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"Souvenirs" from Vukovar : Tourism and Memory within the Post-Yugoslav Region

Patrick Naef

This paper aims at exploring the developing tourism in certain places of collective remembrance in the post-Yugoslav region, specifically that of Vukovar, a locality situated in Slavonia in the east of Croatia, which acquired the status of a martyred city after the war. The process of patrimonialization which these sites undergo will be examined in order to determine the impact of the nineteen nineties' conflict, as well as the general climate of the *après-guerre*, in regards to the production, dissolution and remolding of identities taking place there. Particular attention will be paid to two emblematic sites of a siege that traumatized the city. First, the memorial center of Ovčara, which was constructed in remembrance of the execution of approximately two hundred local people. Second, the hospital of Vukovar – symbol of Croatian resistance during the siege – which has been restored to a fully functioning hospital, with a portion of its basement transformed into a museum and memorial. Further, the role of certain “memorial entrepreneurs” will be questioned and an analysis of the dynamics and intentions underlying their practice and discourse will be proposed. Certain regions within the Balkans, like Slavonia, are experiencing a rise in popularity due to the construction of memorials and museums dedicated to history and past conflicts. It will be postulated that the induction of cultural heritage into memorial practices, through touristic activity or the construction of memorials, is an essential aspect of the construction of post-Yugoslav identities. This will, in the end, allow me to shed some light on a nascent area of research, that connects notions of war, memory and tourism and which questions such concepts as “dark tourism” (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Stone, 2006; Sharpley, 2003), “thanatourism” (Seaton, 1996; Dunkley, 2007) and finally “memory tourism” (Urbain, 2003).

The siege of Vukovar

An armed conflict erupted in 1991 between the opposing forces of the Croatian JNA¹ and the self-proclaimed “liberation army”, a branch of the Serbian military forces. Croatia declared its independence the 25th of June 1991 and the federal

Yugoslav army launched hostilities starting in August of the same year, by bombing and invading certain areas of Croatia. The city of Vukovar fell into the hands of the “liberation” army, between the 18th and 20th of November 1991, after a siege of three months. A few years later, in 1995, Croatia took back control of a large part of its territory thanks to two offensives – “operation flash²” and “operation storm³” - now inscribed in what Croatia qualifies as “the war for Croatian independence”. After its fall, Vukovar was under the control of the Serbian administration and was deemed capital of the new Republic of Serb Krajina, from 1991-1995. Following operations ‘flash’ and ‘storm’, the city came under the protection of UN forces, more precisely the UNTAES⁴, up until its reintegration into the Croatian state in 1998. During the nineties, Slavonia underwent many demographic changes first with the departure of a large number of Croatians, then that of many Serbs after the reintegration of the region with Croatia. As Britt Baillie (2009, p. 20) has noted: “[...] many local Serbs feel forced to choose between humiliating assimilation, social isolation or exile.” The city of Vukovar was completely destroyed during the three months of a siege that has since become a symbol of Croatian resistance and Baillie adds (2008, p. 486), concerning the process of reconstruction, that: “Vukovar’s war-damaged heritage has undergone three distinct stages of reconstruction. Each stage was shaped to reflect a narrative of the past which encapsulated the political needs of authorities who held the power; first the RSK authorities, then the UNTAES and finally the Croatian government. Each of these groups valued different heritage”.

The hospital of Vukovar continued to function throughout the totality of the siege under the direction of Vesna Bosanac, who had been appointed the 24th of July, a few weeks before the beginning of the siege. The first bombs fell on the hospital in August and the building became the daily target of the federal Serbian army’s attacks. At the end of the siege, hundreds of people took refuge in the hospital hoping that the international community would lead an evacuation, normally the

responsibility of the Croatian government and the JNA in Zagreb. The 18th of November, the city finally fell and the soldiers of the Serbian federal army penetrated the hospital the following day. More than 200 people that had taken refuge in the hospital were taken by bus to a building situated near the farm of Ovčara, around ten kilometers away, toward the south-east of the city. For several hours the detainees were beaten, the majority of whom were then taken by truck to a field on the road between Ovčara and Grabovo, where they were executed and buried in a mass grave located in the same area.

Two “enemies” under the same roof

After the Serbian occupation that lasted several years and the retaking of control of the region by the Croats, it seems as if the different identities tended to crystallize exclusively on the basis of nationality⁵, exemplified by the Croat flags that adorn a good number of houses in Vukovar. Baillie and Kardov both see the city, reputed before the war for the large number of nationalities it was host to, as spatially heterogeneous but socially polarized :

Vukovar is a spatially mixed but socially polarized environment. Croats and Serbs live nose to nose in the same apartment buildings, but in two different Vukovars. Here ethnicity is marked out and policed by the flying of flags, the holding of commemorations, the marking of ethno-nationalist expressions in the urban landscape (such as graffiti), and the presence of symbolic buildings (Baillie, 2011, p. 90).

