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VUKOVAR '91 AND THE COUNTER-SOCIETY PRACTICE

When competent discussions about the Serbian attack on Croatia in the year 1991 evolve, it is most often pointed out that it was an international attack. However, a closer look at attempts to catalogue true participants of the aggression reveals that their precision is not flawless at all. In general, attempts are reduced to lists of organisers of the Serbian conquering programme, settled in Serbian and other Yugoslav military institutions; and to lists of local executors. Such reduction is undoubtedly very convenient for the Hague indictments and corresponding instruments of, by general opinion, slow and not always true justice. But, it also unintentionally blurs outlines of the whole picture that is actually much clearer. Besides from imprecisely describing the Serbian aggression organiser, these catalogues, generally, lack at least two more, from the present perspective clearly identifiable, aggression participants: certain countries - members of the "international community" and - the Serbian counter-society in Croatia.

It is definitely incorrect to state that certain European countries, together with Serbia, have in a military manner attacked Croatia in the year 1991. However, it would not be incorrect to point to the fact that some of those countries were assisting the preparation of aggression in a political, military and financial way, and were also actively supporting Serbian military and paramilitary formations by occasionally intervening on battlefields. Some of their officers, diplomats and intelligence agents were therefore active participants in mass crimes that have later become cases of court investigations. Nevertheless, as we can see, their names are not on indictments from The Hague. Will they ever be? – it is the question that goes far beyond the scope and task of this text.

In trying to name the other, the absent participant, we have used a word "counter-society". Why? It would be useful to remind you of several facts and their, usually less emphasised, meanings in our search for the answer.

Example No. 1. After Serbian occupation of Vukovar in November 1991, occupational town authorities were applying diverse procedures to kill and displace non-Serbian population, primarily the Croats. In political handbooks, such practice is "reassuringly" called: ethnic cleansing. If we keep our attention, for a moment, only on the technical purpose of the procedure, it becomes obvious that its goal is to - evacuate a certain populated area by physically removing non-Serbian population. Naturally, it is possible to explain such perversity with moral dullness and blind racism of the occupator. But, such explanation is too simple to be precise. Clearly, the mentioned procedures have been causing quite definitive social consequences. Their roughest draft would be reduced to separation of territory from groups that have previously inhabited it. Separated and evacuated, conquered territory becomes the main form of the war prey.

There is no basis to claim that it is the conventional practice in wars for land. There are many examples of one country attacking the other **without** such practice. On the contrary, there are often efforts made to preserve the civilian population on the conquered territory – if for no other reason, then because of the labour force. Image of the main war prey in form of the separated and evacuated territory is therefore indirectly pointing to the fact that the aggressor does not belong to the group of entirely conventional aggressors. He has more intricate intentions.

Example No. 2. It is well known that many defenders of Vukovar were held in Serbian concentration camps. According to numerous testimonies, prisoners were permanently exposed to systematic torture and humiliation. Murders, deliberate or accidental, come "natural" at the end of such procedures depending on criminal imagination that has unexpectedly had the opportunity to come in full swing. However, from this example it is also hard to turn away from the technical purpose of applied procedures. Obviously, this purpose is dual. The first one would be to "remove" the citizen of Vukovar, so that every trace of him is lost. The second one would be to stigmatise the citizen of Vukovar if he were to survive, so that he would not dare but to be a servant. A school definition of stigmatisation teaches us that it is a procedure of reduction of the social participant to the position of the non/person. Thus, by this procedure the participant is annulled in the social environment and is transformed into a disposable nonliving object. If we were to apply this on the example of Vukovar, it would become obvious that by murdering and stigmatising citizens of Vukovar in concentration

camps, they are being "annulled" as real participants in the town. Town social space is being evacuated and becomes independent of the former group of inhabitants. The fact that some people have survived concentration camps is not desirable from the occupational perspective. But stigmatisation of survivors is a guarantee to the occupational authorities that the town, despite surviving citizens of Vukovar, would continue to be void, because they were reduced to non/persons in concentration camps, and therefore, can not reappear in the role of town leaders or its autonomous users. In other words, stigmatisation is a guarantee that the town will continue to be vacant, regardless of the fact that some citizens of Vukovar have physically survived concentration camps.

