COLLOQUIA

HUMANISTICA

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Newcomers and Locals. Invisible Boundaries Among Inhabitants of a Divided City in the Balkans

Abstract

Research on divided cities in the Balkans focuses mostly on ethnic/national divisions. Is this perspective, however, truly viable and sufficient for the description of post-conflict cities in the Balkans? The question is posed not only because of the fact that every city is somehow divided or fragmented. More noteworthy, and not widely known, is the fact that the unstable structure of a city's population is much more complex with its intergroup relations becoming much more complicated – a fact commonly disregarded due to the importance assigned to ethnic/national rifts which have dominated the narrative of the divided city. Underestimating the importance of other relations within society and the dynamics of a highly changeable social structure, one cannot uncover the actual nature of intergroup relations in a divided city.

The main objective of this paper is to briefly present the state of contemporary inter- and intragroup relations in a divided city, with a special focus on inhabitants'

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residential status. The article is based mainly on the case study of Mitrovica supplemented with references to other cities in the Balkans considered as divided. The paper is based on selected outcomes of qualitative and quantitative field research conducted in Mitrovica in 2017 and 2018 as well as results of other studies devoted mostly to Mitrovica but also to Mostar, Vukovar, Skopje and Sarajevo.

Keywords: Mitrovica, divided city, field research, migration, neighbour, local community, inhabitants.

Introduction

Research on divided cities covers a wide range of fragmentation aspects (social, economic, ethnic, political, confessional, racial, mental/material, etc.) and a diversity of approaches, definitions, and methodologies (Allegra, Casaglia, & Rokem, 2012). Literature on the topic provides many different examples of divided cities (from Berlin, Nicosia, Jerusalem, Belfast and Mostar, to Paris, London and New York) and identifies a list of different reasons of partition (Anderson, 2008; Bollens, 2012; Calame & Charlesworth, 2009; Jańczak, 2009; Nagle, 2016; van Kempen, 2007). Depending on the intensification of regional and global processes, divisions in the urban space have a different face. As a result of the prevalent importance of the collapse of Yugoslavia in the region, research on divided cities in the Balkans focuses mostly on ethnic/national divisions. Research on cities perceived as divided, like Mostar, Vukovar, Mitrovica, Sarajevo and Skopje, is mostly devoted to changes resulting from the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Shaw, 2003), the process of reconciliation and peace-building in the post-conflict area (Björkdahl & Gusic, 2013; Župančič, 2018), the dynamics of local community dissolution and the influence of direct exposure to suffering during the war on contemporary (mutual) relations (Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2009; Pilić & Bošnjak, 2011), the ethnic identity and ethnic dimension of divisions (Castan Pinos, 2016; Jańczak, 2009; Luković, 2005; Marković, 2010; Pavlović, 2016). They are also analysed in the context of symbolic conflicts over urban space, commemorative strategies and competing narratives of the local past (Janev, 2011, 2015; Palmberger, 2016; Radović, 2013). Divided cities also appear widely in contemporary reports of international (OSCE, UN, ICG, etc.) and local organizations. Most of the reports focus mainly on security issues and examine the socio-political context, therefore remaining an invaluable source of information about the current situation in a given

city as well as in the region. Nevertheless, the reports ignore other aspects of everyday life which are not directly connected with security issues.

The domination of the ethnic/national aspect in the narration of the divisions in those cities was and undoubtedly still is justified, and this paper does not aim to challenge that. Nevertheless, one cannot underestimate the importance of other factors which shape the urban landscape in the context of disintegration and integration processes. This paper proposes a perspective different than the ethnic/national one in intergroup relations; it suggests a focus on intragroup relations and other dimensions of relations between groups and individuals which might be determined by gender, level of education, profession, age, economic situation, political affiliation, origins, place of birth, personal character, etc. Obviously, not every component of identity will be just as relevant, but they should at least be taken into consideration. The aim of this approach is to enrich, complement and verify the research results which are already available.

