

(Un)Avoidable War: Peace and Violent Conflict in Multiethnic Areas in Croatia

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This paper is based on preliminary results of a research project on social integration and collective identities in certain multiethnic settings in Croatia. Generally, a distinction is drawn between two main forms of peace in multiethnic settings. The first one relates to the existence of peace in the places that maintained their peace and integrity amid the spread of ethnic violence in their surroundings. The second form of peace is much more frequent, as it relates to the whole scale of post-conflict processes. Next, a typology is proposed, distinguishing multiethnic peace and conflict areas in Croatia, where the former are the areas where no violent conflicts happened in the 1990s, and the latter areas where return of refugees, mostly Serbs, is taking place as an aftermath to the conflict in 1990s. Subsequently, answers given by national experts and certain local leaders of Croatian and Serbian nationality are described in order to pre-test the bottom-line of typology, i.e., the existence of conflict and non-conflict areas inhabited both by Croats and Serbs. In the end, two main conclusions are proposed. The one concerns the relevance of the basic dichotomy of the multiethnic areas, and the other the possible usefulness of the path dependence approach to the explanation of the difference between conflict and peace areas in the case of Croatia.

Key words: multiethnic areas, conflicts, peace, typology, Croatia, path dependence

1. Introduction

This paper is based on preliminary results of a research project on social integration and collective identities in certain multiethnic settings in Croatia.* General theoretical approaches and literature concerning the forms of peace and post-conflict processes in multiethnic settings, which constitute the

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topic of this paper as well, were presented in a previous article by the author (Katunarić, 2007b). The central topic of the paper concerns two main peace modes in multiethnic settings, which are distinguished as regards conditions under which peace was established, either in the context of the war in Croatia or as a follow-up to the conclusion of the war in 1995.¹ The first mode is associated with areas that have preserved their integrities without major changes in their population composition, amid the spread of inter-ethnic violence in their surroundings. Curiously enough, only a few empirical studies (Varshney, 2002; Katunarić and Banovac, 2004) about this phenomenon exist in the available research literature bases, although one can assume that there are many more instances of such modes of peace preservation.²

Unlike the former, empirical studies on the second peace mode, i.e., the outcomes of post-conflict processes, are numerous and largely specialized as regards different phases of peace processes (see more details in: Katunarić, 2007b), which will be briefly described below.

Both modes of peace, i.e., peace in the midst of violent conflicts, and peace established upon the end of the conflicts, are displayed in the multiethnic settings of contemporary Croatia. The first mode emerged at the beginning of the 1990s in cities such as Pula (cf. Katunarić and Banovac, 2004), or in towns and villages in the region of Gorski Kotar (see below) inhabited by both Croats and Serbs. These ethnically mixed communities succeeded in avoiding violence that was, otherwise, widespread in most areas where Croats and Serbs resided next to each other. The second mode of peace was established upon the conclusion of the conflict and it has subsequently passed through several phases.

In Section 2 below, results of a couple of empirical studies on the first mode of peace are summarized. Subsequently, in Section 3, a short overview is given of various types of peace generated in post-conflict processes. In Section 4, a typology of peace conditions in multiethnic settings in Croatia is proposed. In Section 5, some responses from the interviews with national interlocutors are presented. In Section 6, results of interviews with local ethnic leaders and some officials in two different multiethnic

¹ A short reminder on the war in Croatia is given in footnote 5.

² On variations in relations between Jews and Palestinians in Israel, especially in urban areas, see: Yiftachel, 1992; Al-Haj, 2003. A rather similar case to conflict-and-peace variations in Croatia can be found in the study of Smith (2007), where the author describes a peaceful transition to federalism in a territory in Ethiopia, where the Siltie ethnic group makes up the majority, whereas, in other units, the transition largely caused ethnic dissent and violence.

places are described. Additionally, in Section 7, some comparable findings from another survey are presented. Finally, differences between conflict and peace areas are summarized on the grounds of the preliminary empirical analysis, and an explanation based on the path dependence concept is outlined concerning what might have caused differences between the paths of conflict and peace in the multiethnic areas of Croatia.

2. Peace enclaves

Both common sense and research often perceive ethnic conflict as a total phenomenon, i.e., that it involves entire ethnic groups and, respectively, takes place everywhere where these groups reside next to each other (for criticism of viewing ethnic conflict as an all-encompassing collective action see: Brubaker, 2002). In a similar vein, as Varshney stated in his study on Hindu-Muslim conflicts in India, the main theoretical approaches to ethnic relations correctly explain the emergence of conflicts, but they fail to explain variations in conflict, including its absence in some places whose populations are composed of the same ethnicities (Varshney, 2002: 27).

How is possible, then, to explain the existence of the pockets of peace in the midst of the conflict climate? Varshney, for example, found that peace in some Indian cities is a result of the existence of the associational links of civil society, i.e., concord organizations, such as business clubs and trade unions, whose membership is composed of both Hindus and Muslims. These links resisted a variety of “shock-waves” from the surroundings, spanning from the destruction of sacral objects to circulating gossip. At the end of his study, Varshney has attempted to explain, by analogy, the causes of the wars in the former Yugoslavia. Thereby, he contends that the totalitarian Communist system brusquely prevented the formation of a civil sphere with autonomous organizations made up of members of different nationalities. Instead, the Party controlled what was supposed to be a civil society sphere. Hence, with demise of the Party, the interethnic ties were dissolved accordingly and, eventually, conflicts rendered unavoidable.

Unfortunately, this explanation also reiterates the shortcomings of the conventional approaches to ethnic conflict, for it overlooks the possibility of the existence of peace pockets in this case as well. The existence of what were named “peace enclaves/cradles” in the wars of the former Yugoslavia has been registered as well as explained in a case study by Katunarić and Banovac (2004). The authors have established that some multiethnic communities, such as in Pula (Croatia), Tuzla (Bosnia-Herzegovina), and Kosovska Kamenica (Kosovo) have managed to avoid ethnic violence in the 1990s, and this happened primarily as a result of the autonomous actions of

local leaderships³ (a good part of which, notably, were former Communists) *vis-à-vis* the central/national political leaderships, which were prone to nationalism and to the ethnic divide. The local leaders did everything possible to prevent conflicts. For example, they talked with representatives of different parties or nationalities, they outflanked *spoilers* of peace in their own rank-and-file, and they also agitated for peace and harmony among the local population directly, door-to-door, and indirectly, through local media. Thus, in the Yugoslav case, although no concord NGOs appeared, as in the Indian case, the actions of local political elites were decisive for the peace outcome. The authors maintain that this case illustrates the relevance of the constructionist approach to the varieties of ethnic relations (Cederman, 2001; Joireman, 2003), i.e., that the outcome, whether peace or war, depends mostly on deliberate choices on the part of the local actors, as there are no historically predetermined or uniform patterns of actions or events. In other words, local modes of ethnic relations are primarily the result of the will and actions of local actors, rather than the consequence of events or actions which stay outside of their control and responsibility.