Co-relation between the outlined purpose and purpose of procedures mentioned in the first example is more than apparent. It is also dictated by the obsession with an open territory and an empty town. It is not weakened by the fact that concentration camps, as a rule, are places where violence is a systematically given form of behaviour. However, in conventional aggression, the gathering of combatant-capable population of the "other side" is not submitted to the aggressor's orgies in concentration camps but to a tendency to remove them from the combat plan and put under control for the possible exchange for captured members of aggressor's own formations. The way that the concentration camps staff were treating imprisoned citizens of Vukovar shows that they were not counting on that possibility, except on special occasions. Most procedures were conducted in order to physically and socially erase imprisoned citizens of Vukovar and to establish the new emptiness of the town.

Example No. 3. It is known that during the occupation of the town, Serbian soldiers were knocking mortar off all walls in the town cathedral of St. Phillip and Jacob. That is how they have destroyed all artistic and symbolic creations written in their surface (paintings, plastering, relieves, sculptures). What they left behind them were walls barred to the brick. This image almost imposes the thought of the previously outlined examples. It is filled with emptiness, which, in the social experience, is identified with the effect of the radical violence - with death. Accordingly, a new analogy is easily established. "Erasure" of citizens of Vukovar during the occupation of town and in numerous concentration camps is a procedure structurally co-related with the "erasure" of sacred signs on walls of the central church in Vukovar. By "erasing" citizens of Vukovar, a new reality of the empty town is set. By "eras-

ing" sacral signs and symbols a new reality of the empty temple is set. Determination with which the occupation authorities are creating such double emptiness shows that their goal is not limited only on supervision of social indicators of presence of the stigmatised group. On the contrary, it is spread on the imaginary area where identity indicators are being created. The town is being evacuated. But the sky above it is also being evacuated. Afterwards, we remind you, similar obsession with clearing the sky were shown by some Taliban groups in the Near East, which were destroying statues of the Price Buddha cut into the church/mountain. However, such kind of religious passion was not characteristic for conquerors of Vukovar. It is more likely that they were forced into creating the new emptiness of the Vukovar sky by the idea that killing, evacuation of the town is not complete if its temples are also not killed, evacuated. Therefore, the object of stigmatisation is unexpectedly spread to the limit that relentlessly brings the manifested obsession closer to - tragicomedy. In a long list of similar examples in history it is difficult to find co-related examples for that very reason. "Expected" victims of wiping out are, mostly, limited to the more obtrusive indicators of political system.

Example No. 4. It is known that on one of the main town plots, awkwardly called "free area" by town planners, occupier's authorities of Vukovar have built a "cemetery of šajkačas" (šajkača - Serbian traditional hat). A visitor might easily conclude that the collected memorial items stand for the courage of Vukovar defenders. However, the defenders of Vukovar are buried elsewhere, where they are actually expected: in a separate part of the town cemetery. Several aggressor soldiers are buried in the "free area" in the town centre. An intended reversal in meaning, caused by such transposition, is more than surreal. This turning point allows for aggressor soldiers to be found among memorial figures of defenders of Vukovar.

It is obvious that this act of the town authorities is not a direct sign of the above mentioned obsession with the evacuated town and empty skies. On the contrary, it is meant to impress a powerful mark on the town reality. However, lack of relations between the obsession with emptiness and the denotative gesture is only apparent. The mentioned turning point, provoked by the gesture, in other words, presentation of the aggressor soldiers as town defenders is possible to be created only in a place where a new **cynic** emptiness is being established as a normal situation, by actively erasing the real town and its transcendental horizon. To conclude, it is the intention of such re-

versal to send the message that the good obtained by criminal behaviour is the same as the one that is not obtained by criminal behaviour. It would also be correct to conclude that in other war examples, aggressors have built cemeteries to their fallen soldiers. But the mentioned one differs from others with two characteristics: the cemetery is **not** in the cemetery; and the buried people are presented as defenders instead as aggressors. In general, such denotative reversals are not found elsewhere. Fallen soldiers **are** done honours that are appropriate for the world of the dead, but without intention to incite special denotative reversals. The noticed intention is directly raising the question – what kind of aggressor is directing its own aggression as the – **martyr defence**?