Newcomers, Locals and Others. The Case of Mitrovica

In this paper special attention is paid to one of the aspects neglected in research on divided cities which is strictly connected with social mobility and intense migration, especially after the conflict. Research has proved that residential status and possible circumstances connected with this category may influence the status of an inhabitant in certain urban contexts. In the case of Mitrovica, the issue of residential status and other aspects of internal divisions within the community has already been mentioned in several studies. Nevertheless, it has never been the main focus in the research on Mitrovica, which is rather surprising considering the multicultural character of the local community and some serious shifts in demographic composition (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2011, 2014). It seems that this situation can be explained by the relatively small number of cultural analyses compared to strictly political ones.

For instance, in the paper *Историјске, урбано-демографске и социолингвистичке особености Косовске Митровице* [Historical, urban-demographic and sociolinguistic characteristics of Kosovska Mitrovica], relying on interviews with local people and analyses of documents, Miloš Luković notices that, apart from ethnic and confessional differences, citizens of Mitrovica might be divided into three groups according to their residential status: refugees, newcomers and old citizens (Luković, 2005). The category of old citizens (*Mitrovčani, starosedeoci*) refers to families that have lived in the city since the times before WWII, newcomers are those who have lived

in the city for a few generations and came to Mitrovica after WWII, while refugees moved to the city after NATO troops entered this territory (Luković, 2005).

Although Aleksandar Pavlović in his PhD thesis *Свакодневни живот становника северне Косовске Митровице* [*The everyday life of northern Kosovska Mitrovica residents*] emphasizes the divisions in Mitrovica along ethnic lines, at the same time he also reveals a significant difference within the Serbian community. Pavlović argues that solidarity among Serbs in North Mitrovica remains the main social imperative, in relation to which all other social relations within their own Serbian community are pushed to the background. Solidarity among Serbs, derived from a feeling of kinship and neighbourhood as well as common ethnicity in opposition to Albanians, shows, however, only one picture of intergroup relations within the Serbian community (Pavlović, 2016). Together with acts of solidarity, Pavlović identifies elements of division within the Serbian community regarding residential status (there is a difference between a native inhabitant – *starosedelac* and a newcomer – *doseljenik*), due to socioeconomic stratification (as a consequence of economic decline and the lack of a legal framework which would prevent the increase of crime) and regarding the question of North Kosovo's political status (Pavlović, 2016).

In his paper *EU peace-building in the north of Kosovo and psychosocial implications for the locals: A bottom up perspective on normative power Europe*, Rok Župančič also refers to one of the aspects covered by Pavlović, namely the influence of the political situation on the condition of the present-day local community. He presents the results of research on intra-ethnic relations among the Serbs in North Kosovo on the basis of a field study completed in 2017. According to his observations, the EU peace-building engagement in Kosovo intensified the intra-ethnic split of the Serbs into so-called “boycotters” and “integrationists”. Many of those who did something which could be considered a step towards integration (even crossing the bridge in a certain period, or applying for a Kosovar identity card) have been labelled as traitors and exposed to various forms of violence. He argues that, as a result, for many people from the Serbian community it was not the Albanians that they should be afraid of but their fellow Serbs (Župančič, 2018).

Even though the research mentioned above was conducted mostly among the Serbian community in the north, most of these problems were confirmed by locals during interviews with regard to the southern region as well. In the next sections I will elaborate on the issue of changeable social structure, perception of the neighbour, the concept of a citizen of Mitrovica as well as the resultant complex relations within communities.

Demographic and Spatial Characteristics of Contemporary Mitrovica

Mitrovica is a medium-sized city located in the northern part of Kosovo, about 40 km from Pristina, 124 km from Skopje, 75 km from Novi Pazar, and 80 km from Prizren. The city is situated in a valley and bounded by the Shala hills in the north-east. There are three rivers flowing through the city: the *Sitnica/Ситница*, *Ibër/ Ибар* and *Lushta/Љушта*. Recently an artificial lake was created as well, located west of the Roma district.

