

CONFLICT IN CITIES AND THE CONTESTED STATE

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Divided Cities/Contested States

Working Paper No. 25

**Vukovar's Divided Memory:
The Reification of Ethnicity through Memorialisation**

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Conflict in Cities and the Contested State: Everyday life and the possibilities for transformation in Belfast, Jerusalem and other divided cities UK Economic and Social Research Council Large Grants Scheme, RES-060-25-0015, 2007-2012.

Divided Cities/Contested States Working Paper Series

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Editorial note

This paper is derived from fieldwork conducted as part of Dr. Baillie's PhD research and additional work undertaken as part of Conflict in Cities and the Contested State (CinC) project. Baillie's PhD thesis was entitled 'The Wounded Church: War, Destruction and Reconstruction of Vukovar's Religious Heritage'. Previous versions of this paper were presented at the CinC Urban Conflicts conference and the Ivo Pilar Institute's Vukovar '91. - Dvadeset godina poslije [Vukovar '91-Twenty years on] conference - both of which took place in 2011.

Biographical note

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Divided memory: The reification of ethnicity in post-conflict Vukovar

Britt Baillie

Abstract

This paper explores the role of 'Homeland War' memorials and exhibitions in the 'Martyred City' of Vukovar. Today, no city in Croatia has a more dense concentration of memorials/memorial centres to the 'Homeland War' than Vukovar. The city has transitioned out of wartime. Yet, ethnic divisions persist and tensions continue to run high. Here, a meaningful sense of peacetime remains elusive - instead the city lingers in the limbo of 'conflict-time' - a term defined not by the presence or absence of violence but rather by an on-going sense of unease and contestation. This paper unpicks the 'naturalisation' of Vukovar's memorialisation and asks: do these new memorials seek to punctuate the past to provide a sense of closure; do they act as vehicles for 'reconciliation'; or do they serve as boundary markers in a contested city?

Keywords: memorial, boundary, Vukovar, ethnicity, 'conflict-time'

Remembering and re-remembering

Today, Vukovar has the highest concentration of 'Homeland War' monuments and memorials of any city in Croatia. In this paper, I posit that this memorial boom reflects the local Croat need for a 'tangible response' to the pervasive anxieties spurred by the siege of the city in 1991, the specter of Serb 'Occupied' Krajina Vukovar (1991-1995), and to international war crime indictments and rulings. In 2012, Vukovar remains divided along ethnic lines, embodied not only by its segregated schools and cafes, but also reflected in its on-going 'memory wars' expressed through its contested memorials. This paper unpicks the 'naturalisation' of Vukovar's memorialisation and asks: do these new memorials seek to punctuate the past to provide a sense of closure; do they act as vehicles for 'reconciliation'; or do they serve as boundary markers in a contested city?

In 1991, the model 'Brotherhood and Unity' city of Vukovar was surrounded by the Yugoslav National Army (JNA¹) and Serb paramilitary groups who besieged it for three months'. This battle for what has now become known as the 'Martyred City' or 'Hero City' marked the beginning of the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia and served as a harbinger of the uricide (Bogdanović 1994: 37-74) which followed in Mostar and Sarajevo. Ethnically cleansed of Croats, Vukovar became a part of the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK) (Figure 1). After the Srebrenica massacre of Bosnian Muslims in July 1995, the army of the Republika Srpska located in Bosnia became the targets of heightened

NATO operations. Croatia took advantage of this shift in international opinion to launch its own military campaigns against the Krajina areas in what is today Croatia. It was the collapse of the Krajina on both sides of the modern border which led to the Erdut Agreement (for Eastern Slavonia) and the Dayton Agreement (for Bosnia and Herzegovina). From 1995-1998, Vukovar became the only city of the RSK to be peacefully (re)integrated into the Republic of Croatia by the UN - all other RSK cities were taken by force by the Croatian army in the summer of 1995.



Figure 1: Map of Croatia and surrounding territories. The area controlled by the Republika Srpska Krajina in the early 1990s is marked in red [Wikimedia Commons 2005.]

Today, the city's Croats see public memorialisation as central to justice, truth telling and coming to terms with the recent past. Yet, in this article, I assert that the city's division is mirrored and reified by its new 'Homeland War' memorials. As one Croat 'defender' stated: 'everything related to the war is marked according to which side it is on. A heroic dead [individual] is made fun of or criticised by the other side. Nothing can be looked at with the same eyes' (Interview VUKS2-16). Memorials help to shape collective perceptions of 'selves' and 'others'. Halbwachs (1992:182-183) noted that 'society tends to erase from its memory all that might separate individuals, or that might distance groups from one another'. In