3. The post-conflict processes

On the whole, peace conditions in Croatia have been established as a follow-up to the conclusion of the conflicts in the second half of 1995. Research literature on peace in multiethnic settings (e.g., Taras and Ganguly, 2006; Richmond, 2004; Ganguly, 2004) generally differentiates between *peace-keeping*, *peace-making*, and *peace-building* conditions, and eventually *democratic peace* as a condition appropriate to mature democracies only (cf. Barkawi and Laffey, 1999). Yet, the tenet of *democratic peace* may be applied not only to international/interstate relations, but also to ethnic relations. The rationale for this is that in (mature) democracies (ethnic) conflicts, if they exist, are not escalated into violence, but are solved through democratic procedure and dialogue (Horowitz, 2001). The holistic notion of *peace culture* (Mayor, 1997, 2004; Galtung, 2002) may also be added to the assortment of peace conditions, since it can be attributed to multiethnic areas, such as the peace enclaves, where maintaining peace in critical situations seems to be an element of local tradition (in the sense that is explained below, i.e., in the terms of path dependence).

³ A rather similar, although military, case is described by Arfi (2000: 569), namely peace (“live-and-let-live” logic) within war (“kill-or-be-killed” logic) during the First World War, where the former appeared as a result of the disobedience of some local commands of (the British) military troops toward the Central Command.

In Croatia, with the withdrawal of the UN forces (UNPROFOR and UNTAES) from the region in 1997 (Rubinstein, 2005), a palette of conditions for peace-building has existed along with elements of peace culture, i.e., places where no violent conflicts had occurred between local Croats and Serbs. Yet, a majority of the multiethnic settings inhabited by Croats and Serbs, especially as regards the current process of the return of refugees (mainly Serbs) to their places of origin, can be situated on the scale of post-conflict processes.

Furthermore, although there are relatively numerous NGOs dealing with conflict resolution, peace and interculturalism (cf. Yilmaz, 2005; Falkheimer and Heide, 2006) in Croatia, their impact on the ongoing process of re-integration still cannot match the magnitude of the impact of the concord organizations in India analysed by Varshney.⁴ The former typically gather just a few people of different nationalities (in the case of NGOs in culture see: Katunarić, 2007a: 112 et passim). The concord (Croat-Serb) organizations are, in fact, lacking in Croatia (except in a few places – see Section 6.2.). Instead, Serbs and Croats typically meet on an everyday basis, which is not sufficient for consolidating their relations; or, they establish political party coalitions in particular local governmental units, which are, indeed, an associational link, but are obviously not enough also to consolidate the peace condition.

For a democratic peace to be established – i.e., the condition under which violence is not used in interethnic disputes (Horrowitz, 2001: 560–565), and where the ethnic parties do not display secessionist tendencies, or these cannot for some reasons be realized (Guelke, 2004; James, 2003) – in Croatia and other, previously war-torn areas of the former Yugoslavia, some macro-structural changes are needed as well, such as consolidation of democratic governance, further economic growth, and education informed by interculturalism (cf. Žagar, 2002: 61).

Last, but not least, some lessons may also be learned from the cases of the Croatian peace enclaves, such as certain places in the regions of Gorski Kotar, Western Slavonia (e.g. Moslavina), and Istria. The current situation as well as traditional practices of cross-boundary interactions in these areas may correspond to the *peace culture* concept as well, primarily because the natives have abstained from keeping or using arms in critical situations (for a list of the peace culture elements see: De Rivera, 2004, 2005). In any case, the predilections for a *culture of peace* may be taken

⁴ For similar attempts at establishing cross-ethnic associational links, yet on a temporary basis, such as summer camps, see: Nelson, Carver and Kaboolian, 2007.

as complementary to *democratic culture*, for the latter, although “realistic”, i.e., confined to the circle of mature democracies, also recommends non-violence in settling disputes between groups.

4. Typology and research methods

4.1. Typology

Multiethnic areas in Croatia (inhabited mostly by Croats and Serbs) can be differentiated with regard to their past experiences, i.e., the first half of 1990s, which can also be associated with local memories of what happened in the communities during the period of the Second World War (when Serbs were the main target of pogroms and genocide executed by the government of the Independent State of Croatia, a pro-Nazi state proclaimed in 1941):

a) Areas where there was no violence in the 1990s or the 1940s, i.e. during the Second World War – for which the *culture of peace* might be a proper term.

b) Areas that avoided violence in the 1990s, but not in the 1940s. Thus, the legacy of peace in this case may be attributed to the impact of the Communist Party policy “Brotherhood and Unity” in Croatia/Yugoslavia, for the peace established from 1945 to 1990 under the auspices of the Communist regime has somehow been prolonged into the 1990s as well.

c) Areas in which there was no ethnic violence in the 1940s, but it emerged in the 1990s, which may be called the *new conflict areas*.

d) Finally, areas in which conflicts and violence appeared in both periods of time – *traditionally* or *chronically conflict areas*.

Areas can also – at least logically – be differentiated according to their experiences with the current process of return and re-integration of refugees, which is associated with what locals have experienced in the 1990s. For example:

- Areas in which the process of re-integration runs smoothly, and where there was no violence in the 1990s (but, still some portion of emigration), which is probably highly congruent with type a).

- Areas in which the process of re-integration runs smoothly, but locals have experienced violence in the 1990s.

- Areas in which the process of re-integration is being made difficult or obstructed, and where there was violence during the 1990s, with many refugees as a consequence.

A part of the typology is presented in Table 1, where particular places in Croatia are selected in order to illustrate the above types (some examples are given according to suggestions of national interlocutors as well – see section 5.1.).