The River Ibar is perceived as a border between the south and north of the town, but the city is also divided into several quarters or neighbourhoods¹ which include – besides the centre(s) [*Qendra, Центар*] – the Bosnian district [*Lagja e Boshnjakëve, Бошњачка махала*] and the Roma district [*Fidanishte/Fidanishtja, Ромска махала*], and also the less well known Partisans' Hill [*Kodra Partizane, Партизантско брдо*], Minors' Hill [*Kodra e Minatorëve, Микронаселје*], Ilirida neighbourhood [*Iliridë/ Илирида*], Bair neighbourhood [*Lagja Bairi, Баир*], Tavnik neighbourhood [*Tavniku/Тавник*], the "Bridge of Blood" [*Ura e Gjakut*], the Industrial Zone [*Zona Industriale, Индустијска Зона*] and *Suhodoll/Суви До*. There are also some names of neighbourhoods that only appear in one of the available sources, as well as those which are not official but commonly used. Regardless of the designation, each of the neighbourhoods, obviously, has its own history of internal shifts and specific microcosms of relations.

Identifying the city centre is very problematic today, not only because of limited access to sources. Even local people living in Mitrovica seemed to be confused about this matter when interviewed. The first concern was the division of the city, when they needed to specify which part of the city we were talking about and which period we were referring to in our conversation. The second issue was the sense of centrality; in many cases they pointed to particular parts of the city which have either a specific function or appearance, such as the social centre, the urban centre or the market as a centre. As a result, we can point to several examples of the centre before and after the division of the city, such as the promenade close to the former Jadran Hotel and Nikola Tesla Cinema, relatively close to the Isa Boletini statue, the surroundings of the traffic circle where the monument of Prince Lazar is situated, the place(s) close to the main mosque, the surroundings of the main bridge, the northern part of the city.

¹ This brief description of the main parts of the city should be treated as a general overview. It is based on several maps, mostly contemporary, often contradictory or incomplete, observations on site conducted by the author of this paper as well as interviews with locals.

The situation seems to be less complicated regarding the market, even though on account of the armed conflict and economic transformation it has changed significantly. Today Mitrovica's residents shop in the (green) market, similar to the old *pazar*, located close to the main mosque (in the south where it used to be), close to the Roma district in the south as well as close to the main bridge in the north, but also at small shops (located, for example, in the Bosnian district) and at new shopping malls located mostly close to the east bridge on the south side of the river.

This brief introduction to the spatial (dis)order on the example of the main reference points in the city only shows that all communities had to pay a high price for the disintegration. At the time of dissolution, there remained on the southern side: a bus station, the Trepca mine,² the Orthodox church and the Christian cemetery, the Catholic church and some sports facilities, while on the northern side: a regional hospital, most of the modern buildings, the Bosnian district and the Muslim cemetery. Over time, the communities on both sides of the river created parallel institutions (for example, local administration, universities, religious facilities) which enable them to meet most of their vital needs without crossing to the other side.

A multicultural environment and changing social composition have been typical for Mitrovica for centuries due to its geopolitical location.³ Tremendous shifts in the city's demographic composition in both the northern and the southern part were characteristic for the last conflict in the 1990s. The contemporary demographic situation in Mitrovica can be better understood within the broader context of demographic changes and migration waves after WWII in the region. According to the *Kosovo Human Development Report*, in the period after the war Kosovo faced rapid population growth, long-term shifts in the relative numbers of ethnic Albanians and Serbs as well as four migration waves: before 1989, mostly by young unskilled men from rural areas, with a low level of education, driven by the economic situation (especially in the 1960s); in 1989-1997, caused by the unstable political situation when both skilled and uneducated men from both rural and urban areas migrated for economic as well as political reasons (also to avoid military service); in 1998-1999, when more than 800,000 refugees moved to Albania, Western Europe and the United States, many of them returning after June 1999; and in the post-1999

² Trepca Mine – Miniera e Trepçës (Albanian), Рудник Трeпчa (Serbian): an industrial complex crucial for the economic development of the city (and the Kosovo region), especially from the 1920s onwards.