Kardov adds that the fall of the city led to a division among its citizens following certain ethnic demarcations: *“From that day on they lived under different educational, political, and economic systems, and their experience of war had also little in common.”* (2007, p. 65) Charles Tauber is the director of the mission to South-East Europe for the NGO “Coalition For Work With Psychotrauma and Peace” (CWWPP). Originally from the Netherlands, he has lived in Vukovar since 1995 and explains his vision of the division from a foreign point of view:

Everything is divided here. [...] Pubs, cafes all the rest of that stuff... Schools, restaurants... Everything is divided here. And people know it. And by the way, as a foreigner, they let you know - because of the words they use and the accent they use - who they are. And it is funny sometimes how they do it. With one word or with two words. They will let you know if they are Serbs or Croats⁶.

A new census conducted in 2011 and if the details concerning the demographic repartition by nationality are not yet available, it is known that the population in 2011 was 28,033⁷ habitants versus 31,670 in 2001⁸ and 44,639 in 1991⁹. At the beginning of the nineties, the population was divided in a relatively balanced manner: 47.2% of individuals considered themselves Croat and 32.3% Serb¹⁰. Though a large number of Serbs left the city after reintegration with Croatia, a Serbian minority is still present. Presently, Robert Rapan, of the “HSP dr. Ante Starčević¹¹” a deputy of the Vukovar parliament and a member of the commission for the 2011 census, affirms that Croats will actually be in the minority compared to the total number of members of other groups: *As a member of the commission I had the chance to see the list. In particular the list of national minorities. It turned out that there were approximately 14,000 members of national minorities... 14,000 people. [...] That means that the minorities are in fact the majority¹².*

It is important to remember that these census are not merely symbolic, the minority status in Croatia was subject to a law implicating different processes of positive discrimination. In a general, according to a report published in 2007 by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), the percentage of Serbs within the ensemble of the Croat population will have gone from 12% to 4% in ten years. It seems thus – if we are to believe the statistics coming out of Vukovar as well as from a member of the commission for recruitment most often cited – that the decrease in the Serbian population in Vukovar will be much less than what is generally forecast for the whole of Croatia.

The inhabitants who joined the Croat forces to defend the city, as well as certain others who came from other parts of the country in solidarity, are known as *Branitelji* (defenders). They have since benefited from an elevated social status, especially in comparison to the Serbian community that remains there, which is still considered the enemy by many. Baillie (2008, p. 218) illustrates how the relative equity between the communities that prevailed before the war is something of the past:

To meet the needs of the *branjitelji* a plethora of new monuments celebrating the Homeland War were erected across Croatia by municipalities, veterans groups, etc. [...] This converted Croatia from a Republic defined by a certain level of ethnic equity into a putative nation-state with significant residual Serb minority—now at the mercy of the

Croats, a previously aggrieved ethnic group.

In the political sphere, in 2010, Serbian and Croat leaders instigated a process of reciprocal excuses. Boris Tadic is the first Serbian president to have visited Vukovar since the 1991 war. Accompanied by Croat president Ivo Josipović, he placed a bouquet of flowers at the site of Ovčara massacre. That visit, deemed by many as historic, was certainly a step toward the normalization of Serb-Croat relations. At the same time many voices were raised in criticism of the gesture. Representatives of some of the victims' families even turned their backs in protest to the Serbian president during the ceremony. A month before the Serbian president's visit, the Croat president himself participated in the inauguration of a monument dedicated to nine Serbs killed at the end of September 1995 in a village next to Knin, the ancient self-proclaimed capital of the Serbian Republic of Krajina. It seems that even if a process of reconciliation is at work within the highest spheres of government, it is far from being the case for the leaders of local populations.

The arms of a conflict with memory

In Vukovar today, a war of memories seems to have replaced the armed one. The memorials and symbols maintain tensions within a region that boasts the largest number of monuments dedicated to the war for independence. On the main road, at the entrance to the city, a fifty meter high water tower riddled with bullet holes has been left in ruins. It now symbolizes the Croat resistance and as one *Branitelji* explains at the time of the conflict the water tower was systematically targeted by combatants: *"Serbs would always try to shell this water tower to knock down the Croatian flag, but every time a Branitelji would climb up to place a new one"*¹³. This memory-object is depicted on the Office of Tourism's site, as a symbol of victory and of a new life: *"The Water tower will not be renewed in its original function, but it will become the Memorial area which will be a reminder of pain and suffering that Vukovar endured"*¹⁴. The water tower is now a memorial adorned with a commemorative plaque. Certain projects on the city's agenda, like that of the construction of a restaurant inside, have not yet been completed. The symbol of the water tower is frequently used, present on public transportation, as the logo of the municipality or depicted in certain touristic materials.

A number of imposing panels are also to be seen

around the city, representing protagonists of the Croat army – like General Ante Gotovina¹⁵ - bearing such slogans as: *"Heroes rather than criminals"*. (document 1) Deschaumes (2005, p. 127), using the cemetery for Croat defenders as an example, speaks of the vertiginous instrumentalization of the victims of the siege, which structures the sense of memory:

In Vukovar, the organization for the collective memory by the State and the nationalistic Croat municipality operates a vertiginous instrumentalization of the victims of the sieged city and its destruction. While the state of the city in ruins is maintained, with the contempt of the children who play there, the war cemetery, edified on terrain belonging to the Croat army, offers a vertiginous example of the segmentation of the collective memory. The victims are classified by category: military, "normal" inhabitants, etc. The cemetery is so well kept that it's contrast with the ruined city is unimaginable.