The counter-society and its supporters

In most discussions, answers to questions, anticipated in the preceding paragraph, are using a basis determined by two core determinants. The first one is raging ethnocentrism, with abundant use of rich heritage of theoretic moroseness against social differences, classified with the adjective: ethnic. It would not be unjustified to say that it was exactly the pressure of that moroseness that had made theoretic development of one simple insight difficult for a long time: area of ethnic differences indeed belongs to the conventional social reality. Second determinant of the mentioned basis is cultural dullness, to be exact, the "Balkan mentality". Although this determinant has various meanings, it seemed appropriate for users of different and imaginative stereotypes on "Balkan tribes", which were used to compensate for the lack of competent insights or verified knowledge. Different international officers, involved in mediation between participants in war, were clearly following the same path. They saw the outlined basis as particularly practical, because it was facilitating the transmission of unique image to, as often said, "all parts of the conflict". But, the main flaw of the mentioned basis and the practice of labelling derived from it, is that it is not in best accordance with facts. Already the bare denotative consequence of the use of the phrase: Serbian aggression on Croatia, teaches us that we should be careful with images of symmetry, as those implied by the phrase "all parts of the conflict". The reason is very simple: aggression is not a symmetric social situation.

It is our evaluation that previously mentioned examples of behaviour of the aggressor authorities and army in Vukovar, and later on, naturally, in other parts of Croatia

exposed to violent attacks, are more correctly described by the term: **counter-society**. As obvious, it is directly interested in the new **physical**, **social and symbolic** emptiness in Croatian society. Why?

In short, counter-society is a formation that is created when an ethnic or any other community, otherwise conventional in the horizontal structure of the social reality, is "transferred" to the role of the social participant, which is determining the **vertical** structure of society. In other words, the counter-society is created when one horizontal group, or one part of it, is socially constituted as (privileged) elite or, at least, an "upper" social class. However, the very "transfer" from the horizontal role to the role of the vertical social participant is still not exhausting inner contents of the range of changes, which are, predictably, created in the process. We believe that five of such changes are more important than others.

- (I) Identification. The counter-society is self-determined and self-described as the combat predecessor or a cape form of another society, outside the borders of a real native society, in which the ethnic group constitutes its everyday life. While describing political behaviour of Serbian leaders in Croatia during the late eighties and nineties of the 20th century, one Croatian representative has humorously noticed that they are opening an umbrella as soon as it starts raining in Belgrade; "opening of an umbrella", of course, does not depend on the fact is there or is there not rain in Croatia, where their everyday life is. Considering that they represent the cape form, or to be exact, the cape part of another, outer society, their behaviour is derived from rhythms of that other society's reality. That is why, reversibly, their practice in their everyday life, limited by private frames, often seems surreal. On the other hand, when it is bordered by public frames, it seems disintegrative, because a combat representation of the outer society's reality often flows through it. Combat representation implies a violent shattering of the native society's reality. We evaluate this fact as useful in a more exact measuring of obsession with emptiness, noted in aggression on Vukovar in 1991. Spreading of emptiness is anticipated in the mentioned perspective as "field levelling" in order to establish new borders of society, combat predecessor of which the counter-society is using.
- (II) Added majority. With this term we are referring to pattern, which is used by the statistical minority in order to change the scarcity of one group into the numerical superiority in relation to other social communities. For example, share of population, self-described with the

ethnic name: Serbs, is a traditional minority in Croatia. However, if Serbian ethnic group in Croatia were to be identified with the combat predecessor of Serbian community "wherever it may be", mathematic basis is completely changed. Added majority allows the minority group to represent itself to others (other social participants involved in vertical social structure) as the monopolistic controller and renter of - majority rights. It would be useful to be here reminded that they tried to use the profit from the added majority in initial phases of practical preparation of Serbian military aggression on Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina during the eighties of the 20th century. We remind you that in those times, under the label of "liberal" reform of the then second Yugoslav republic, the electoral model: one man - one voice was to be accepted, without taking federal republics into consideration as natural political frames of the electoral procedure. It is predictable that with such model Serbs would confirm statistical superiority in the second Yugoslav republic. And they would "transfer" the confirmed superiority in every single federal republic, regardless of their majority of minority share. It is obvious that resistance to such model, derived from the counter-society archaeology, was in the late eighties stigmatised with the label - nationalism.