³ Due to the paper's limitations, the author will focus on the contemporary context, without elaborating on the city's historical social and spatial development.

period, when migration was caused by economic and educational reasons as well as being due to family reunification (UNDP, 2014).

In the context of the current divisions and demographic composition, apart from emigration there are at least two other crucial trends identified as having contributed to the great change of life in the town of Mitrovica: internal displacement (with all the consequences resulting from the emergence of Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs)⁴ and the inflow of people from rural areas as well as neighbouring rural municipalities (Hardten, 2014).

Firstly, about a third of the Albanian citizens and likely over a half of the other population of the town left Mitrovica during the 1990s. Serbs emigrated mostly to Serbia, Albanians to Pristina and other cities in Kosovo, a great number of representatives of both groups moved abroad. Secondly, according to a UNDP poll, 67.4% of Serb residents of North Mitrovica did not live in Mitrovica before 1999, while 19.8% of Albanians declared themselves to be newcomers and 57.3% stated they had lived in Mitrovica before 1999; many refused to answer the question (UNDP, 2011). In addition, about 30% of representatives of all the groups declared that they had been displaced from the southern to the northern side of the city, or the other way round (UNDP, 2011). All of the above could lead to the conclusion that a large part of North Mitrovica society has never had any contact based on mutual coexistence with South Mitrovica inhabitants.

What is more, many of those who were forced to migrate from one part of the city to another after the conflict had to move many times from rented accommodation before they were able to afford their own home. Some of them struggled for many years or are still trying to cope with the housing issue, which means they either have to sell their previous home or obtain compensation for lost real estate. Moreover, most newcomers belonging to the group of internally displaced people who were forced to flee their homes, probably experienced violence from representatives of the other ethnic group, and were or still are in a bad or at least uncertain economic situation. This significant inflow of a more traditional population from rural areas affected the urban and cultural landscape of the city.

Besides the above-described migration of rural society to the city right after the conflict, everyday mobility can also be observed from neighbouring settlements and other cities, which also has an impact on the structure of the urban society as well as on relations in the city, mostly on its economic balance. Regarding the economic aspect, one cannot underestimate the

⁴ According to the UNHCR definition, Internally Displaced People (IDPs) have not crossed a border to find safety. Unlike refugees, they are on the run at home. See: The UN Refugee Agency (n.d.). In many cases, inhabitants of Mitrovica stayed not only within the borders of their country but within the city where they were born.

influence of the diaspora either, not only on the overall situation of Kosovo (UNDP, 2014) but also on the local community.

It is true, obviously, that today Mitrovica is inhabited predominantly by two communities: Albanian and Serbian, but not only. According to available data, Mitrovica's residents include Albanians, Ashkali, Bosniaks, Gorani, Montenegrins, Roma, Serbs and Turks, while several sources also mention Egyptians (either as a separate group or as a part of the RAE community) and, finally, foreigners on top of that. According to recent OSCE data, Mitrovica has about 100,000 inhabitants. The northern part of Mitrovica is inhabited by approximately 29,460 citizens – including the town and surrounding villages (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE], 2015a). There are about 22,530 Kosovo Serbs and 4,900 Kosovo Albanians residing in the town and in surrounding villages as well as approximately 1,000 Kosovo Bosniaks, 580 Gorans, 210 Turks, 200 Roma, and 40 Ashkali, all residing in the town. According to the *Kosovo Population and Housing Census 2011* there are 70,289 people (in the municipality – 71,909⁵) living in South Mitrovica⁶: 69,497 Albanians, 518 Turks, 416 Bosniaks, 528 Roma, 647 Ashkali, 23 Gorans and 14 Serbs (OSCE, 2015b). It is worth noting that *2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia* did not cover the territory of Kosovo. Unfortunately, statistics which take into consideration indicators other than ethnic/national identity are available only for the southern part of the city⁷; since the subject of the analysis is Mitrovica as a whole (its northern and southern part), those data will not contribute to completing the profile of the city's population.