Document 1 - Billboard celebrating "the defenders" in the vicinity of Vukovar - © P. Naef.

Zoran Šesto, tourist guide and founder of the agency *Danubium Tours*, gives another example, the commemorative ceremony held the 18th of November, when thousands of people march from the hospital to the cemetery for the defenders, remarking that no Serb participates: *There are only Croatians. Serbs don't do any ceremonials. They stay at their homes and keep quiet. But in their eyes you can recognize guilt. 20 years after the war they*

didn't say anything...' Except: "it was war"¹⁶. This remark illustrates the difficulty that the Serbs have commemorating their conflict and indirectly their victims. Bailie (2011, p. 7) sites the case of Borovo, a village neighboring Vukovar, where a monument to the Serbian victims of 1991-1996, was without names until 2011: "The local Serbs do not dare to list the names in fear of reprisal attacks by Croats. It is still not possible to have a similar monument within the city itself. Serb 'victims' are unrecognized in Vukovar like Serb residents are for the most part unwanted." The mere notion of "victim" is often deemed inappropriate when it's a question of deaths on the Serbian side, as the following declaration of Zdrako Komčić, director of the memorial center of Ovčara, himself a *Branitelji* demonstrates: "« There is a graveyard called the 'Serbian graveyard' for those who were killed. But for the defenders... For those who opposed... fought against them. There are 'occupators' and tchetniks"¹⁷."

Martyred city, symbolic city

Vukovar did certainly acquire the status of a martyred city and became a symbol of the war for independence, as Ferdinand Meder, the director of the Croat Institute of Conservation, confirms: *Vukovar and all the villages around became special places for all the Croatian citizens. We were all following the news, every inch of destruction were followed with a lot of emotion. Even small villages that nobody knew before the war became then symbols of this war*¹⁸. Baker (2009, p. 40) underlines how Slavonia inspired a vast repertoire of "wartime music"¹⁹ and that Croat media quickly turned Dubrovnik and Vukovar into key sites of resistance and symbols of the war's victims: *Vukovar made it the focus of ongoing symbolic work after the end of the war. A linear process of suffering, displacement, nostalgia, sadness and return was enshrined in political discourse, the mass media, school textbooks and Brodifest songs about Vukovar*. If Dubrovnik is a powerful symbol of the conflict, notably because of its international fame and status as a UNESCO protected site, it is the amplitude of the destruction and violence that struck Vukovar and a number of other localities in Slavonia, that has made Vukovar a symbolic city. Kardov (2007, p. 67) explains the manner in which the city passed from a state "of emergency" to that of "a place of remembrance" (Pierre Nora). He adds that before the reintegration of the city, Croatia couldn't be a sovereign state without the integrality of its territory: [...] *The return of Vukovar, Croatia's new mythical place, symbolized fulfillment of the*

Croatian 'centennial dream' and indicated the stabilization of Croatian identity. After the reintegration of Vukovar, many Croats visited the city - for some it was a sort of pilgrimage - in order to discover, even pay homage to the symbolic place. In that sense, Kardov (2007, p. 67) suggests that for some, the city should be presented as a fundamental building block of the Croatian state:

Vukovar became a place where the people of Croatia could go and bring back to memory the experience of the war, where younger generations could not just understand the experience of war, but also feel, the suffering of the Croatian people, and where in the words of the director of the Croatian Tourist Organization, tourists should be told the story of the rise of the Croatian state.

This last statement illustrates how the symbolic status of Vukovar is directed inwardly, following a process of identity construction, but also outwardly, by the intermediary of tourism. Contrary to Dubrovnik, the city of Vukovar was never an overly popular tourist destination, especially not for international visitors, but it appears that its iconic status has attracted and will continue to attract more and more visitors, from Croatia and abroad. Baillie (2008, p. 18) recollecting upon his experience as a tourist guide mentions the magical connotation that the city has in the eyes of certain tourists: "Some of the foreign tourists on Danube cruises, whom I guided around the city, were not even sure which country they were in, much less what city. For others, the word Vukovar has almost a magical connotation of sacrifice, martyrdom, suffering and heroism." As we can see, the symbolic dimension of Vukovar is not lost on certain tourists. In this excerpt, taken from *Ideoz* a discussion forum fed by people who travel, Vukovar is compared to another symbol of destruction: "Vukovar is the Croatian Oradour-sur-Glane... Masses of Serbo-Yugoslavians didn't hesitate to massacre the civil population, including patients in the hospital... something to think about!"²⁰ What's more, those within the tourism industry themselves participate in this projection, as the following excerpt taken from a web-site of the Office of Tourism illustrates: "Vukovar is today regarded as the symbol of Croatian resistance, an invincible heroic town, and also a symbol of peace, reflecting the bravery of its defenders. It was the selfless sacrifice of Vukovar's defenders that gained it its sacred status in the fight for Croatian independence"²¹. After reintegration, a large number of Croat citizens visited the city in order to discover the symbolic place and, for many, to pay homage to it. This leads some to compare