Table 1. Types of situations in the 1990s and nowadays, with some tentative examples

	<i>Violent 1990s</i>	<i>Peaceful 1990s</i>
Disintegration of communities in the 1990s	e.g. Vukovar, and most of Eastern Slavonia	?
Cohesion of communities in the 1990s		e.g. Plevlja, and most of Gorski Kotar
Comfortable return/re-integration	e.g. Vukovar, and most of Eastern Slavonia	e.g. some places in Gorski Kotar and Istria?
Difficulties with return/re-integration	hinterland of Zadar	?

In general, the typology is aimed at emphasizing the advantage of the case-approach over the population-oriented approach (cf. Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2002), for the sake of explaining variations in ethnic conflict, including the occurrence of peace in war, which cannot be grasped if the whole population of a nationality is taken as a collective actor in war and peace, respectively.

4.2. Methods

Two methods are applied respectively in the research. One is *oral history* obtained through narrative interviews with certain national experts and local leaders, and some officials as well, which is applied in the first phase of research. The aim of this method application is to reconstruct the periods of time that are critical for understanding events and developments in different multiethnic settings, certain multiperspective accounts of the interlocutors notwithstanding. Other methods, including the analysis of various sources, such as newspapers or military and political documents of the time, may be helpful here, of course, but they could not be applied without expanding the scope of research deeper into the historical analysis of the war in the early 1990s. Instead, one may recommend some detailed descriptions on that period of time, for example in the historical studies carried out by Žunec (2007) and by Ingraio and Emmert (2009) – some chapters of which may serve for readers to check comparatively with the historical narrative given in the interviews.

The other method, which will be applied in the next phase of research (and will be reported in a set of analytical papers which are currently being

prepared by the members of research team), is a *survey* of larger samples of local populations in different multiethnic settings. The aim of the application of this method is to complement the oral history analysis with insights into the local people's opinions and attitudes on a number of issues, including the views of the Other.

5. Information and views of the national interlocutors

The persons that have been chosen as national interviewees are public figures. Next to their expertise in various aspects of Croat-Serb relations (e.g. history of the relations, contemporary politics, legislation on minorities, peace initiatives in the beginning of the 1990s, documenting the war crimes), another criteria for their selection was balancing their national origins, i.e., Croatian and Serbian, respectively. They are also members of various governmental bodies or NGOs, both national and international. Their specific role in the research procedure was to give an overview of current situations in a variety of multiethnic settings in Croatia, with backgrounds in the 1990s and, when possible, earlier history, especially that of the Second World War period. In this way, they have facilitated the quest for comparable types of multiethnic places, and, accordingly, for modes of peace. In addition, the interviewees were asked to express their own views of the broader context of the wars and post-war situations in Croatia and the former Yugoslavia as a whole.

In sum, six national interlocutors were selected for the interviews: an expert on Croatian- Serbian history; a highly positioned advisor of the President of Croatia; the former head of a major NGO for human rights and scholar; a political leader of the Croatian Serbs, also a scholar; another political leader of the Croatian Serbs (belonging to an opposite political camp in the Serbian community, which strongly criticizes the major political party of the Croatian Serbs as being too collaborative with the Croatian government), who also runs a broad network of Serbian organizations in Croatia; and, finally, a former Croatian Minister of the Interior in the early 1990s, who played a key role in successful peace-talks with local Serbs in an ethnically mixed area in the Gorski Kotar region.

5.1. Distinguishing between the peace areas (PAs) and the conflict areas (CAs)

Virtually all the interlocutors differentiated between the PAs and CAs in Croatia, both for the period of 1990s and nowadays, when processes of return/re-integration of refugees are taking place. The following places in

the region of Gorski Kotar (in the central part of Croatia) are delineated as typical PAs, which have preserved peace amid interethnic violence in a number of other places in Croatia:⁵ Moravice (formerly, Srpske /Serbian/Moravice), Drežnica, Vrbovsko, Plevlja, and Gomirje. These places also have not experienced major obstacles in the process of return of the locals who abandoned their homes during the 1990s.

Notably, even though the Yugoslav Army provided Serbs in this area with arms, aiming to instigate their uprising against the newly-elected Croatian government led by the right-wing Croatian Democratic Union, yet including some moderate politicians as well, who also encouraged peace as a solution, the local Serbs decided to conclude peace with the Croatian government. How can this outcome be explained? An interlocutor, who is scholar and formerly the president of a major NGO in Croatia, generally outlined three circumstances that have determined the occurrence of both peace and violence. As he stressed, the first circumstance was “historicism” in the viewing of the past (a bulk of the people on both sides have adopted such basically nationalistic accounts of the history, but obviously less so in the PAs, as will also be exemplified below); secondly, the type of local politicians (among whom nationalists were favoured, and moderates removed from the scene in the CAs, unlike in the PAs); and thirdly, contingencies, i.e., the fortunes of war, where, for instance, some places were spared simply because the Yugoslav Army units in their campaigns of destruction, sometimes used to bivouac and rest in particular places, thus sparing such areas, including some PAs, from casualties and devastation. Nevertheless, he was not specific in this regard, and did not deny that the existence of some PAs, at least, was due to the autonomous attitudes and actions of local leaders and populations.

The former Minister of the Interior maintains that the PAs are primarily a result of collaboration between moderates in the Croatian government and moderates among local Serbs. He also notes that most people on both sides, i.e., Croatian and Serbian, did not want the war to hap-

⁵ A reminder: the war in Croatia begun in March 1991 by an attack of the Serb paramilitary troops on a Croatian police squad in Plitvice. The war lasted until January 1992, and was followed by the cease-fire and the subsequent deployment of the UN troops. The war resumed for a short while in August 1995, when the Croatian Army invaded the areas of the self-proclaimed Republika Srpska Krajina (RSK), and re-established Croatian state sovereignty over the latter. As a consequence of this, nearly a couple of hundred thousand Serbs left Croatia. The bulk of the returnees nowadays stem from this contingent of refugees or, on the other hand, from the contingents of refugees from the RSK in the early 1990s.