Welcomed Neighbour

Since residential status remains the focus of this paper, the perception of the neighbour (*komunija/fqinj*) and the image of the real or proper citizen of Mitrovica *Mitrovčani*, *Mitrovicas* seems crucial for describing mutual relations in this local community. Neighbourhood is a category which has appeared frequently in descriptions of relations in the Balkan region (Bielenin-Lenczowska, 2009; Dragouni, 2015; Falski, 2015; Georgieva, 1999; Lubańska, 2007a, 2007b; Tepavičarov, 1999) and still remains a promising category for further research on local communities. It seems

⁵ It includes Mitrovicë/Mitrovica South town and some 40 villages.

⁶ The 2011 census was boycotted by the inhabitants of the north part of the city.

⁷ The last census of the whole city organized in 1991 was boycotted mostly by the Albanian population (which applies to the whole Kosovo territory). See: *Bridging Kosovo's Mitrovica divide* (2005).

that the unstable political environment (the distant position of the central government) and, probably first and foremost, the multicultural character of the region, resulted in the development of strong neighbourhood and neighbour-oriented strategies due to maintaining social order at the micro level (Falski, 2015).

It is important to underline once again that this paper is based on selected results of field research in Mitrovica⁸. The perception of the desired neighbour and the citizen of Mitrovica is one of the aspects examined during empirical research in the city. Examining mutual relations between the city's residents, the research included issues such as mutual stereotypes (hetero-stereotypes and auto-stereotypes), social distance (using a modified Bogardus scale), level of mobility and communication, identification of the most important actors in the city as well as residents' concepts of the city's future development. It was important to reveal crucial trends regarding the structure of society, mutual relations between individuals and groups in the city, mechanism of identifying the Other, everyday strategies in mutual relations, as well as the importance of demographic changes and migration.

One of the aims of the qualitative research was to identify the most important attributes of the neighbour and examine if there was any connection between the status of residence and the identity components of respondents on the one hand and the characteristics of a welcomed neighbour on the other.

Among 304 respondents⁹, 280 declared they lived in Mitrovica permanently (92.7%) and 22 temporarily (7.3%); 83.2% of respondents declared they were born in Mitrovica, 6.9% were born in a city or village close to Mitrovica, while 9.9% were born in another city or village. Asked if they were displaced or had changed the place where they lived within the city, 77.3% of inhabitants gave a negative answer while 22.7% answered the question positively. They had migrated mostly between the southern and northern part, but also within one part of the city; a few respondents were displaced from other settlements close to Mitrovica (for instance Leposavić or Vushtrri/Vučitrn), and some of them went abroad temporarily during the war.

In terms of ethnic/national identity, more Serbs (25.6%) than Albanians (18.3%) declared that they were displaced; at the same time, all the Ashkali

⁸ The research was conducted as part of the PhD dissertation *Divided Cities. The Case Study of Mitrovica*.

⁹ The number of respondents who participated in the survey is 304 (N=304). The percentage of responses is counted with reference to the total number of valid answers to a particular question.

respondents, 80% of Roma, 50% of Turks and 12.5% of Bosniaks claimed they had changed their place of living.

In the survey, respondents were asked to define (using a three-level scale: *it is important, I am indifferent, it is not important*) which of the mentioned characteristics they considered important when thinking about their neighbour. In this context the neighbour was interpreted literally as being a resident of a nearby space (building, street or part of the street, backyard). More than 70% of respondents agreed that characteristics connected with a person's individual character were the most important: they claimed that it was crucial whether a neighbour took care of the environment and kept it clean (79.3%), whether he or she was friendly and sociable (72.8%) and whether she or he was aggressive or rather calm (71.6%).