these visitors to pilgrims. Charles Tauber has this image of the visitors who make their way to Vukovar since its reintegration with the Croatian territory: *“Vukovar has this whole iconic status of the great place where the Croats supposedly suffered. I mean everybody suffered here. It was not only the Croats, it was the Serbs, and it was every other group. [...] Now the majority of the tourism - with the exception of these tour boats that go up and down the Danube - is extremely nationalistic. They will come here to the hospital with groups of people almost on pilgrimage²².”* The interaction of different dimensions can be thus be observed since the touristic turn of such a strongly symbolic place as Vukovar where the dynamics of tourism, coexist with the desire for education and national construction. This leads me to look now into the emergence of tourism in Vukovar and Slavonia. In a post-conflict context such as this one, where memorials and other sites related to the war constitute the major points of interest for visitors, tourism will be seen as an exercise in memory and the agents involved as memorial entrepreneurs.

Memory and tourism in Vukovar

“Vukovar is healing its war wounds but rising out of the ashes and calling visitors to its war memorials²³.” This excerpt taken from a chapter about Slavonia in Lonely Planet, is representative of the importance of memorials within the touristic panorama of Vukovar. A visit to the memorials is considered a “highlight²⁴” in the guide to Slavonia, like the wine-cellars of Ilok or the observation of birds in the Kopoacki park. The city of Vukovar is considered by the guide as the ideal place for those who want an “out of the ordinary” experience. In light of the major place memorials hold within the region’s touristic offering, the question is whether the tourism designated as a memorial practice participates in the process of reconstructing the identities of the people there. The identity gulf seems to widen due to the existence of memorials commemorating the war for Croatian independence, which promote notions of resistance and suffering, as well as the status of the Croats as victims, in opposition to that of the Serbian aggressor. Before examining more closely the role of these memorial entrepreneurs, - victims’ associations, ex-combatants, new touristic endeavors, etc – it’s useful to take a moment to look at the current state of tourism in the region. Rivera (2005, p.11) conducted a study about tourism within the ensemble of the Croatian territory and notes that the signs of war are localized, principally lying within the eastern part of

the country and along the frontiers, which highlights the exception of Dubrovnik, the majority of the touristic sites having been spared during the conflict: [...] “its stigma is not highly visible. In most tourist areas, there is no imprint of war, damage, or instability of any sort; unless one knows about the history of Croatia, the casual tourist would never know there was ever war in the region, let alone 10 years ago.” If this remark holds true in regards to Dubrovnik, which has been completely reconstructed, Vukovar seems to represent an atypical case. The intensity of the devastation is still clearly visible there as the stigmata left by the war undergo a process of memorial edification and are incorporated into its tourism.

It is interesting to first note that Vukovar received the “golden apple” in 2011 for “archeological research at the site of Vučedol and for its promotion of tourism in Croatia and abroad”. This prize was awarded to the city, after Dubrovnik in 1992 and Split in 1996, by the World Association for Travel Journalists and Writers²⁵. All documentation concerning the touristic frequentation of Vukovar before 1991 has disappeared since the war. Table 1 represents the number of tourists to visit Vukovar since 2006. It’s clear that if local tourists, who still constituted the majority in 2006, are characterized by a drop in frequentation throughout the years, rather the opposite has been observed for foreign tourists, whose frequentation either increased or stabilized. This could be due in effect to the declining interest of Croats for their own war heritage in relation to the chronological distance that separates them from the conflict. As Baillie (2011, p. 40) points out, the monuments created following the conflict continued into the 2000s to represent an important reason for Croats to visit : “In Vukovar, the new monuments attract Croats from across the country who come to learn about the siege, commemorate the dead, and feel a part of the place which has become so important in the national narrative.” On the other hand, inversely to an eventual decline in interest in this heritage on the part of Croatian tourists (due the time that’s passed since the conflict), the international image of the city has only been reinforced with the passing years.

If we observe the number of tourists by nationality during the same period, we can see that tourists coming from Serbia represent an insignificant number, with a maximum of 287 visitors in 2008 and a minimum of 26 in 2010. The data is inscribed within the post-conflict context of Croatia in

general, where potential Serbian tourists avoid going to what are still considered “enemy” regions.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Local Tourists	7296	7297	6874	6197	4938	3647
Foreign Tourists	1855	2221	2174	1990	2552	2460
Tourists of Serbian Nationality ^a	n.r. ^b	244	287	164	26	157
TOTAL	9151	9518	9048	8187	7490	6107

Document 2 - Arrival of tourists in Vukovar.
Source : Vukovar Office of Tourism

Further more, a system restricting visas still in place for Serbian citizens is another factor that limits the number of eventual visitors to Croatia. It is more difficult to have precise statistics concerning the tourists who visit the memorials, as information about them is still collected quite at random. The Vukovar Office of Tourism is at the same time able to furnish certain statistics from 2009, 2010 and 2011, data that has been verified by various related sites. According to the statistics, the memorial center of Ovčara received around 120,000 visitors in 2009, 100,000 in 2010 and 120,400 in 2011, while the hospital was visited by 35,715 people in 2009, 39,500 in 2010 and 63,180 in 2011.