Vukovar - a city in conflict-time, in limbo between war and peacetime - a different pattern has emerged. Here, memorials create the illusion of depluralised 'selves' - against an homogenised 'Other'. This 'self-stereotyping' enables the suppression of individual traits and the attendant cultivation of socially approved ones. Divided memorials help to foster and maintain mental barriers towards the 'Other'. Paradoxically, while memorials seek to resolve perceived threats to security through discourses of co-ethnic/national unity and order, innocence, survival and heroic sacrifice, they also continue to generate fear in contested cities by vilifying the 'Other'. In this paper, I do not address each of the city's memorials in turn, but rather examine them as a group highlighting their collective spatial and discursive impact. The sample of memorials which I am addressing includes: four memorial centres, a planned exhibition at the city museum, the ruined water tower, free standing statues and crosses, the memorial cemetery, as well as memorial plaques.² I use this sample to query whose narratives are told at these sites and whose are forgotten. I examine the urban geography of Vukovar's memorials, exploring the uses of public space in the articulation of competing political ideologies.

Memorials are too often understood to be 'outside of the political process - relegated to the 'soft' cultural sphere as art object, to the private sphere or personal mourning, or to the margins of power and politics' (Brett et al 2008:2). Yet, as one Vukovarian politician stated, 'the purpose of the memorials serves not those who they commemorate and their families but they are used as a means of daily politics' (Interview VUKS6-2). Amnesty International reports (2010:61) that 'apart from President Ivo Josipovic, who has on several occasions paid tribute to the victims of all sides in the wars in the former Yugoslavia, very little effort has been undertaken by other Croatian politicians to deal with the [contested] war-time past'. A U.S. Department of State (2008) report on Bosnia indicates that 'monuments were built to send a political message to minority believers about the dominance of the majority group in that area, creating ethnic tensions and impeding the process of reconciliation - a similar trend can be observed in Vukovar. Unlike juridical processes, truth and reconciliation programmes and other mechanism for addressing the past which are subject to public scrutiny, Croatia - like most other nations - has not developed analogous expectations for memorialisation (Brett et al 2008:2). These 'public' sites are not obliged to take into account alternative discourses, to serve the needs of the minority 'public' or to adhere to any code of conduct (Brett et al 2008:2). While memorials in 'peacetime' cities can aim to create unified 'imagined [urban] communities', memorials in cities in 'conflict time' enhance fractures in multicultural communities to emphasise sharp boundaries between ethnically 'pure' and 'exclusive' groups. As long as the painful asymmetry of memory persists, manifested in

mono-ethnic memorials, the war continues to be 'present' and the city remains in 'conflict time'.

Creating a patriotic landscape

Croats maintain that the 'Homeland War' memorials in the city seek to preserve 'THE' truth of what happened 'so it is never forgotten and never repeated' (Interview VUKS6-4). However, as the authors of the volume on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission edited by Villa-Vicencio & Verwoed (2000) note there are different genres of 'truth' in conflict-time: historical truth, moral truth, forensic truth, personal truth, social truth, restorative truth, etc. However, it is 'one thing to "establish the facts" and quite another to establish a society-wide consensus on what they mean [...] Shared facts do not necessarily conduce to shared truths' (Avruch & Vejarano 2002:37). In Vukovar's memorials only Croat 'truths' are expressed and commemorated.

Vukovar has become what Daniels (1993:5) labels a 'patriotic landscape' and Sullivan (1998) describes as a 'landscape of sovereignty'. The battle of Vukovar is today depicted as the sacrifice *par excellence* that enabled birth of the Croatian nation and the construction of Croatia as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991). Since the war, inhabitants of the city have ceased to be 'Vukovarians'—they have reimagined themselves as 'Croat Vukovarians' or 'Serb Vukovarians' (or identify themselves as Croatian citizens of Vukovar but of a minority identity) - a division intensified through the construction and erasure of 'Our' and 'Their' memorials. In 1994 Kaiser (section 55) noted:

[Vukovar] is the subject of books and videos; there are associations devoted to keeping alive Croatian Vukovar outside of the occupied zone; there is a wall of bricks with the names of missing Vukovar citizens outside UNPROFOR headquarters in Zagreb; there are Vukovar units in the army. It is the equivalent of France's Strasbourg, veiled in the Place de la Concorde before World War I. This means that it is also the subject of myths, and a mainspring of vengeance. It has dropped from the view of the world, which means that the native Serbs of Vukovar, also bombarded savagely by the JNA, have fallen into a black hole, or worse been totally identified with that army.

The cityscape is now suffused with Croat 'Homeland War' memorials and symbols of 'banal nationalism' (Billig 1995). Today, many Serbs feel ostracised from the increasingly

Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS) stated, 'A large number of monuments are aimed to keep the public thinking that [all] Serbs were bad guys and [all] Croats were good guys' (Interview VUKS5-6). However, a Croat 'defender' retorted saying, 'Serbs can go on living with the memorials even if they see them everyday, they can go on with normal life. If they had nothing to do with the war, then the memorials shouldn't provoke any negative feelings' (Interview VUKS6-4). In Vukovar, memorials reveal and reify the city's level of inclusiveness designating who belongs to and in the city. They also make material claims about a city's identity in relation to Croatia (the newly recognised 'homeland') and other states - suggesting everything from shared values with 'Europe' to ideological conflict and historical enmities with Serbia and the East.