pen.⁶ Likewise, he added, most of the Yugoslav Army leadership did not want the war either. On the one hand, he blames the Croatian extremists in the government as instigators of the war; these extremists having arrived from abroad, i.e., from Croatian political émigrés circles mostly in Canada, the USA and Australia. Allegedly, the latter put the Croatian president Tuđman under their control. On the other hand, he also blames the Serbian president Milošević, and his coalition with Serbian extremists, respectively.⁷

Another interlocutor provided his own typological description, recalling old-fashioned anthropogeographic accounts, by describing Serbs from the PAs as “peace-loving” and “moderate”, unlike those from Dalmatia (the southern region of Croatia), who are allegedly more forceful and conflict-prone. However, in the view of the third interlocutor, such an account is nonsensical; most events were generated through the actions of local leaders and populations, which actions were contingent, depending on particular circumstances. In some CAs, for instance, such as Knin (in northern Dalmatia), or Osijek (in Eastern Slavonia) – this having been stressed by all the interviewees – some peace-prone leaders on both the Croatian (e.g. Josip Reihl-Kir, the chief of police in Osijek) and the Serbian sides (e.g. Dmitar Obradović, a peace activist from Vrginmost in the Banija region), who both acted with some success on the eve of the war, were finally killed by extremist compatriots.

⁶ This perception corresponds to the results of a survey in Croatia from the end of 1980s, according to which an overwhelming majority of Croats and Serbs did not express ethnic intolerance (Katunarić, 1992). Nevertheless, the conflict was generated by smaller groups of extreme politicians and by local or imported militants, who incited a broader arousal, permeated by heightened intolerance and hatred among respective populations. The usual moves by the former in this direction included killings of several people on each side. This is typical, for example, for what happened in Osijek and its surrounding at the beginning of the 1990s, as told by an interlocutor, who was a local political leader at that time, in an interview made for the study by Katunarić and Banovac (2004).

⁷ To the same interlocutor, the Croatian extremists pushed Tuđman to make a deal with Milošević in terms of dividing Bosnia-Herzegovina into a Croatian and a Serbian part, with the addition of a Muslim enclave. Consequently, Milošević was prepared to give up his support for the Serbs in Croatia, and Tuđman, in return, for Croats in Posavina [the Sava River Basin], a north-western part of Bosnia-Herzegovina. And indeed, until the middle of 1990s, Posavina was virtually emptied of Croats, without any sign of objection from Tuđman, and in parallel, most Serbs left their homes in Croatia without Milošević's showing any serious disagreement with such events. This population engineering was euphemistically named “humane resettlement” (*humano preseljenje*) by the Croatian government of the time.

The interlocutors have also delineated the city of Vukovar, and the area of Eastern Slavonia on the whole, as a typical CA in the 1990s, but as a PA nowadays, for the return of refugees is unfolding relatively smoothly. Difficulties with the current process of return occur mostly in the hinterland of the city of Zadar (which encompasses a good part of the Ravni Kotari area), which is a typical CA, as it used to be in the early 1990s. In Vukovar, and a good part of Eastern Slavonia, most of the Serbs have opted to stay after the withdrawal from the area of the insurgent Serb leadership and the Yugoslav Army troops, waiting for the resumption of Croatian rule and the return of local Croats to their homes. Currently, these two ethnic communities live in peace, but deeply separated, both in the private (e.g. housing) and the public sphere (e.g. schooling) (cf. Čorkalo Biruški and Ajduković, 2009).

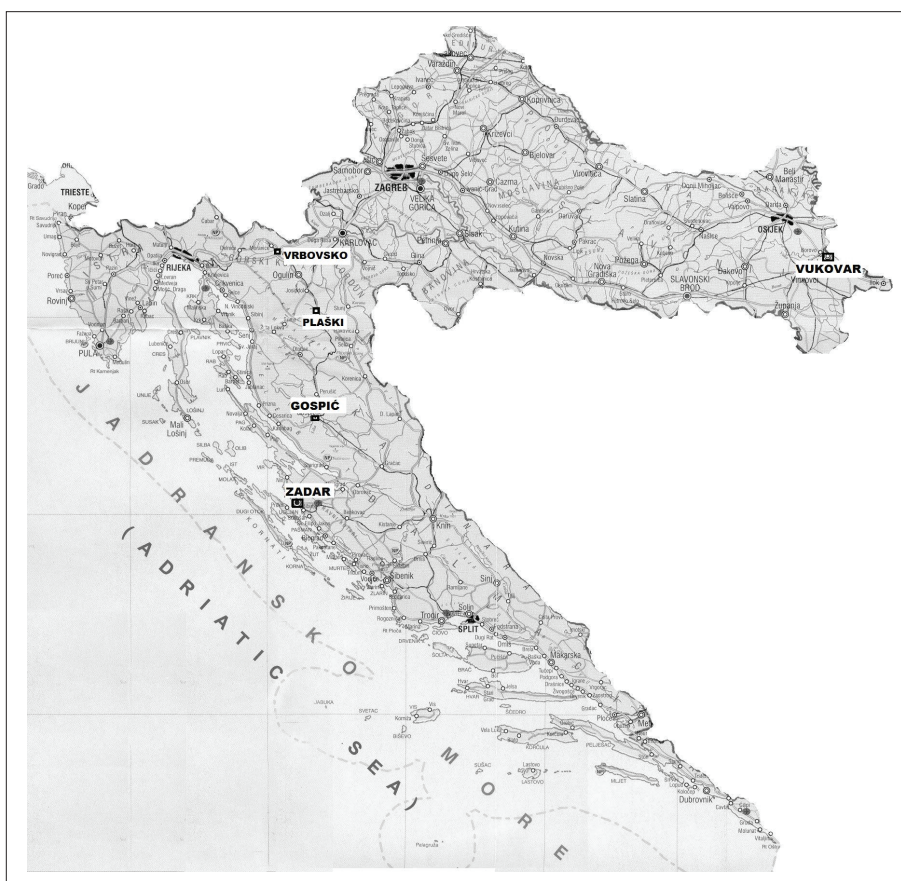
An interesting historical aspect of the PAs and the CAs has been outlined in the interviews with two national interlocutors. It is that during the Second World War a majority of the Serbian population (living in the rural areas) accepted the setting up of the Independent State of Croatia, even though the latter was a pro-Nazi, genocidal state. At the same time, the Serbian elite, mostly residing in major Croatian cities, fled from Croatia. (This is why the Ustashi, the notorious Croatian elite army forces, paradoxically, were so “efficient” in their atrocities against Serbs.) In the 1990s, however, the situation was just the opposite as regards the reactions to the political changes on the part of various parts of the Serbian population. This time, it was the Serbian elite who largely decided to stay in Croatia, while most of the rest of the population, i.e., in Krajina, fled from Croatia, but mostly in 1995, during the Croatian military operation “Storm” (*Oluja*). Among the Serb elite, some individuals surfaced who played the roles of mediators in the PAs. Yet, they could not reach the CAs with their activities, mostly because nationalists, including paramilitaries from Serbia and the Yugoslav Army, respectively, took control of the local populations in such areas and thus succeeded in pushing them into the armed struggle against the Croatian government.