*Danubium tours*²⁶, an agency set up by a young couple upon their return to Vukovar after reintegration, was one of the first touristic structures to propose the remembrance of the conflict through a tour, entitled the “*Path of defenders of Vukovar*”. It has experienced a growing success, with most of the tourists contacting the agency specifically to reserve the tour that leads them through important sites of the conflict : the hospital, the road to Trpinjska²⁷, or even the water tower. The subject is a sensitive one, but according to the guides of what some qualify as the “war tour”, the project has been well accepted locally. The tour is presented in these terms on the tour agency’s site : Heavy is the story of Vukovar. A town of heroes, a symbol of the Croatian freedom. The story of the triumph of human spirit certainly is a story that will live forever²⁸.” Zoran Šesto explains the agency’s logo (document 3) in which both the omnipresence of war and the birth of the Croat nation are clearly represented: *The squares represent the Croatian flag, and the chopped edges the damages of the war. The blue represents the Danube River and the green the fields of Slavonia*²⁹.



Document 3 - Logo of the *Danubiumtours* travel agency

The Ovčara Memorial Center

The hangar at the farm in Ovčara was transformed into a memorial center in 2006, fifteen years after the massacre. The Vukovar branch of “the Croatian Association for the Prisoners of Serbian Concentration Camps³⁰” led the project, with financial support from the Croatian government, in the sum of two million Kuna³¹. Zdravko Komšić, the president of the Vukovar association, architect of the project and current director of the memorial, had himself spent time there while it was still a detention camp : *After I have been captured, I spent nights at the prison of Ovčara which was a prison at that time. After that, we were taken to Srpska mitrovica a camp in Serbia. So there are certain emotional links... A personal relationship with the place*³². At the entrance to the memorial, a large wooden door stands permanently open and the light is never turned on as all the prisoners were killed at night. On the ground, ammunition is encrusted in the cement. On the original roof, two-hundred stars pay homage to the two hundred victims whose bodies have been exhumed. More than sixty people are still considered as “missing” and a hotline for any information pertaining to the victims is still in service. In the hangar a multitude of the victims’ personal affects are exhibited under glass and on beds of straw. Entry is free and a guide – the only person to receive remuneration at the center – is available for visitors. Besides the subsidies initially received from the capital, it is essentially the donations and boutique sales that keep the structure going. No photographs were made during the massacre so the “Croatian Association of Prisoners in Serbian Concentration Camps” has published a pamphlet entitled “*Scream in the night*” (figure 4) which is available at the memorial and tells the story of the massacre through drawings and texts realized by members of the association.



Document 4 - Excerpt from the pamphlet "Scream in the night" representing the massacre of Croats by Serbian paramilitary forces at the farm of Ovčara - Source:

Croatian Association of Prisoners in Serbian Concentration Camps

With around 120,000 visitors annually the site is classified as a major tourist attraction in Vukovar. According to Zdravko Komčić, a project is planned that would create a "path of the cross", leading from the defenders' cemetery to the farm at Ovčara, with fourteen explanatory panels guiding the way. The city maps distributed by the Vukovar Office of Tourism explain the touristic offering of the memorial center. The cover page shows the different memorials, the fourth being the emblematic illustration of "The Croatian Association for Prisoners in Serbian Concentration Camps."

The Vukovar Hospital

If Vukovar is considered by many to be a powerful symbol of Croat resistance, the city's hospital is an incontestable symbol of that resistance in the very heart of Vukovar. The hospital now has a double status : care center and memorial object. A museum was constructed in the basement and visitors interested in the history of the conflict find themselves shoulder to shoulder with the ambulances and care givers. The hospital never ceased to function, neither during the siege, nor the Serbian occupation and of course continued after reintegration. It is inconceivable to speak of the place without mentioning its director – both presently and at the time of the siege – Vesna Bosanac. After the fall of Vukovar in 1991, Dr. Bosanac was incarcerated for three weeks in a prison in Mitrovica before being handed over to Croat authorities. She returned in 1997 to fill her

former position and rebuild a mixed medical team. She herself was accused of war crimes, nick-named "the vampire nurse" for having "stolen" the blood of wounded Serbs. Such accusations were quickly abandoned and she was even nominated for Nobel Peace Prize in 1992. She instigated the museum project in the hospital's basement, which opened its doors in 2005 :

Soon after we returned to Vukovar, there were a lot of people visiting us. Who came to visit the hospital and they were curious to learn how we managed to function, to operate during the war. They also wanted to see the room where we operated and treated our patients. [...] I brought my idea to the ministry of health and social affairs. And then the minister of health made a decision to form a commission which worked on the project of a museum³³.

Today the museum is completely private and its budget is managed by the hospital. The museum is made up of different rooms, containing artifacts from the period and mannequins representing the personnel and the wounded. One room is specially dedicated to contemplation of the conflict. On the walls of one of its hallways excerpts from Dr. Bosanac's journal are exhibited. The journal, which describes the siege of the hospital, is one of the few historic traces in Croatian possession that exists. A number of documents were sent to Belgrade after the fall of the city, but after the last meeting between Serbian and Croatian leaders, some of these exchanged hands. The museum's logo consists of a red cross, marked by holes, a reference to the cross that hangs on the hospital's roof which was targeted by combatants. Vesna Bosanac underlines the educational dimension of the museum, by mentioning the number of classes that visit it:

Children from Vukovar schools come and visit the museums and among such groups there are a lot of Serbian children, or children with a Serbian background, [...] Even today in our professional forms all individuals are free to decide whether to put down their national background or not. Officially no Serb groups, I mean officially... In terms of political parties, political associations have never visited the museum. And I do not know whether some individuals of Serb background have ever visited the museum³⁴.