Relatively high marks went to the response that the origin of the neighbour mattered: over 70% of respondents found it important which family their neighbour came from (which concerns all the national/ethnic groups). In this context it is interesting that the results did not suggest significant interest in ethnic/national and confessional identity. Confessional identity was not very important to the whole sample (50.2%) as well as particular ethnic/national groups; it was similar with the question of whether he/she was religious (52% claimed it was not important). Respondents had an ambivalent attitude towards ethnic/national identity, but to most of them it was not important (to almost 50% it was not important, while 18% were indifferent). Taking into consideration the preliminary assumptions and results of the qualitative research, it is also significant that 68.2% of respondents thought it was unimportant in which city/village a person had been born, and 64.7% did not find it important whether he or she was a newcomer. It is also worth noting that over 40% of respondents found their neighbour's occupation to be important.

Other components of identity, such as marital status, political orientation, gender and sexual orientation, were not of significant importance. Using the possibility of adding comments to this question, several respondents listed some other important elements such as behaviour towards that particular person, empathy, hygiene and morality; they also wanted to live close to a respectful, tolerant person without any criminal record.

This aspect of the quantitative research was complemented by the results of the qualitative research. Even though the ethnic/national dimension of the disintegration still remains vital, my interlocutors, regardless of their origins, also pointed to many other dimensions of divisions within the local communities in Mitrovica, such as: different levels of education, manners and behaviour in many cases connected with rural or urban origins,

economic status, confession, occupation, position within society regarding political orientation and, last but not least, residential status.

It was proved by respondents from different groups that close relations with neighbours from different communities had been a fact before the 1990s. What is more, my interlocutors not only emphasized the importance of local community at the closest neighbourhood level (being residents of a nearby space) but also at the level of local citizenship, meaning an integrated and engaged community of citizens of Mitrovica regardless of ethnic origins:

Mi smo se, mislim građani u Mitrovici, što Albanci što Srbi znali smo se i držali smo se zajedno, mislim da je više bila podela na građane Mitrovice i na ostale, bilo to Albanci ili Srbi, stvarno. (Interview from 11 June 2018)¹⁰

According to the respondents, citizens of Mitrovica used to spend time in particular places such as restaurants and cafés which also today are recognized as places where locals hang out. What is more, this past multicultural community is often described as integrated, valuable and active; it was even emphasized that citizens' activism was one of the characteristics of Mitrovica. To complete this often nostalgic picture of the old Mitrovica, it is important to point out that obviously citizens perceived the community as well-integrated and, in a sense, unique, but within well-known boundaries of mutual relations¹¹. One of the dimensions where my interlocutors identified those boundaries was the low number of mixed marriages, in contrast, for example, to mixed environments in Bosnia. Trying to explain those circumstances, they pointed to language differences as well as religious and cultural characteristics.

As mentioned before, not many of the old Mitrovica citizens who actively created this integrated community remain in the city, particularly families which have lived in Mitrovica for generations. Nevertheless, it seems that this division into locals and outsiders is still vital, although not that visible at first sight as a result of the dominant value of solidarity with one's compatriots. One interviewee explains the peculiar unity of the citizens of Mitrovica and the sense of otherness towards newcomers as follows:

¹⁰ "We, the citizens of Mitrovica, Albanians and Serbs, knew each other and stayed together, I think that the division was more visible between Mitrovica's citizens and the others, either Albanians or Serbs, seriously". This and other quotations were translated by the author of the article.

¹¹ A phenomenon also recognized during research on multicultural communities in other parts of the Balkan region. See: Bielenin-Lenczowska, 2009; Bringa, 1995; Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2009; Georgieva, 1999; Lubańska, 2007a, 2007b; Tepavičarov, 1999.