The interlocutors, who were peace mediators at that time as well, stressed the negative role of the Croatian media, which virtually ignored their efforts and actions in establishing the areas of peace.

Finally, the national interviewees could not confirm the existence of such cases that would illustrate the existence of the typology categories that are question-marked in Table 1. Hence, the multiethnic places which were peaceful in 1990s, but have experienced disintegration or are having difficulties with re-integration nowadays, are only formal or logical rather

than empirical categories.⁸ (See Map 1 showing some CA and PA places analysed or just mentioned in the paper.)

Map 1. Croatia with some CA and PA places



5.2. Implementation of the policy of re-integration

In a recent study on the process of return and re-integration in Croatia, Mesić and Bagić stated that only a “sustained return” of refugees is proving possible (Mesić and Bagić, 2007). This means, primarily, that it is actually impossible to reproduce the demographic structure predating the war through

⁸ In addition, the national respondents could not provide any evidence that could confirm or refute the existence of the 4.1.b) to 4.1.d) types, i.e., the historical Second World War contingencies of particular places. Nevertheless, this issue is reiterated, with some outcome, in the interviews with local leaders (see Section 6).

the return of refugees and displaced persons. The number of returnees is relatively small, and elderly folk make up the bulk of the population (one of the interlocutors called this phenomenon the “elephants’ graveyard”).

The national interlocutors have confirmed such “demographic realism” in approaching the issue of return/re-integration. At the same time, they warn about the existence of a double bind in the governmental policy. On the one hand, at the beginning of the return/re-integration processes, both Croats and Serbs resisted them. Later on, however, the central government adopted an active policy of return of the refugees, whereas, at the same time, some parts of the local (Croatian) governmental units obstructed the policy. On the other hand, as explained by the interlocutor speaking on behalf of the majority of Serbs in Croatia, any policy of decentralization and local autonomy in this regard would not be beneficial to the Serbs, as long as the policy’s aim would be to provide for the extension of a “weak” or “minimal state”. By the same token, only a welfarist informed government can be helpful to the Serbs, for they desperately need better social services, schooling, job opportunities and, generally, a socio-economic safety net, and not just a free-market game, which puts those people at the mercy of highly biased private (mainly Croatian) employers.

Yet, the crucial problem with the Serbian minority, as pointed out by the Serbian NGO activist in the interview, is that the Croatian government has enacted a nearly perfect Constitutional Law on the Protection of the Rights of Minorities in the year 2002, but its implementation has failed thus far (this aspect is properly documented in: Srpski demokratski forum, 2007). The implementation entails, among other things, the setting up of two different languages and scripts in the ethnically mixed areas, then restitution of rights to the Serbian tenants who have emigrated from the area, and the employment of Serbs in the public sector, which would be set up in proportion to the minority’s shares in local populations.⁹ Unfortunately, says the interlocutor, the practice of the Croatian government (not just a part of it, he argues, but on the whole!) is just the opposite, as it wants to keep the presence of Serbs in Croatia at a minimum, i.e., to retain the ethnic cleansing results from the 1990s, when the share of Serbs in the general population has declined from 12% in 1991 to merely 4%. On the other hand, he adds, the official image of the Croatian minority policy, especially the one manufactured for the eyes of the European Un-

⁹ As Mesić and Bagić noted in their study on returnees, about a third of returnee Serbs were unemployed, compared to a countrywide average of 17% for Croatia. Likewise, only 8% were employed or self-employed, while 11% were dependent on humanitarian assistance (Mesić and Bagić, 2007).

ion representatives,¹⁰ is polished and basically false, although the current government has co-opted some Serbian politicians who, as the interlocutor maintains, serve as a charade for two-faced politics. Such remarks, as well as remarks made by other national interlocutors, have been double-checked in the interviews with some local leaders in the PAs.

6. Interviews with local leaders in Plaški (a CA) and Vrbovsko (a PA)

6.1. Plaški

Plaški is a town in Lika, traditionally inhabited largely by Serbs (nearly 90%, and 10% of Croats, out of the total of 4,659 inhabitants in 1991). Between 1991 and 1995 it belonged to the territory of Krajina (the self-proclaimed Serbian state in Croatia). Afterwards, during the Croatian military operation “Storm” (*Oluja*) in August 1995, the town was virtually emptied: only 92 persons remained. Shortly afterwards, a number of Croats from an area in Bosnia-Herzegovina (mostly from the surroundings of Banja Luka) poured into the town and occupied a good part of the Serbs’ houses or apartments. In 2001, after the assumption of municipal power by the Serbian Autonomous Democratic Party (SDSS) in the regular elections, the houses and apartments were returned or restituted to the local Serbs. However, only some 25% of the Serbs have returned to Plaški. The nearby village of Lička Jasenica (which belongs to the Plaški municipality) was exclusively a Serbian community with some 500 inhabitants (unlike the village of Saborsko in the vicinity, for example, which is a Croatian community exclusively). Following August 1995, Lička Jasenica was emptied, and nowadays only elderly people (some one hundred of them) have returned.

In Plaški, the interviewees were the former mayor (from 2001 to 2005), who is a Serb, and a teacher in the elementary school, who is a Croat who came there from Bosnia-Herzegovina in the wave following the “Storm” operation. The interlocutor in Lička Jasenica is a medical doctor (thus, an exemption among interlocutors qua officials), a Croat.