Post-conflict tourism and the “alienation of cultural heritage”

In the a divided city such as Vukovar where the dynamics of tourism seem to progressively take shape, the touristic landscape is in large part constituted by objects of memory produced by the war for Croatian independence. In a certain manner, it is based on a “traumascape” (Tumarkin, 1995), which has led to the “touristscape” of Vukovar and to a larger extent that of Slavonia. According to Baillie: *“Today, monuments to the ‘Homeland War’ persist in presenting the binary of Croats as heroes and Serbs as the collectively guilty party. Few attempts have yet been made by the nation to commemorate the Serbs harmed by Croats during the war³⁵.”* When he is asked about the potential that such a memorial has to favorize a climate of reconciliation, the director of the Ovčara memorial center himself doesn’t seem to believe it’s possible: *Honestly speaking I do not think it can. My opinion is that the only thing that can radically improve or influence the reconciliation process is again on Serb minority and the moment. When they will recognize and accept Croatia as their homeland without crossing fingers in their pocket.* The tourism which accompanies the creation of memorials is often seen as “nationalistic” tourism, a facet intrinsically linked to the symbolic status of the city. The production of memorials, through tourism or commemorations, seems in part to be monopolized by one national group. Such national dynamics may lead to the reproduction of representations imposed during the war, as Herscher (1998, p. 4) notes in reference to Mostar: *“If this rebuilding proceeds in the framework of a divided city, without the involvement of citizens of both sides of the city, then the old city [Mostar] can only convey the image that was imposed on it during the war.”* In a collection of articles published by ICCROM³⁶, Price (2005, p. 13) demonstrates the potential division that cultural dominance may induce within a post-conflict context in which only one national identity is recognized: *“Moreover, the official institutions responsible for culture may wish to avoid giving attention to a war-affected minority ethnic group if national policy recognize only a single national identity.”* He adds that the role of museums and cultural institutions must be based on the prioritizing of a common heritage, contrary to the *“war museums commemorating the military victory and demonizing the enemy interest [...]”* (2005, p. 3) The phenomenon of memorial monopoly seems to be highly influenced by the iconic status of

the city. As we’ve seen, Vukovar has become a powerful symbol of suffering, resistance and finally independence, for the entire country. This particular status has certainly favorized the apparition of a number of memorial sites related to the war for independence, as well as a form of tourism, which certain define as “nationalistic” or even see as a form of pilgrimage. It is made clear in the discourse of the parliamentary president who insists on the importance for all school children of visiting these major memorial sites, going so far as to suggest that it is an obligation and a duty ;

We also believe and support the idea of constructing one place. The home of "homeland war" where all 8 years students should come 2 or 3 days... a weekend... where it would be an obligation for students from all over Croatia. A place where they could learn about the war in Vukovar and the role of Vukovar itself which was crucial for the establishment of the Republic of Croatia³⁷.

For others, like Robert Rapan, if the memory of the war is an unescapable element of the touristic panorama of Vukovar, it is at the same time important to avoid that other important resources (vineyards, archeological parks, natural parks, etc) become totally obscured by the exploitation of the remembrance of the war and what certain in the area qualify as “war tourism”:

I agree... Yes! “War tourism” yes! But not only “war tourism” because other activities related to tourism are important. [...] We mentioned the cruises coming to Vukovar. All visitors come to Vukovar and spend a short time and go elsewhere and have meals somewhere else. So we have to upgrade all our other activities related with tourism to make the visitor stay in Vukovar for at least a day or two. And not to be forgotten, the Danube... All these activities have to be related with the Danube³⁸.

Tourism in such a post-conflict context is often seen in the light of reconciliation (Causevic, Lynch Higgins, Salazar). In the case of Vukovar, the monopoly of memory made into tourism seems to be in the hands of the Croats. The Serbian community still living there has almost no voice in the chapter and find themselves in a certain manner “dispossessed” of their memory. Moreover, in a city like Vukovar, which has reconstructed its image and tourism industry, it’s clearly the Croatian war which has imposed itself as the “main attraction”. The symbol that Vukovar constitutes, is that of the city as place of remembrance, asserting the suffering of the Croats.