Memorials as boundary markers

Memorials have mapped memory through a 'frenzy of the visible' (Boyer 1994:7) in this 'ceremonial city'. Here, Croat ethnohistory has been inter-threaded with a cityscape that has been refashioned as a Croat ethnogeography. Vukovar's 'Homeland War' memorials are situated on the peripheries of the city at locations such as: the Ovčara mass-grave, the municipal cemetery, the former Yugoslav National Army Base, on the road to the Serb village of Borovo (Selo) and along the banks of the Danube. They engrain sites of atrocity, the former frontlines and contemporary geo-political boundaries into the fabric of the city. Collectively, they serve as a symbolic frontier between the city and the Serb dominated villages that surround it (e.g. Negoslavci, Borovo (Selo), Trpinja, etc); and to Serbia itself - across the Danube (Figure 2). These memorials have been constructed to suture this (re)gained territory into the body politic of the recently (re)founded Croatian state.



Figure 2: The White Cross at the confluence of the Danube and the Vuka Rivers. The site has become a central node where Croats from across the country remember those who died during the 'Homeland War'. The symbol of the cross with the Croat coat of arms on it is a strong marker of the Croat presence in the city. The monument serves as a reminder to the Serbs across the river and in the city of their 'aggressor status' (Baillie 2007).

The memorial to what the Croatian media have dubbed the 'Borovo Massacre' (*Pokolj u Borovom Selu*) is an illustrative example of memorials being used as boundary markers. In April 1991 the Republika Srpske Krajina announced that it would secede from Croatia. In response, Croat 'paramilitary' forces/'defenders', including the future Croatian Minister of Defense Gojko Šušak, fired rockets into the predominantly Serb village of Borovo (Selo) which borders Vukovar to the north (Silber & Little 1996:140). At the time, the police forces across Croatia were mobilising as a proto-Croatian army. In response, the villagers in Borovo (Selo) had begun arming themselves and harboring Serb paramilitary groups (neo-Četniks) as they feared a resurgence of the ethnic cleansing which had been carried out against Serbs by Croats during the Second World War. With this in mind, the moderate police chief of Osijek, Josip Reichl-Kir, had spent the early months of 1991 visiting Serb villages in the area to assure the population that the police force would not attack them. On May 1 1991 four policemen entered Borovo (Selo) against Kir's wishes to provocatively replace the village's Yugoslav flag with a Croatian flag. Two were captured. A police rescue party of approximately 150 officers was sent in after them the following day - 12 police officers were killed in the skirmish which ensued.

After 'Peaceful Reintegration' of the city by the United Nations Transitional Authority for Eastern Slavonia (UNTAES) the Croatian Police Officer's association, the Association of Widows of Croatian Defenders of the Homeland War and the Croatian Association of Prisoners in Serbian Concentration Camps erected a memorial on public property at the entrance to Borovo (Selo). The site was selected 'because it wouldn't bring about a negative reaction of the international community or the Serbs living in Borovo (Selo)' (Vukovarske Novine 2005 [26 August]: 2). Twelve memorial trees were planted to sink their roots around an area onto which the Croatian flag had been paved (Figure 3). The site marked the 'boundary' between Serb and Croat spaces. The memorial was vandalised shortly thereafter - presumably by local Serbs who resented the territorial claim and one-sided interpretation that the memorial embodied. In 2002, a new memorial to the policemen was erected 'in the very centre of Borovo (Selo)' (Vrdoljak 2005:5) as an indication that Croatia now subsumed all territory in the area, including Serb villages. Local Serbs in Borovo (Selo) have continued to resist/ contest the narratives imposed upon them by re-homing pro-Serb memorials from sites in Vukovar and by erecting new memorials to fallen Serbs in the village. They have become a 'counter public' which Fraser (1990: 67) defines as a 'parallel discursive arena where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, so as to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs...Counter publics emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics'.³



Figure 3: Memorial to the 12 policemen killed in Borovo (Selo) (Baillie 2011).

An additional register of 'Homeland War' memorials and exhibition spaces runs like a spine through the centre of this linear city (e.g. Borovo Naselje Football Club's 'Homeland War' memorial, Vukovar Hospital Memorial Centre, the planned gallery in the town museum, the Hrvatski Radio Vukovar memorial plaque, a memorial plaque to the missing police officers at the municipal court building, the memorial to Siniša Glavašević, etc). The memorials are intended, in part, to be 'state reinforcing' (Mann 1994) - a visit to the city's memorial spaces has become a part of the national 8th grade curriculum. To mark the anniversary of the fall, an annual 'procession of memory' in which thousands from across Croatia and the Croatian diaspora participate, links some of these memorial sites together. One Serb politician commented, 'It will be very difficult to improve the relationship between the two sides as long as such ceremonies exist. It is obvious that in the months that such events take place, the hatred is becoming increasingly obvious' (Interview VUKS6-2).