(III) Legitimation of fighter for the "new border". Legitimation ensures two significant advantages to the counter-society. The first one is manifested in the fact that the counter-society is gaining a valuable object of exchange with the society, combat predecessor of which it is being constituted with. Under the patronage of this advantage, local, minority tactlessness, or better said, radical conflictness in relations with the everyday society is loosing offensiveness, or evades the danger of being labelled with unpleasant titles as: extremism, adventurism and similar. On the contrary, in the role of fighter for the "new border" of society, combat predecessor of which it is being constituted with, the counter-society (according to the political short circuit model) becomes the strategic partner of that society. By such action, its vertical transfer in the social structure of both societies - the one of the everyday life and the one to which it represents a cape formation - is a long-term guarantee. We remind you that in Croatian war circumstances, in the year 1991, horizon of the "new border" suggested that west borders of the Republic of Serbia were on the line Virovitica-Karlobag.

Second advantage ensured by the mentioned legitimation is manifested in the possibility of concretising the inner mobilisation, within the frames of the very ethnic

community, by goals and by congruent means. Borders of reception of particular concrete goals and tasks, and of desirable behaviour, are determining the degree of coalescence of the ethnic community with the new structure of the counter-society. Therefore, it would simply be incorrect to say that Serbian participation in aggression on Croatia in the year 1991 was restricted to a small group of cynical seducers from the political elite. Croatian Serbs were participating in that aggression on a massive scale, mobilised in the counter-society. However, it is not correct that the range of mobilisation included the entire ethnic group. Already a glance on the list of Croatian defenders of the Serbian ethnic origin shows that the ethnic group and the counter-society are not corresponding. Borders of the counter-society should not be searched for on borders that are marking ranges of mobilisation based on, as already said, the practical concretisation of goals and means derived from the legitimation of fighters for the "new border".

(IV) Preservers of the utopia. The very fact that the counter-society is constituted by transferring the horizontal group to the vertical atlas of the social structure implies that such successful increase must be adequately explained. If the transfer is not explained, there is a danger of sinking into the group of bare examples of accumulation of social power for the power itself, that is, of the example of ethnic, or any other kind of terror. Avoidance of such danger strengthens the formation of a generalised image of counter-society as the combat predecessor, but not any more of one particular society, but of one civilisational system. If we take a closer look on the range of means, usually used by, for example, Esulian counter-society or Hungarian counter-society in Croatia in the 19th century, we will become aware of the joint reaching for the role of civilisation defenders from participants of their Croatian everyday society. Serbian counter-society in Croatia in the second half of the 20th century, due to a series of special circumstances, can not repeat the same role. But it can repeat the model. Because of that, it is constituted in the role of the exclusive preserver of the revolutionary pureness of socialism. Considering that keeping of such role conventionally implies available weapons, (because, we remind you, the socialist utopia is by definition armed) a large number of armed preservers of the socialist orthodoxy was gradually accumulated in Croatia within the borders of the Serbian counter-society in Croatia. Considering that such orthodoxy was rapidly loosing utopian characteristics in the eighties, and was also fossilising the

totalitarian control over the "rest" of society, the counter-society was becoming more clearly determined by such role. Therefore, as figures of Serbian aggression on Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were becoming more clear and simple in the late eighties, totalitarian practice and authorities were "naturally" uniting with other anticipated roles, among which the most important was the role of the fighter for the "new border". On such background it is possible to explain why social borders of mobilisation of the Serbian counter-society have included several, although only a few, ethnic Croats and a large number of many times declared "democratic Yugoslavs". Shaded by obligatory practices of the counter-society members, such attributes were left on margins during the war years. Criminal statistics of the international judicature have once more drawn attention to them after the termination of aggression.