... jer su se ljudi identifikovali kao Mitrovčani, međusobno, to je bila neka zajednička crta i postojao, postojao je određeni duh koji je, jel tako, to ujedinjivao. Znači Mitrovčani su imali neke svoje fore i fazone da tako kažem, neke svoje zajedničke stvari. I onda kad su došli ljudi koji su bili iste nacionalnosti, nisu bili Mitrovčani, bili su doživljeni kao uzurpatori, da kažem i kao neko ko je okupirao sad mentalni i fizički prostor u gradu ...¹² (Interview from 25 June 2018)

One of the respondents born in Mitrovica was forced to move from the north to the south and had to change homes several times after 1999. He currently lives in the south, in a neighbourhood he characterizes as being the suburbs. He does not feel connected with the neighbours as much as he used to, pointing to the level of education and the difference between the centre and peripheries of the city. He still stays in touch with his ex-neighbours and maintains superficial relations with the present ones:

... I know my neighbourhood but ... not too much, ... I am just using my house just for sleeping and my garden to be relaxed, staying with my family but I don't communicate too much with them. Just in case when we have some religious holidays, when we have to go to congratulate something, for condolences, when someone passes away or something like that...¹³ (Interview from 26 April 2018)

For many interviewees, being in a new neighbourhood was the reason why they moved from one home to another. In the north and in the south, the list of concerns and problems was very similar: people were not well-behaved or polite, they did not respect house rules, leaving rubbish in the corridor, being loud and not showing respect to others, not to mention the lack of interest in the local neighbourhood or community problems:

... because people that come from the village, it is hard for them to get integrated in the city. I mean it's not about the culture but it's about the values and rules that are different from the village and for that reason... ... I mean it's normal to throw the things, it's normal to shout, it's normal to ignore the others you know and ... so on. (Interview from 10 June 2018)

... to su ljudi koji dolaze, kojih većina njih dolazi sa malih sredina i sa sela, tako da su neke svoje navike i neke svoje načine funkcionisanja života utkali u nešto što je nama bilo, nama normalni život, što nama njohovi modeli funkcionisanja su bili

¹² "... because people identified themselves as Mitrovica's citizens, mutually, it was kind of a common characteristic and there existed a certain spirit which, you know, united this. It means that Mitrovica's citizens used to have their own, so to speak, jokes and behaviours, some things in common. And then, when people who were of the same ethnicity came, who were not Mitrovica's citizens, they were perceived as usurpers, I'd say, and as someone who occupied mental and physical space in the city ..."

¹³ During the research interviews were conducted in Albanian, English and Serbian. This and subsequent quotes in English have been cited in the original version.

totalno neshvatljivi. I šokantni. Znete, pričamo o galami, pričamo o nepoštovanju kućnog reda, pričamo o smeću koje se ostavlja po ulazu koje je javno dobro ... U jednom trenutku je zgrada potsećala na bronx osamdesetih. I to se dešavalo većinom zgrada.¹⁴ (Interview from 11 June 2018)

It is very important to emphasize once again the overall situation of the newcomers, who in most cases were traumatized, having the status of temporary residents, therefore did not feel part of the community and did not contribute to the city's development as the old residents imagined they should. Since in many cases they came from rural areas, they transferred their own behaviours and values to the city, making the locals feel at least uncomfortable. It is obvious that within the conflict and post-conflict context, the local community had to struggle with everyday existential problems and did not pay enough attention to the integration process of the newcomers; obviously, this was not the most important issue in the chaos caused by the armed conflict. The aim is not to condemn rural society and their behaviour, but to show a peculiar clash of worlds that was not necessarily strictly connected with ethnic/national identity. That is why some of my interviewees who were born in Mitrovica and in most cases had grown up in mixed neighbourhoods, would sometimes say that it was better living together with representatives of different communities than with their newcomer compatriots.

Both the qualitative and the quantitative research results show that the most important elements of a welcomed neighbour are character traits and the level of a person's engagement in taking care of common spaces. They also reveal that the importance of residential status may be evaluated differently depending on the research method. It is promising, though, that most of the interviewees described the desired neighbour using components of individual rather than collective identity.