In this sense could we not conclude that the Serbian inhabitants of Vukovar experience a process of “alienation” from their cultural heritage? On the other hand, tourism linked with the war – seen by certain as nationalistic - seems also to hinder the possibility of developing other aspects of tourism in the region (archeological, viticultural, nautical, etc). In this way, the “alienation” resulting from production based on cultural heritage could also be experienced on the Croatian side, where the desire to develop beyond a context of “war tourism” seems to be compromised. Alneng (2002, p. 479), on the subject of Vietnam, proposes the idea of the death of Vietnam as a country and its resurrection as a war: “ [...] *there is a new war in Vietnam – a war of ideological napalm and propaganda booby-traps. This new war is a meta-war. A metamorphosis – the death of Vietnam as a country and resurrection of Vietnam as a War.*” He adds that in an economically devastated country, the meta-war made Vietnam into one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of its identity. If Vukovar cannot be represented without reference to the war that killed it, is it not also in some way trapped in the dark past which Baillie uses to describe the general state of the Balkans?(2008, p.164): “The people of the Balkans within Europe, [...], are viewed as people trapped in the past, forever reliving the religious conflict that dominated early modern Europe, unable to free themselves from the shackles of history and move into the late twentieth century.” Torodova, in his work “Imagining Balkans” deconstructs the idea of “Balkanism”, which is linked to occidental preconceptions of the region, including such notions as savagery, war, violence. Finally, by promoting tourism that is limited to a warring past, are not certain memorial entrepreneurs in Vukovar participating in a reification of the “Balkans”?

The limit of “macabre” typologies

The ties between tourism and trauma, and more specifically war and tourism, have been brought to light by a number of Anglo-saxon authors of academic literature. Derek Hall (2006, p.69) affirms that the sites affiliated with war become the most popular. Valène Smith (2007, p.205) goes so far as to introduce the idea that : “memorabilia of warfare and allied products constitute the largest single category of tourist attractions in the world.” The creation of tourism around such sites is often problematized by the notion of “dark tourism” (Lennon, Foley, Stone, Sharpley). Stone (2006, p. 151) proposes that these sites be categorized – from dark to light - based on their different

characteristics, such as leisure, education, the authenticity of the place or how it can be related to chronologically. Seaton (1996, pp. 241-242) puts forth the idea that this type of tourism would be representative of an itinerate dimension of “thanatopsis³⁹”, part of the concept of “thanatourism”, a practice that dates back to the Middle Ages. He also proposes a typology based on five categories: visits to places of “individual or mass death” (ex: Auschwitz), visits to places of “interment” or places of “memorial” (ex: catacombs or war memorials), material signs or symbolic representations (ex: the embalmed body of Lenin or arms displayed in a museum) and finally reconstructions (ex: reconstructions of medieval battles). Along the same lines, Duknley (2007, p.1) proposes seven different categories of thanatourism: “horror tourism” (ex: theme-based tours about Jack the Ripper), “grief tourism” (ex: the Arlington cemetery), “tourism of suffering” (ex: Alcatraz), “tourism of tragedy” (ex: Hiroshima), “war tourism” (ex: museums dedicated to war), “genocide tourism” (ex: Auschwitz) and finally “extreme thanatourism” (ex: public executions).

The first question that arises when faced with these categories has to do with the categories that delimit them. It seems that a site such as Auschwitz could, for example, fall under several categories at the same time depending on the order in which the different elements are used to define it. Auschwitz is at the same time a place of “suffering”, “war”, “interment”, “tragedy”, “genocide”, “horror” and also “grief”. It’s difficult to see what would lead the authors to place it one category over another. Moreover, such places summon up different associations depending on the experience of the different visitors, who cannot be considered a homogeneous group, as Biran et al. (2011, p. 6) demonstrate:

Tourists are often regarded as a homogeneous group and as passive receptors that should be educated. Studies ignore the fact that tourists have different levels of knowledge and familiarity as well as diversity of views in relation to the display all of which may affect their preferences of on-site interpretation. While some tourists may be interested in interpretation that is educational, others may be seeking an emotional, spiritual, or sentimental experience.

Biran et al., in a study available on a site about Auschwitz, deconstruct the notion of “dark tourism”, emphasizing the dominant theoretic approach in the field and moreover the lack of

empirical studies that characterize it. They lead us to reconsider a homogeneous vision of tourists, demonstrating that a survivor of the Holocaust, or one of their family members, will not experience the place in the same way as a student on a school visit. This argument could be supported by the case of Vukovar where the perceptions of a site like Ovčara will differ greatly depending on whether one is a survivor of the siege, a student, or a foreign tourist. In this case, as for Auschwitz, in which category are we to situate the memorial of Ovčara or the hospital of Vukovar? The theories pertaining to “dark tourism” tend to limit the reasons for which tourists visit such places to the desire to satisfy some morbid curiosity, conceptualized by the German notion of *schadenfreude* (Lennon & Foley, 2000). In the same way, the direction of such sites would be guided by this said morbidity, in order to satisfy certain commercial demands. In light of the above, it seems that financial imperatives alone are not – at least not totally, the sole factor which determine how these sites function. Sharpley (2009) admits that such sites are experienced differently depending on the visitor, even if the fascination with death remains one principal reason to visit. He proposes a continuum of reasons for such a visit, from “intentional” to “accidental”. Inspired by the theories of Stone, he proposes a matrix in which to classify the sites, between “dark” and “light” as well as “intentional” and “accidental”.