(V) Masters of stigma. As it is obvious from the example of Vukovar, stigmatisation is not restricted to redistribution of social titles for the purpose of possible renting of special communicational advantages. Its technical nature implies that denotative contents of particular figures of stigma are formed as a material consequence. In other words, stigmatisation, apart from being a symbolic procedure, is also a technical procedure, which is used for "arranging" the practical way of treating social participants affected by stigmatisation. Monitored Serbian concentration camps for citizens of Vukovar are only practical forms of accomplishing certain intentions of the previously conducted stigmatisation. Therefore, stigmatisation can not be structurally separated from mass murders and crimes.

Considering that functioning of the counter-society is determined by previously outlined attributes, it can not survive without the help of the organised stigma. That is why it is continuously producing it, relatively independently from practical circumstances, which are determining the stigma figures that will technically be realised in relations with other social participants of the everyday society. In other words, history of stigmatisation does not necessarily correspond with the history of its technical effects. For example, one of the main stigmatisation figures of the Serbian counter-society in Croatia was not created in the period of the Serbian aggression (1991-1997), but an entire century before. (Certain stigmatisation creations of the Esulian society are a similar case; they were being used almost an entire century before the Esulian counter-society, structurally oriented by the same obsession with emptiness as the Serbian counter-society in 1991, tried to establish a

new situation on the coastal Croatian area during the Second World War). We remind you that the emptiness is the unambiguous absence of, in this case, non-Serbian social groups and cultural complexes in the "new border" area. That is why it can not be "realised" without the crime. However, no social participant can ask for the right to crime without consequences, and neither can, obviously, the counter-society. That is why the future victim is characterised, by the stigmatisation technique, with attributes that are separating crimes committed against that victim from criminal denominators. So, the perpetrator would not be a criminal but a participant that has a **moral right** to commit the crime, due to the problematic quality of the victim.

It would be reasonable to ask the following question: How is it that the other two, previously mentioned, members of the aggressor triangle trusted the counter-society participants? According to the facts, they were not participating in the social construction of Croatian war reality in the year 1991 by using the counter-society models. Adequate answer to this question is a subject of a separate analysis. But it is obvious that two facts are significant in their relation towards the counter-society. The first one shows that the counter-society is the first planned user of the conquered/cleaned area. Therefore, the counter-society "knows best" which level of emptiness on the conquered territory would be acceptable and bearable to it. That is why indeed there can not be a war without it. The other fact is manifested in the fact that the counter-society's authority is self-restoring by concrete conquering "merits", which are not present in other parts of the society, predecessor of which the counter-society claims to be. In other words, its conquering authority is more convincing than the war authority of other involved participants. Therefore, judgements, standards and techniques of the counter-society participants are protected by this authority. It would be correct to say that the counter-society is directly defining empiric contents of aggression. This fact does not allow other participants of the aggressor triangle to be superiorly separated from the counter-society, as the problematic participant with disarranged standards of social relations. True, they are not accepting it in the role of a confidant on key locations from which the aggression is conducted. For example, decision of Serbian counter-societies in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina on uniting with Serbia was not accepted by the then Serbian authorities because of strategic risks. But, on the other hand, new social reality, created by counter-societies and their aggression, is believed to be the natural "zero" situation.

After the year 1995 and successful liberating actions of Croatian Army and Police, political and military executive organs of the Serbian counter-society in Croatia have disappeared. That is why the discussion on prospects of the Serbian counter-society seems rather inappropriate. It could even be attributed an indirect intention of characterising the very affiliation to the ethnic group as problematic. However, previous sections have already shown that the counter-society and the ethnic group can not be equalised. Discussion on the prospects of the Serbian counter-society in Croatia naturally belongs to the wider analytical area, where main objects of analysis are practices and their components, which are used to change the conventional world of natural differences into a group of armed participants engaged in a fight for the control over the top of the social power pyramid. If we are to follow that path, discussion on prospects must be conditioned by the competent and fundamental researches. Of course, there are no such. That is why we will only describe several facts. Naturally, that can not substitute competent insights. But it can facilitate tracing of special researches.