Through the rapidly expanding corpus of 'Homeland War' memorials and memorial centers, people are increasingly confronted with claims about the past in their daily lives in their everyday spaces. Vukovar has become a commemorative landscape composed of landmarks that provide spatial and temporal coordinates for remembering. Yet, as Levinson notes (1998:37), 'the bitter reality about life within truly multicultural societies is that the very notion of a unified public space is up for grabs each group having its own list of heroes and villains'. Consequently, rather than being sites of consensus building, public space in Vukovar, populated by 'Homeland War' memorials, has become contested terrain within a contested city.

Filling Voids with memorials

The siege of Vukovar in 1991 left a plethora of voids - approximately 3000 people were killed, 13,852 properties were ruined, 22,061 Croats and Croat sympathisers were expelled - the idea of a 'shared city' destroyed (Vlada Republike Hrvatske 2003:section 2). In 1991, no other European city since the Second World War had sustained as much wartime destruction of cultural heritage as Vukovar (Karač 1997:48). Of the city's 118 listed monuments, 21 were completely destroyed, 48 were partly destroyed, and 25 suffered severe damage (Živić 2008:41). Živić argues (2008:41) that 'we can rightfully say that the Serbian aggressor [sic] in Vukovar committed total culturocide'. One Croat returnee added, 'they knew that this [Vukovar] would never be Serbia. So they destroyed everything. If it couldn't be theirs then they did not want it to be anyone else's' (Interview VUKS2-67). The destruction of Vukovar's monuments and memorials coupled with the other voids left by the siege turned Vukovar into an anchorless 'traumascape' (Tumarkin 2005) contributing to its

Although monuments and memorials are erected and preserved in the belief that they will pass down messages for perpetuity, their destruction testifies to their inherent fragility as a medium. Memorials are not only physically fragile, they are also discursively malleable. They are reinterpreted and reinscribed with meaning by a collective memory which is fluid, 'mercurial' and constantly in flux (Ryan 2010:154). The notion that they are physically or discursively stable and/or eternal remains a fallacy. In 1993, a Croatian government committee report (1993:43) stated, 'today Vukovar is in ruins [...] all the monuments of culture were clearly marked according to international conventions [...] everything that made Vukovar what it was has been destroyed. Today the town is an image of madness.' Dimova (2009:100) notes that 'experiences of suffering and trauma become meaningful only through pre-existing 'templates'. In Vukovar, memorials - despite their inherent faults - serve(d) as this template. Here, memorials have been constructed to 'make sense' of the war, to re-imbue its actors and their actions with meaning and to tame the city which had becoming a traumascap. The 'shared' memories expressed by these memorials serve as a guide to collective Croat identity and also to furnish an interpretative code for the personal experiences of the individual group members. Memorials were called upon to fill the physical and emotional voids left by those lost, to (re)knit the social fabric of the in-group, and to (re)populate the landscape with symbolic spatial anchors to renew a sense of 'permanent belonging' after the spatio-temporal rupture induced by the destruction of the siege.

The spectre of Krajina Vukovar

Moshenka (2011) defines two forms of absence: things that were once present but are no longer, and things which were planned but never built. Both of these absences 'haunt' Vukovar today. The Krajina (Serb 'Occupation') period (1991-1995) can be understood as an era in which the 'rewriting' of history took place in the physical space of the city. After the fall of Vukovar in November 1991, Vukovar became part of the self-declared Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK). In 1992, a roundtable of Serbian experts on Serbian television advocated that Vukovar should be 'rebuilt' in a Byzantine style (previously unknown in Vukovar) in order to denote its 'Serbian' identity (Povrzanović 1993). RSK officials focused on erecting and preserving 'monuments to the fallen fighters, antifascists from the Second World War, this war's fallen soldiers and victims of terror from both the fascist wars' (Balić 1997:129). Planned additions included the construction of a museum to the 'liberation of the city', and the erection of a new monumental Serbian Orthodox church (Kustić 1996:194). Although most of these plans remained unrealised, the spectre of Krajina Vukovar - as it was and as it could have been - hovers uneasily between memory and reality. A local teacher

percent of Serbs cannot accept Croatia as their country' (Interview VUKS6-3).⁴

Since the return of Croats in 1998, the memorials which today act as 'reminders' of Krajina Vukovar have repeatedly suffered vandalism, destruction and symbolic 'neutralisation'⁵ - not a single one has survived unscathed (OSCE 2005:2). Šešić (2010:6) argues that states across the former Yugoslavia have 'allow[ed] populist movements to organise monument removal strateg[ies] as their key "spontaneous practice" without suffering persecution for their crimes'. Slobodan (a local Serb) reflected:

The Croatian media never wrote the truth about Vukovar. Why the HTV [Croatian Television] never reported how many times monuments to slain Serb soldiers have been destroyed? How come they never said that the destruction of monuments, regardless of whose monuments they are, is barbarity? No, for the HTV it is barbarity, as it should be, when cypresses planted in memory of the policemen killed in Borovo Selo are pulled out, and when the monuments to Serb soldiers are destroyed, then it is barbarity that these monuments include a reference to traditional Serb headwear (2010:6).

In this last sentence, Slobodan is referring to the outrage caused by the presence of šajkača (Serbian hats) on the graves of Serb soldiers which the Croatian authorities decided to remove in order to 'neutralise' the memorial cemetery (Figure 4). Indeed, fear of vandalism led officials in the Borovo (Selo) to move some of the 'offending memorials' to their cemetery - a graveyard of memorials (Interview VUKS5-4). Banished from Vukovar's public space and debate, the stories of Serb victims and 'liberators' today fester in Vukovar as whispered histories which cannot, for political reasons, be aired too publicly.



Figure 4: The Serbian Military Cemetery was erected during the RSK period to hold the remains of the ethnic Serb fighters who had fallen whilst trying to ‘liberate’ the city. The cemetery was situated on what was private property prior to the war. In the aftermath of Peaceful Reintegration, the cemetery has been subject to a property battle. The site has been the target of a great deal of vandalism. In addition, as the Serbian military hats (šajkača) which served as ornamentation on the gravestones were seen as provocative Četnik symbols, the city authorities have had them removed. Many families with deceased members buried in this cemetery have opted to have their bodies exhumed and reburied elsewhere (Baillie 2011).

Today, the Krajina period, if addressed at all by local Croats, is presented as a perverse aberration within the naturalised ‘evolutionary’ trajectory of Croatian Independence. During the Krajina, Vukovar’s Croats experienced not only spatial displacement but also a ‘displacement of identity’. Vukovar’s post-reintegration memorials have sought to remake and re-narrate the political landscape of the city - to express the Croat discourse of ‘victory through victimhood’ in order to negate the RSK discourse of ‘liberation’. To achieve this, the Krajina cityscape had to be fractured by strategically punctuating public spaces with Croat memorials. Here, memorials have become ‘instruments for territorial self-fashioning, providing a symbolic terrain on which imaginaries compete and battles for the future are fought’ (Isar, Viejo-Rose & Anheier 2011:3). In Vukovar the erection of ‘Homeland War’ memorials acknowledges not only the atrocities that took place, but also deflect the Serb claims on the territory and at the same time reclaim Croat presence in this region. Serb

reactions to the construction of the 'Homeland War' memorial have oscillated between acceptance and contestation/'resistance' (through vandalism or the construction and preservation of ethnically exclusive Serb memorials).⁶

Years of trauma at the hands of Serbian paramilitary troops and the JNA coupled with exposure to Serbian propaganda has rendered many Croat residents of the city unwilling to be open to any narratives of the siege or the RSK which depart from the dominant Croat discourse. There is no desire to hear or learn about the 'Other' side of the story. Those 'Others' excluded from the dominant memory discourse in the city have become 'semiological guerrillas' who decipher the messages conveyed by the new memorials in 'contrary and even subversive ways' (Croteau & Hoynes 2000:285). As one NGO employee of mixed ethnicity stated, 'the monument that replaced the one [Partisan monument] in the centre [during the Krajina] was a huge Orthodox cross. And after reintegration it was [a bust] of Tuđman. To me that is interesting because it shows me that one side is still trying to be dominant [...] The city is wounded. It's a process of healing but that is not the way to heal' (Interview VUKS2-55).

Memorialising Vukovar's fallen

Amnesty International (2010:62) has called upon the Croatian authorities to 'undertake immediate efforts [to] ensure that the victims of war crimes, without discrimination have effective access to and receive adequate reparation.' A recent international survey of victims (of which 9% were Croatian) reported that memorialisation was prioritised as the second most valuable form of state reparations following monetary compensation (Brett et al 2008:2). For some, memorialisation delivers a form of justice through the acknowledgement of the aggrieved - though 'Other' victims are often excluded from the process.