Interlocutors in Plaški stressed that the situation with the return of refugees is replete with problems: even though the legal matters with the restitution of the Serb ownerships are mainly solved, the age of the most of the returnees in addition to the poor economic situation (no investments and, practically, no new employment) discourages the further process of

¹⁰ Croatia is an EU candidate and is currently in talks with the EU, which pressures the government to solve, among others, the problem of return and resettlement of the Serbian refugees.

return. A remarkable difference in the interpretation of that period of time, i.e., after 2005, following the resumption of local power by a coalition of the Croatian political parties, exists between the Serbian and the Croatian interlocutors in Plaški. According to the former, the new authorities have unduly removed the Serbs employed in the local administration, while the latter maintains that the preceding authority, constituted by the Serb political party, appointed only Serbs to the administrative posts, and that the moves of the new local leadership could be justified accordingly. The former interlocutor, unlike the latter, also emphasizes that the implementation of the Constitutional Law on the Protection of Minorities has hardly been initiated as regards Serbs; for instance, the introduction of teaching for the Serbian pupils in their Serbian mother tongue met strong resistance from the local school authorities. Another difference in the views of the interlocutors appears with regard to the possible effects of the expected economic growth of the town. The Serbian interlocutor maintains that economic growth alone cannot have positive effects on the interethnic relations, while the Croatian interlocutor thinks, to the contrary, that an economic take-off would be of key importance for the cohesion of the community. At the same time, both interlocutors agree in that there have been no major interethnic incidents in recent years (unlike in the second half of the 1990s). Moreover, they say, there is no visible segregation along ethnic lines: Croats and Serbs display a certain tolerance towards each other, and certain provocations made by local (Croatian) militants do not seem to have spoilt the relationships – although there are no concord (interethnic) associations (except the local soccer team which consists of Croats and Serbs). Likewise, the interlocutors point out that local intermarriages are highly tolerated by both sides. Finally, they do not see that institutional or political reform in terms of (de)centralization would bring an improvement to both sides, arguing that important posts on both levels, i.e., local and national, are occupied by incompetent officials and politicians, who do not care much for the policy of re-integration and reconciliation, or deliberately obstruct any such trends.

The interlocutor in Lička Jasenica has given a fairly different picture of the local conditions. The local economy and infrastructure, as he states, seems to have deteriorated: there is no school in the village, and the local post office is rundown; even the water supply has barely been secured.¹¹

¹¹ Cutting off the water supply was frequently used from 1991 to 1995 by the authorities in the Serb Krajina *vis-à-vis* some Croatian villages and cities (e.g. Zadar). Afterwards, with resumption of the control of the territory by the Croatian government, it used to happen that the authorities in turn, revengefully cut off the water supply or electricity to the settlements inhabited mainly or exclusively by Serbs.

The main cause of the problem, according to him, is the political centre in Croatia, which had abandoned local development and has hence practically discouraged the return of the Serbs. He basically sees segregation as the main cause of the conflicts, blaming the lack of communication between the different ethnic communities, whereas a multiethnic milieu, he argues, produces peace and tolerance. He also believes that economic growth is the key, and that decentralization would be a better solution for the policy of re-integration, because local people are genuinely more interested in improving the actual existing situation, unlike officials and politicians in the centre. Due to the local segregation (Lička Jasenica inhabited by Serbs only, and Saborsko, which is seven kilometres away from Jasenica, inhabited by Croats only), there are no incidents on the ethnic basis, but there is no communication between the two communities either (the only café is located in Saborsko, but the Serbs from Jasenica have not visited it at all). Finally, the interlocutor maintains that Croatian EU membership may somewhat improve the local interethnic relations in the long rather than the short run, nevertheless, but only provided that Croatian EU membership would open up local windows of economic opportunities, especially for tourism.

6.2. Vrbovsko

Vrbovsko is a town and municipality in the Karlovac County (in the terms of traditional geographical regions in Croatia, it is located on the verge of the Lika region, but locals consider themselves to be part of the Gorski Kotar region) and has 60 settlements and 6 100 inhabitants. The town population consists mostly of Croats (55.8% in 1991, and 57.2% in 2001) and Serbs (34% in 1991, and 36.2% in 2001). Thus, unlike Plaški, there was no change in the demographic composition there in the critical period of time: both populations have even increased slightly. This is due, as explained above, to the decision by local leaders and population in 1991, particularly Serbs, to live in peace with the newly elected Croatian government. Just a few of the local Serbs, obviously militants who eventually realized that they did not have any broader support among their compatriots, left the area.

Interlocutors in Vrbovsko were: the former mayor, who is Serbian (he left the office recently, at the beginning of 2008), and a recently retired engineer of forestry, who is a Croat and a prominent figure both in the local community and in the whole region of Gorski Kotar.

Both of them emphasize the peacefulness of this place and the whole area as a part of a long tradition. In the Second World War, for example, the area was generally spared the conflicts and atrocities, which were rather typical for most areas in Croatia inhabited by Serbs. It did happen at that

time that a Serbian village in the vicinity was scorched by the Ustashi, and that the Croats provided their Serbian neighbours with shelter, mostly by receiving them into their own homes. In this way, as explained by one of the interlocutors, a solid bond of trust was forged between the two communities.

In 1991, although initially local Croats and Serbs were armed – the former by the ruling party, i.e., the HDZ, and the latter by the Yugoslav Army – both sides decided not to use those weapons. The interlocutors readily say that they are extremely different from the Krajina Serbs. Here, concord, i.e., ethnically mixed, organizations exist, like the soccer club or the association of hunters. Likewise, intermarriages are very frequent and such links are very solid. Only recently, warn the interlocutors, some pressures have come from outside, aimed at separating the two communities. One such pressure is the introduction of confessional religious instruction into the school by the Croatian government, which separates Catholic (Croatian) and Christian Orthodox (Serbian) children. The other pressure comes from the Serbian political parties, whose representatives – also not from Vrbovsko – remark that “the local Serbs are not good Serbs”, that they are abandoning their national specificity and identity. In addition, local Serbs do not like the policy which, as a result, introduced Serbian language in the schools, because it separates local Serbian children from their Croatian peers. In the words of one of the interlocutors, “we do not, nor do we want to, live next to each other (*suživot*), for we live together (*zajedno*)”.

Furthermore, the interlocutors do not believe that either centralization or further decentralization would bring an improvement to the local community. Similarly, they think that the EU-membership of Croatia might not necessarily be important for the well-being of the area. Nevertheless, they stress that further economic development should be an absolute priority, and that EU-funds should be used to this purpose, e.g., in sustaining the local cattle breeding and tourism.