- (I) Unsystematic data show that, after the termination of aggression, Serbian counter-society did not completely disappear. Certain fragments have fossilised on different local levels, equalising with other participants in the local autonomy net. Testimonies of members of different associations of non-Serbian returnees to territories from which they have been expelled during aggression deserve special attention in that view. Data showing that one part of stigmatisation archaeology of the Serbian counter-society has gained a new immunity by transferring into the circle of family socialisation and has thus reproduced as conventional contents of family histories should also not be neglected. Accordingly, Croatian consensus on mass crime committed in Vukovar in 1991 stands at a greater risk of being annulled.
- (II) It is known that the Serbian Republic, as a part of the Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina has survived the war period of Serbian aggression. This formation was created by the same model of the counter-society actions, on which the role of the Serbian counter-society as aggressor in Croatia was created. Survival of this republic implies, as several authors have already pointed out, that the war crime is profitable. Crimes committed in order to prepare the establishment of the formation are awarded by the international acceptance of this formation as a state,

or at least as an embryo of a state. Indirectly, actions of every counter-society have the same chances of such award. Presented evaluation could be argued with the fact that war heroes of this formation are at the very top of wanted war criminals. But, even under the presumption that they will be deservingly punished, although there are reasons to doubt it, the very formation is accepted in international relations as a new "zero situation", exactly accordingly to aspirations of the counter-society participants. In Croatia, owing to its capability of defence, they did not succeed. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, owing to active international protection of this formation during war operations in 1995, they succeeded. Therefore, prospects of counter-society are not so poor.

(III) Politicians, officers, diplomats and intelligence agents of several European countries that have actively supported Serbian aggression on Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are naturally not convicted by international courts, and furthermore, all such attempts are shattered. However, there have been some examples of criminal prosecution of certain Dutch, French and British officers, because of their responsibility for certain crimes during aggression, especially during aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina. But, no political, military or economic mentors of such practice in countries that during the nineties have not even hide that victory of Serbian aggressors is in their interest (like France, Great Britain and Russia) were not persecuted for their active support and involvement in Serbian crimes. Therefore, a participant that can definitely count on the fact that it will not be punished is present in the aggression triangle, mentioned at the beginning of the text. Its presence, reversibly, is multiplying diverse impulses to the counter-society participants for their further aggressor behaviour. Teaching is the same as the teaching implied by survival of the Serbian Republic as a country: crime is profitable, especially if protected by European mentors.

(IV) Creation of perverse political formations, like the West Balkans and similar in political workshops of powerful European Union members, shows that actions of such workshops are directly determined by the **outdated** vision on modernisation of South-Eastern Europe.

First source of obsoleteness is the equalisation of the counter-society practice with formation processes of national states in the South-Eastern Europe. Accordingly, the area is governed by the malign, "endemic" nationalism, and should indeed be long-term kept in the civilisational purgatory and under protectorate. But if we take a closer

look at basic facts, it will become obvious that counter-society actions are only a structural component of the Serbian aggression. In other examples, more or less conventional models of forming or completing national states are at work, those typical in **Central Europe**. (We remind you that Ivo Pilar, at the beginning of the 20th century, has drawn attention to the fact that the political syntax of the South-Eastern Europe is the same as the political syntax of the Central Europe.)

Second source of obsoleteness is the European equalisation of quality of the old and new European outskirts. Accordingly, Croatia should, for example, stay a double outskirt, just as it was in the 19th and the 20th century. It is completely forgotten that the anti-colonial imperative was incorporated in the structural turning point on the European east and south margins at the end of the 20th century. Return to the civil world, made possible by that turn, is also analysing possibilities of European centres in that area to repeat an old game of centre-margin. It is especially obvious on the Croatian example. Although, naturally, it is not possible to neglect the Croatian obsoleteness inherited from the totalitarian period as the source of diverse and not at all harmless obstacles on the "European" journey of Croatian society, it is not hard to prove that the European producer of obstacles, which is hiding in the outdated understanding of its, formerly double, outskirts, has at least the same strength. When such obsoleteness is fixed as the model of crystallisation of the new zero situation, it would be completely predictable that one of its shameless consequences would be the annulment of differences between the victim and the criminal; but also between freedom and slavery; colonisation and development "from below". That is why just the reading of messages from Vukovar surpasses outlines of the bare restoration of memory of ancestor figures, which is the typical ritual of social integration. Reading teaches us that Vukovar '91 stands in the centre of a process of revitalisation that can be completed in no other way but by initiating a rightful peace and establishing national and individual rights to development as natural.

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