Memorials to 'the Glorious Dead' are key elements in the symbolic landscape of the modern nation. In Vukovar two groups are the focus of memorials to the 'Homeland War': deceased Croat civilians and deceased Croat 'defenders'. In the local memory schema, Serbs - both local and from what is today Serbia - are relinquished to the category of 'aggressor'/perpetrator. Today, four categories of actors are absent from the dichotomised vision presented by the city's memorials: 'rescuers' those who refused to recognise ethnic divisions or who crossed ethnic lines to help the 'Other'; 'collaborators' - those who were perceived as betraying their national group by assisting the 'enemy'; victims of other minority backgrounds, and so-called 'passive bystanders' who claim 'there was nothing we could have done' (Cohen 2001). One such 'forgotten hero' Aco Jevtic risked his life to save Croats

him because he is a Serb and many local Serbs view him today as a traitor.

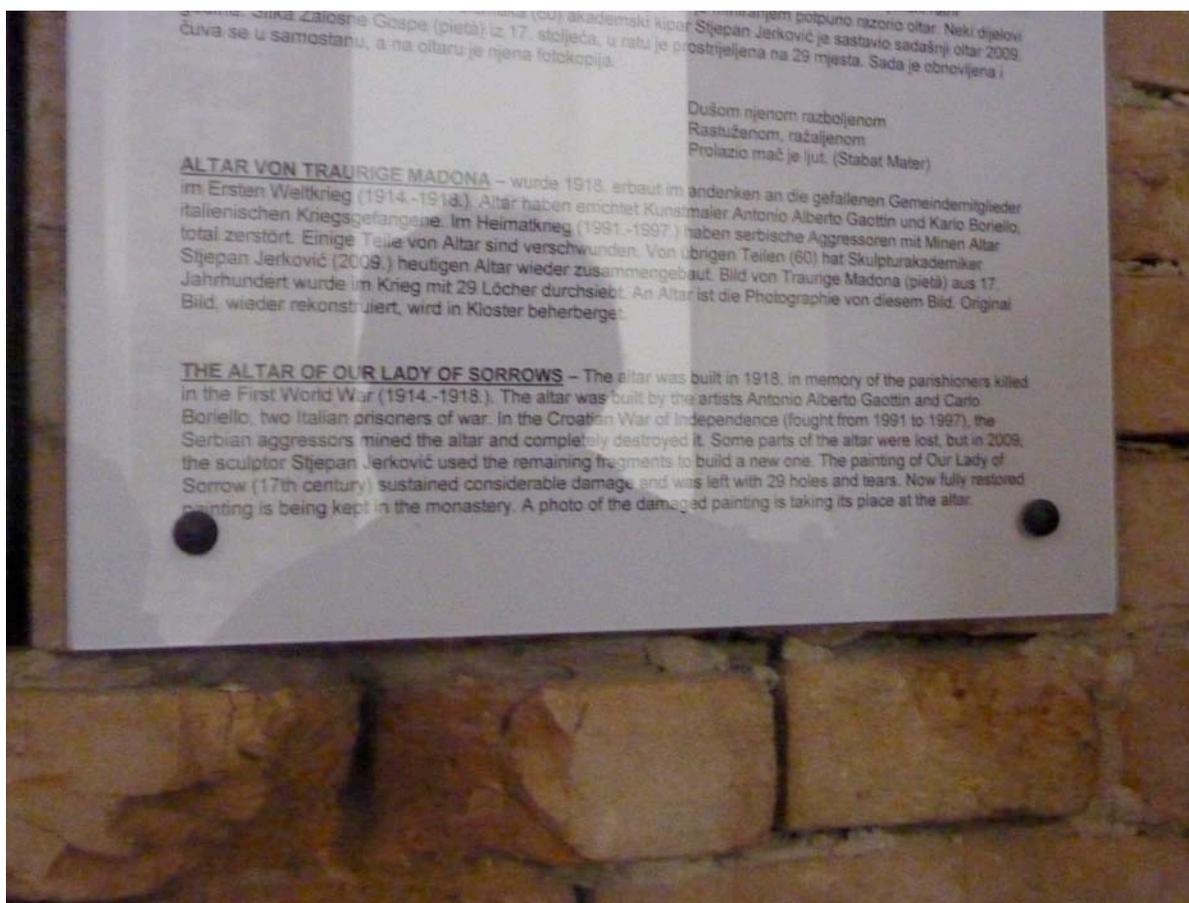


Figure 5: Information panel in Vukovar's Franciscan monastery church (St Philip and Jacob) noting that the 'Serbian aggressors mined the altar and completely destroyed it' (Baillie 2011).