7. Germane data from another survey

In Tables 2 and 3, data are presented from a survey in 2004 in the Croatian regions of Gorski Kotar, Lika and Istria (Banovac and Boneta, 2006),¹² indicating attitudes toward Others by respondents, mostly Croats, living in a CA place (Gospić, the Lika region), and a PA place (Vrbovsko, the Gorski Kotar region).

¹² I thank the authors for passing on to me the unpublished data bases of their research.

Table 2. Is a common life of Croats and Serbs still possible?

	<i>Gospić</i>	<i>Vrbovsko</i>	<i>Total</i>
“No”	8	1	9
Column Percent	10.53%	2.22%	
“Yes, but not as much as before”	43	11	54
Column Percent	56.58%	24.44%	
“Yes, absolutely”	25	33	58
Column Percent	32.89%	73.33%	
Totals	76	45	121

Table 3. If you would be in a position to decide on relations with the groups listed below, which ones would you like to accept?*

		Close neighbors	Friends	Acquaintances	Co-worker	Leaders in the economy and politics	Spouse	Visitor to Croatia	Banning them entry in Croatia
<i>Albanians</i>	<i>Gospić</i>	28.75	25.00	38.75	18.75	11.25	8.75	60.00	8.75
	<i>Vrbovsko</i>	57.78	60.00	66.67	55.56	37.78	31.11	86.67	6.67
<i>Bosniacs</i>	<i>Gospić</i>	50.00	48.75	57.50	35.00	12.50	26.25	67.50	2.50
	<i>Vrbovsko</i>	73.33	77.78	80.00	68.89	44.44	46.67	84.44	0.00
<i>Montenegrins</i>	<i>Gospić</i>	32.50	23.75	40.00	20.00	11.25	12.50	61.25	8.75
	<i>Vrbovsko</i>	66.67	68.89	75.56	64.44	42.22	44.44	86.67	2.22
<i>Croats</i>	<i>Gospić</i>	98.75	96.25	96.25	96.25	97.50	96.25	82.50	1.25
	<i>Vrbovsko</i>	95.56	95.56	95.56	93.33	93.33	100.00	95.56	0.00
<i>Roma</i>	<i>Gospić</i>	32.50	22.50	40.00	16.25	10.00	10.00	61.25	5.00
	<i>Vrbovsko</i>	57.78	55.56	68.89	55.56	37.78	26.67	86.67	6.67
<i>Slovenians</i>	<i>Gospić</i>	42.50	31.25	50.00	25.00	12.50	20.00	70.00	10.00
	<i>Vrbovsko</i>	71.11	75.56	75.56	75.56	60.00	48.89	86.67	0.00
<i>Serbs</i>	<i>Gospić</i>	58.75	50.00	61.25	41.25	15.00	35.00	65.00	8.75
	<i>Vrbovsko</i>	75.56	77.78	82.22	77.78	55.56	48.89	86.67	4.44
<i>Italians</i>	<i>Gospić</i>	48.75	41.25	63.75	27.50	16.25	28.75	83.75	2.50
	<i>Vrbovsko</i>	75.56	82.22	86.67	77.78	53.33	46.67	95.56	0.00

* Only answers “Yes”, and percentages, are given.

Obviously, respondents in Vrbovsko (a PA) have more faith in a common life shared by Croats and Serbs than respondents in Gospić (a CA) – with regard to the experiences in the 1990s. Likewise, the social distance

of the former is significantly lower than that of the latter. This is virtually true for all groups on the list, including Serbs. The only exceptions are the Croats (actually, this is an expression of a high self-preference among the respondents qua Croats).

On the other hand, differences in social distance, as shown in Table 3, reflect the opinion expressed by some interlocutors in the interviews, which is that people in the PAs are, at least partly, different from people in the CAs in terms of their “mentality”. Nevertheless, such an attitude – regardless as to whether it indicates real differences in the respective cultural patterns or merely reflects some of the interlocutors’ prejudices – may obscure the fact that differences between the two areas are relative rather than absolute. In other words, one should not ignore the existence of a certain number of respondents in the CAs, whose attitudes are similar or even identical to attitudes of the majority of the respondents, and other people, in the PAs. Hence, different circumstances or contingencies might have been responsible for providing different “mentalities”. Thus, in some places, peace-prone actors with accordingly low social distance have prevailed at a critical juncture over conflict-prone actors with high social distance – and vice versa. Of course, the existence of a long tradition of peace in a PA may indeed contribute to the peace outcome in such precarious situations. However, the tradition alone cannot be a sufficient condition for peace. Some other contingencies, such as the above-mentioned fortuitous paths of the war operations, might be equally important in sustaining the peace outcome. Naturally enough, the outlooks for peace in a crisis environment will be greater in places where local conditions resemble peace culture – and vice versa, they will be smaller there where local conditions, such as a culture of violence, are conducive to mass mobilization on a (mono)ethnic basis.

It should be pointed out that both survey data and the data from the interviews have been obtained recently, i.e., more than ten years after the completion of the war in Croatia. As such, they cannot make for an evidence of “cultural” differences between CAs and PAs, i.e., in terms of the culture of violence and culture of peace, respectively. Undoubtedly, social distance in CAs, for example, might have been substantially lower in pre-conflict periods than later (cf. Katunarić, 2009). Consequently, the war by itself caused enlargement of social distance between Croats and Serbs. On the other hand, the existence of PAs and their predispositions to peace rather than conflict and violence, i.e., their “culture of peace”, should not indeed be seen in terms of primordialism, whether founded emotionally or in a distant, yet mythologized, past, but in the terms of their experience

with some previous episodes of crisis in the relations between Croats and Serbs, and their consequent peaceful solutions. Such an experience preceding the one in the 1990s, and indeed most importantly, happened during World War II. In this respect, a path dependence explanation may be the most suitable.