Within the panorama of French academia, Jean-Didier Urbain correlates notions of tourism and memory, presenting the practice of a “tourism of memory” in relation to time and more precisely in relation to the consciousness of time (2003, p. 4). According to him, the visit to a place of remembrance is not an attraction like so many others: “It (the place of remembrance) does not exist in itself, but by a specific vision of it, the vision of the one who remembers and causes it to become and exist as the receptacle of a past that is still alive within collective mentalities and sensibilities.” (2003, p. 5) We see that the visitors’ perception of on one hand, and also that which the places themselves produce – in the case of the memorial entrepreneurs presented above – is fundamental

for the existence of these places. In this way such places of remembrance that are rendered touristic produce particular experiences which cannot be classified within the rigid typologies proposed above. Moreover, Urbain (2003, p. 5) suggests that one aspect of how this sort of tourism functions, too often excluded from research linked to “dark tourism”, is linked to the identity mechanisms which accompany it: “At the interior of a territory, there is a tool for the consolidation of a cultural unit, of the construction of an identity, of the formation of a people. At the exterior, for the foreign visitor with the host culture, it is a vector for the diffusion of an image, of a cultural identity.” As I wished to demonstrate with the case of Vukovar, these dynamics, whether the construction of identity or the diffusion of an image, seem essential for a proper understanding of this phenomenon, which joins tourism and memory within the Post-Yugoslav region.

Conclusion

We have seen that the desire to satisfy a morbid curiosity as the sole motor for tourism within sites linked to traumatic events seems somewhat reductive, whether from the point of view of the consumer or the producer. In this sense, the theories surrounding “dark tourism” do not take into account the complexity of the dynamics that lead to the creation of tourism around these sites. Contrary to this macabre tourism, Urbain (2003, p. 6) sees this tourism of remembrance as an “ethical tourism”, founded on a notion of morality: “The tourism of memory is to time what ecological tourism is to space; it is to the past what humanitarian tourism is to the present.” It could serve moreover as an instrument – an expression of memory and indirectly of grieving – which would permit the attainment of a certain social peace. At the same time, this should in no way downplay the risks that can result from the manipulation inherent to the very notion of morality (Urbain 2003, p. 6). As we see with certain sites in Vukovar, the nationalistic dynamics which accompany the tourism seems to constitute a considerable impediment to peace in the society.

NOTES

- 1 Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija, "the Yugoslav People's Army" in English.
- 2 Operacija Bljesak in Croatian.
- 3 Operacija Oluja in Croatian.
- 4 United Nations Transitional Authority for Eastern Slavonia.

5 It is clear that the Croatian war strongly stimulated this process of splintering identities in a city known before the conflict for its multiculturalism. The discourse of the agents there – originating from politics, media or civil society – are the first to reveal the dynamics of identity that lead an individual to consider themselves exclusively "Serb" or "Croat". Above all this should not obscure the fluidity which characterizes any production of identity. Charles Tauber, a psychologist residing in Vukovar since 1995, estimates that within a group of patients with whom he works, around 80% have a parent thrice removed or less, of a different nationality. It's important to take a certain distance and to recognize that these categories, "Serb" and "Croat" are also constructions, produced internally by the actors located there, but also externally, due among others to the work of researchers.

6 Interview conducted in English in Vukovar in August 2011.

7 www.dzs.hr/Eng/censuses/census2011/htm/E11_Zup26_5185.html

8 www.dzs.hr/Eng/censuses/Census2001/Popis/E01_02_02/E01_02_02_zup16.html

9 www.icty.org/x/cases/mrksic/ind/en/mrk-ii951107e.pdf

10 Idem

11 A right-wing Croat political party (<http://www.hsp-ante-starcevic.hr/>)

12 Interview conducted in Vukovar in August 2011, assisted by an English-Croat translator

13 Information acquired informally in Vukovar in August 2010.

14 Vukovar Office of Tourism - <http://www.turizamvukovar.hr/index.php?lang=en>

15 Condemned in 2011 to 24 years in prison by the International tribunal for war crimes and crimes against humanity, then liberated after appeal in 2012.

16 Interview conducted in English in August 2010.

17 Interview conducted in Vukovar with the assistance of a Croat-English translator, August 2011.

18 Interview conducted in Zagreb assisted by Croat-English translator. July 2011.

19 wartime music in English in the original text

20 "Voyage Ideoz," <http://voyages.ideoz.fr/> (in French)

21 "Croatia at a glance," <http://onecroatia.info/en/destinacije/vukovar-2/>

22 Interview conducted in Vukovar in English, August 2011.

23 Croatia, Lonely Planet, 2009, p. 106.

24 Highlights in English in the guide.

25 <http://www.fijet.net/>

26 www.danubiumtours.hr

27 Also baptized "*the cemetery of tanks*", a route reputed for the number of tanks destroyed by Croat defenders.

28 <http://www.danubiumtours.hr/en/articles/programs/paths-defenders-vukovar>

29 Interview conducted in English in Vukovar in August 2011.

30 www.hdlskl.hr

31 Around 250'00 Euros

32 Interview conducted in Vukovar in 2011 assisted by a Croatian-English translator.

33 Interview conducted in Vukovar in August 2011 with the assistance of an English-Croat translator.

34 Idem

35 Interview conducted in 2011 in Vukovar assisted by a Croatian-English translator.

36 International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property

37 Interview conducted in Vukovar in August 2011 with the assistance of a Croatian-English translator

38 Idem

39 From the Greek "*thanato*" (death) and "*opsis*" (sight)

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