The implicit equation of Serb=Aggressors and Croat= victims is more apparent during the annual commemorative events or when new memorials - which risk replicating these simplistic divisions - are opened. The middle ground between the perpetrator/victim categories is eclipsed at these sites and events and the memories of ethnically mixed Vukovarians are restricted. A local Serb NGO staff member reflected, 'I wonder if there will ever be a monument to all those that died: Serbs, gypsies, everyone. I don't think there ever will be ... No one knows how many Serbs were killed in Croatia before the JNA arrived. Serbs feel frustrated with that. We are labelled as the bad guys, but we weren't the only ones killing' (Interview VUKS2-54). The frequent recurrence of the term 'Serbian aggressors' is a worrying trend seen in Vukovar's post-reintegration memorials and heritage sites (Figure 5), as this term fails to distinguish Serb civilians from JNA soldiers and Serb paramilitaries. It therefore effectively distorts the boundaries between these groups and their respective levels of culpability and guilt. In addition, Serb civilian 'victims' are entirely absent

forgotten, coupled with the pervasive rejection of the 'Brotherhood and Unity' encouraged in Socialist-era Vukovar has resulted in the reification of the city's ethnic divisions (Garrett & Marić 2011:11). Vukovar's post-reintegration memorials are increasingly manufactured as Croat space and consumed by a majority Croat audience. Local Serbs therefore see Croat memorials as 'aggressive physical entities' (Doss 2010:74) which are imposed upon what was once 'shared space'.

There is little if any effort at the city's memorials to contextualise the events of 1991 within the framework of other incidences of ethnic cleansing witnessed in the city, the former Yugoslavia or beyond. The crimes which happened here are depicted as unprecedented events in order to disassociate them from the Croat ethnic cleansing of Serbs and Jews which took place in the city and across Croatia and Bosnia during the Second World War. Vukovar's Croat memorials to the 'Homeland War' essentialise the war as an age of moral certainty, a time innocent of complexity, irony or ambiguity - a simplified version of the chaos and insecurity experienced during the siege. Memorials 'verge close to sacredness, not unlike the temples, shrines, and historic landmarks with which they are often associated' (Zelinsky 1988:181). In Vukovar the 'sacred nature' of these sites is reinforced through the use of religious symbols (e.g. crosses) and the contributions made by priests (e.g. special masses, processions, other rites). Collectively Vukovar's Croat dead are depicted as innocent victims. Through making their subjects sacrosanct, Vukovar's memorials buffer these subjects and sites from critique, rendering them beyond reproach (Doss 2010:74). Yet, this leaves no room to critically address who and what are not being remembered at these sites.

Symbolic Justice

In Vukovar, the emphasis of memorials on the victim/perpetrator dichotomy mirrors the focus of the ICTY and the Croatian prosecution system. In a city in which perpetrators continue to live next door to victims, justice has been agonisingly slow, and the divisive ethnic tensions continue to simmer beneath the surface. Impunity and the promulgation of sentences which are perceived as unjust allows the perpetuation of an atmosphere of mistrust. The failure of the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to provide a sense of rigorous justice for the citizens of Vukovar has only weakened their faith in it. To date, only two of the seven indicted by the ICTY for war crimes committed in Vukovar have been sentenced to imprisonment.⁷ One of the accused, Šljivančanin, has had his sentence reduced from 17 to 10 years, allowing him to walk free in 2011. In part, due to the inability of the ICTY to penalise individual Serb perpetrators, Croat Vukovarians use

public memorials to ascribe accountability for the crimes committed in 1991 to the collective 'Serb aggressor'.

Amnesty International (2010) reports that there is a 'failure of political will [in Croatia] to pursue prosecutions in a way that is not one-sided and selective.' In cases of war crimes committed by Croatian forces against Serb civilians 'victims and witnesses are considered to be losers and traitors (Youth Initiative for Human Rights 2011:5).' Allegations of the destruction of Serb property by arsonists as well as cases of kidnapping and murder of Serbs in the build up to the siege of Vukovar have received little attention in the Croatian courts (Youth Initiative for Human Rights 2011:5). The trial of Tomislav Mercep who was indicted in 2011 for killing 43 Serbs in Pakračka Poljana and Zagreb did not include an investigation against him for the alleged execution of 20 Serbs in Vukovar in the summer of 1991 (B92 6 June 2011). Indeed, it was the ICTY's sentencing of the Croatian 'hero' Ante Gotovina to 24 years for crimes committed in 1995 during Operation Storm (the Croatian offensive against Serb controlled areas of what is today Croatia excluding the UN protected area in which Vukovar was situated) that most upset the Croats - especially as none of those Serbs prosecuted for crimes committed in Vukovar have received a longer sentence. At a 'Homeland War' commemoration event in the former Serb stronghold of Knin the former Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader stated that 'no one is going to write Croatian history but us', adding that he would 'not allow any institutions to falsify history', clearly alluding to the ICTY (Pavlakovic 2007:5). If the ICTY's verdicts are not recognised as 'A' truth by the Prime Minister, it implies that only truths palatable to Croats will be allowed to be publically memorialised in Croatia in the near future.