8. A path dependence explanation

These reliabilities as well as differences between a CA (Plaški) and a PA (Vrbovsko) described in Section 6, may be taken to illustrate the *path dependence* or, more precisely, the *self-reinforcing sequences* in historical processes that are conceptualised by some historical sociologists as a proper substitute for causal analysis, given that there existed, presumably, three different initial options in this case for both the Serbs and the Croats. The first possible option was to establish, or to contribute to, peace. The second option was to fight, and the third to flee, i.e., to leave the area. What the actors have chosen – that, as a consequence, has determined their future. Thus, group members were “locked in” (Arfi, 2000: 566) to the process they or the most powerful among them traced. In general, “once contingent historical events take place [e.g. the initial peace arrangement in some parts of Gorski Kotar and Lika, or riots by Serbs in Zadar’s hinterland], path-dependent sequences are marked by relatively deterministic causal patterns or... ‘inertia’ [which]... involves mechanisms that *reproduce* a particular institutional pattern over time” (Mahoney, 2000: 511; see also: Pierson, 2000; Aminzade, 1992). In this case, that means that Gorski Kotar and Zadar’s hinterland are by no means “pre-paid” for peace and war, respectively, for the contingency of the initial events rules out inevitability, i.e., an entirely deterministic or probabilistic explanation. Nevertheless, “[t]o argue that an event is contingent is not the same thing as arguing that the event is truly random and without antecedent causes” (Mahoney, 2000: 513). Thus, peace in some multiethnic areas of Croatia in the 1990s, as well as peaceful reintegration nowadays, is not purely coincidental, and peace and tolerance can be taken as a possibility, both historically and as regards the current or the future outlook.

The path dependence is also a recurrent topic in ethnic conflict research, yet more frequently so as to contribute to the explanation of the occurrence of ethnic conflict (cf. Ruane and Todd, 2004; Arfi, 2000; Smith, 2007; Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2002) rather than peace (for the case of the Northern Ireland settlement of peace see: Ruane and Todd, 2007). In the latter, peace is explained as the product of “critical junctures”, i.e., situations

in which the actors for some reasons – most often these are international pressures combined with domestic forces committed to the pragmatism of peace – decided to cease with the precedent practices of violence. This mode of peace, however, as pointed out in the Introduction to this paper, does not have the same root as the one perpetuated in traditionally peaceful multiethnic areas. Consequently, the peace is path-dependent as much as the violent conflict is. Nevertheless, as much as violent conflict can, under certain conditions, be converted into peace, peace can also be altered into violent conflict, although it cannot be substantiated that the conflict occurs at the outset of the creation of multiethnic settings, i.e., that “war is the father of all” (Heraclites).

9. Conclusions

Two main conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the preliminary phase of research into certain multiethnic areas in Croatia. The first conclusion concerns the typology, for some differences between the areas of ethnic violence and ethnic peace can be discerned. The most significant difference concerns the history of a particular place. The CA places studied here used to be conflicting in the past as well. In such a way, they might have transmitted the messages of mutual ethnic distrust through generations. On the other hand, PA places “remember” good conduct in the past, and are consequently, during crisis situations, committed to peace rather than conflict as an option. In addition, members of different nationalities in the PA places constitute the common/concord organizations, unlike in the CA places, where interethnic communication either does not exist or it unfolds on a day-to-day basis, i.e. superficially. This finding basically confirms Varshney’s argument on the focal importance of the associational links between members of different ethnic groups.

With regard to the typology (outlined in 4.1.), only types a), and e), respectively, i.e., *culture of peace* (in the case of the PA), and types d), and g), respectively, i.e., *traditionally conflict areas*, have been detected so far.

The second conclusion concerns the explanation of differences between the CA and the PA areas. On the basis of the conjectures surfacing in the oral history, where commonly shared views of the interviewees are taken as a basis to reconstruct the (historical) process that bifurcated the fates of the areas – it can be demonstrated that the choice for peace or war was the result of an interplay between local tradition (of peace and conflict, respectively), on the one hand, and the macro-political context created by the Croatian government, Serbian government and the Yugoslav Army, on

the other. It is questionable, however, how much events in the 1990s could have been determined by local tradition or micro-politics of the local leaders only. Still, it can be argued that local leaderships, whether Serbian or Croatian, who refused to collaborate with their respective national(istic) leaders, have insomuch heightened their chances for the perpetuation of the local peace. Thus, peace was not the main option of national policies at that time, but merely local and – rarely successful.

Because of such contingencies, a “path dependence” approach can presumably be employed in this case. A rationale for its application can be found in the fact that, in a few areas in Croatia, a long-lasting tradition of peace may have generated peace as a consequence, whereas conflicts have generated further conflicts (in many more areas inhabited by Croats and Serbs) in subsequent critical situations. Whether this is true in other PA or CA cases as well, or some variations exist in this regard, and why such variations occur, is an issue that may direct future research, resulting with a more complex typology of CAs and PAs in Croatia.

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Rat se (nije) moglo izbjeći: mir i sukobi u multietničkim područjima u Hrvatskoj

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Ovaj je članak zasnovan na prvim rezultatima istraživačkog projekta o društvenoj integraciji i kolektivnim identitetima u nekim multietničkim sredinama u Hrvatskoj. Općenito se razlikuju dva oblika mira u multietničkim područjima. Prvi se odnosi na postojanje mira u mjestima koja su sačuvala svoj mir i integritet unatoč širenju etničkog nasilja u njihovu okruženju. Drugi je oblik mira mnogo češći, a odnosi se na čitavu ljestvicu postkonfliktnih procesa. Nadalje, predložena je tipologija koja razlikuje područja multietničkog mira i sukoba u Hrvatskoj, gdje se prvo odnosi na područja u kojima nije bilo nasilnih sukoba devedesetih, a potomje na područja u kojima se vraćaju izbjeglice, pretežno Srbi, kao posljedica sukoba devedesetih. Potom su prikazani odgovori koje su dali stručnjaci na nacionalnoj razini te lokalni vođe hrvatske i srpske nacionalnosti, kako bi se provjerila valjanost spomenute tipologije u njezinoj osnovi, tj. razlikovanje konfliktnih i nekonfliktnih područja nastanjenih i Hrvatima i Srbima. Na koncu, predložena su dva glavna zaključka. Prvi se tiče relevantnosti osnovne dihotomije multietničkih područja, a drugi moguće korisnosti pristupa (sa stajališta koncepta) ovisnosti o prijedenom putu u cilju objašnjenja razlike između konfliktnih i mirnih područja u slučaju Hrvatske.

Ključne riječi: multietnička područja, sukobi, mir, tipologija, Hrvatska, ovisnost o prijedenom putu