticised by the outstanding Croatian intellectual Vlado Gotovac: “Dubrovnik has been hit by the sentimentality of pragmatism. In the name of beauty, but in a trivial manner. Incapable of comprehending the whole, of comprehending its context and meaning, it ignores even the suburban landscape. (...) From a pragmatic point of view it is incomparably easier to save Dubrovnik in isolation than in a perspective and with the ties of its whole survival. Nobody’s Dubrovnik is a toy for international safekeeping...” (Gotovac 2000: 10).
- \* This is a revised version of the paper “När våldet tar plats”, published in *Fönster mot Europa*, Studentlitteratur, Lund 2001.

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