Groups who were once excluded from the dominant national narrative are now beginning to challenge that absence (Foote 1997:327). This model has yet to be applied in Vukovar where the memories of conflict remain fresh. Today, each Croat victim is remembered by name at the city's memorial sites. While it might not be appropriate to name each perpetrator - in case they become glorified as martyrs by the 'Other' - some individualisation of guilt might help to prevent the further entrenchment of the city's ethnic divides. By focusing solely on grief for those Croats lost or sacrificed, a sidestepping of more critically engaged questions is actualised at Vukovar's memorials (Doss 2010). The discourse of collective innocence absolves Croats from reflecting on issues of individual accountability. It also enables disengagement from social and political initiatives that might check future ethno-national violence in the city.

Conclusion: memorials in a city in conflict time

Contested cities such as Belfast, Nicosia, and Jerusalem are defined, in part, by their iconic dividing walls. Corkalo et. al (2004:143) refer to psychological walls separating Croats and Serbs in Vukovar. This paper suggests these 'walls' are no longer solely psychological but have rather been given tangible and spatial form through competitive memorialisation practices. Armstrong (1982:6) pointed out the ethnic group is defined by exclusion in the process of drawing inter-ethnic boundaries, the symbolic border guards such as peculiar architecture [in this case memorials] are critically important'. Vukovar's memorials act as 'symbolic border guards' that augment the invisible international border in the Danube. Balibar (2002:73) notes that

The borders of new socio-political entities, ...are no longer situated at the outer limit of territories; they are dispersed a little everywhere, wherever the movement of information, people, and things is happening and is controlled - as in cosmopolitan cities, for example [...] Borders are creating problems in the heart of civic space where they generate conflicts, hopes and frustrations for all sorts of people, as well as inextricable administrative and ideological difficulties for states'.

In Vukovar, the violence of the siege has not been expunged from the landscape, but has rather metamorphosed into memorial form.

Twenty years have now passed since the siege of Vukovar; 14 since 'peaceful reintegration'. Yet, Vukovar remains a contested city. Relationships between its Croat and Serb community, while no longer violent, remain decisively uneasy. Here, the term 'post-conflict' remains a misnomer. In Vukovar, the erection of memorials by the 'Other' is viewed as the continuation of war by other means. Each new addition solidifies, and perhaps widens the perceived gap between the city's Croats and Serbs and shrinks the remaining plural public space in the city (Kardov 2007:76). As the memorials remain highly selective, ethnically exclusive, and distinctively non-democratic, they provide little room for reaching common ground or engaging in open debate. As such, Vukovar's memorial-boom can be seen as both a symptom and perpetuator of the 'conflict time' in which the city is immersed.

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¹ During the Ten Day War which resulted in Slovenia's independence, the JNA was considered to be representative of a communist Yugoslavia. Initially, the JNA was declared neutral in the Serb-Croat conflict. However, due to defections, over time, and certainly by the end of the siege of Vukovar, the JNA had become an instrument of Serbian nationalism.

² Sample of the memorials that have been erected in and around the city since 1998: the Ovčara Memorial Centre, Ovčara memorial sculptures, the Vukovar Hospital Memorial Centre, Dr. Juraj Njavro bust, Rene Mataušek memorial, Vukovar Hunting Club 'Zrinski' memorial to hunters who were killed during the siege, the Memorial Centre for Croatian Defenders, the memorial to the policemen killed in Borovo, the White Cross on the Danube, a memorial plaque to the missing police officers at the municipal court building, the memorial to Siniša Glavašević, the memorial bust of Blago Zadro, Borovo Naselje Football Club's 'Homeland War' memorial, the Hrvatski Radio Vukovar memorial plaque, Borovo Commerce memorial wall, the War Memorial Cemetery, etc. In addition, a Memorial Centre to the 'Homeland War' has opened in the city's former JNA base and the city museum is due to open a new gallery dedicated to the 'Homeland War' in 2012. Recently, ground has been broken in Mitnica for a new memorial square dedicated to the 'Victims of Ovčara'.

³ In Vukovar, the 'counter public' is not a stable entity, rather its composition shifts and is remade in reaction to which group is dominant in the city. E.g. during the RSK Croats were a counter public (outside of the city).

⁴ Clearly this statement is not based on any quantitative statistics. I have included it nonetheless as an indicator of local perception.

⁵ E.g. the removal of symbols considered divisive such as Šajkača from the graves in the Serbian Military cemetery or the four 'č's on the cross of the Orthodox church - both of which were considered to be 'Chetnik' (far-right Serbian nationalist movement).

⁶ E.g. the Serbian Military graveyard in Vukovar and the recently inscribed (September 2011) memorial to the residents of Borovo (Selo) who were killed between 1991 and 1996.

⁷ Slobodan Milošević died before his trial, Slavko Dokmanović committed suicide before his trial, Miroslav Radić was acquitted, Mile Mrkšić was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment, the trials of Vojislav Šešelj and Goran Hadžić remain ongoing. Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović were also initially indicted for their crimes in Vukovar but the ICTY dropped those specific charges in a later indictment due to a lack of evidence.