Conclusion

One may ask if we can learn anything new about the local community from the perspective proposed above, and if it is truly viable and sufficient for describing post-conflict cities in the Balkans. Firstly, we are clearly dealing

¹⁴ “... those are people who come, most of whom come from small settlements and villages, therefore they have some of their own habits and some of their own ways of life they have incorporated into something that was a normal life for us, whereas to us their lifestyle models were totally incomprehensible. And shocking. You know, we are talking about noise, we are talking about disrespecting house rules, we are talking about rubbish that is left in the corridor which is a public space ... At one point the building resembled the Bronx [district] from the 1980s. And this was taking place in most of the buildings”.

with a complex, unstable, but also valuable, fascinating and sophisticated community structure, and not just another example of a divided city torn as a result of ethnic struggle.

Secondly, we can conclude that policies and solutions imposed at levels above the local community not only disturb the coexistence of that community but can also cause conflict and disintegration. What is more, this also suggests the conclusion that political actors from outside the local community will be unlikely to be able to rebuild the space of peaceful coexistence of a multiethnic society.

The characteristics of local community dynamics as well as actual needs and expectations cannot be disregarded and simplified for the purpose of political goals pursued above the local community level. Therefore, it is not surprising that the perspective of the peace-building process in a post-conflict society – without in-depth insight into the local community and presupposing subjective treatment within the framework of regional or international policy – has been widely criticized. It seems that the agenda of reconciliation stripped of humanistic considerations was doomed to failure from the very beginning, assuming that it was ever a priority at all.

Moreover, studies focused only on one aspect cannot reveal the actual nature of intergroup relations in a divided city. Divisions resulting from cultural, social and economic backgrounds, revealed through oppositions such as urban vs. rural, influential groups (those who have political and/or economic power) vs. ordinary citizens, wealthy vs. poor, Christians vs. Muslims, relatively religious vs. unreligious, etc., should not be underestimated. It is crucial for further research to examine in what circumstances the ethnic/national component is activated and dominates over other aspects of residents' identity.

Many existing boundaries and hierarchies seem to be invisible to researchers, public opinion as well as decision-makers. Meanwhile, various integration and disintegration factors remain visible to the city's residents. Nevertheless, they may be also blurred or forgotten due to the dominant and exclusive ethnic/national narration and, as a result, obstruct the inhabitants' coexistence within what is already a highly disintegrated local multicultural community.

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Przybysze i miejscowi.

Niewidoczne granice wśród mieszkańców podzielonego miasta na Bałkanach

Badania nad podzielonymi miastami na Bałkanach koncentrują się głównie na podziałach etnicznych/narodowych. Jednak, czy ta perspektywa jest odpowiednia i wystarczająca do opisania miast pokonfliktowych na Bałkanach? To pytanie nie wynika tylko z faktu, że każde miasto jest w jakiś sposób podzielone lub rozdrobnione. Bardziej istotny, a jednocześnie mniej znany jest fakt, że niestabilna struktura populacji tych miast jest znacznie bardziej złożona, a relacje międzygrupowe – znacznie bardziej skomplikowane, niż przedstawiają to dominujące narracje o podzielonych miastach przypisujące kluczowe znaczenie rozłomom etnicznym/narodowym. Tymczasem, nie doceniając znaczenia innego rodzaju relacji w społeczeństwie oraz dynamiki wysoce zmiennej struktury społecznej, nie można odkryć rzeczywistej natury relacji międzygrupowych w podzielonym mieście.

Głównym celem artykułu jest przedstawienie współczesnego stanu między- i wewnątrzgrupowych relacji w podzielonym mieście, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem statusu mieszkańców Mitrowicy. Artykuł jest przede wszystkim studium przypadku miasta Mitrowica (Kosowo) uzupełnionym o odniesienia do innych podzielonych miast na Bałkanach. Artykuł opiera się na wybranych wynikach jakościowych i ilościowych badań terenowych przeprowadzonych w Mitrowicy w 2017 i 2018 roku,

jak również na wynikach innych badań poświęconych głównie Mitrowicy, ale także Mostarowi, Vukovarowi, Skopje i Sarajewu.

Słowa kluczowe: Mitrowica, miasto podzielone, badanie terenowe, migracje, sąsiad, społeczność lokalna, mieszkańcy.

Note

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