4 Silence as practices of (in)security in the post-Yugoslav region

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Introduction

Security is a crucial aspect in contemporary societies, and it gains a particular outline in post-conflict societies. In such places, where memories about war are still fresh, and the consequences of conflict are highly pervasive, it seems to be a strong desire for a secure, 'normal life' (Maček, 2009; Jansen, 2015). However, this has to be achieved among parts that, not so long ago, were drawn by war to be on opposite sides and to identify (or be identified) as enemies. In this longing for safety, we notice that many aspects of the everyday become embedded in practices of (in)security. In this chapter, we analyse how practices of (in)security become part of people's everyday lives in two cities located in the post-Yugoslav region, more specifically Vukovar, in Croatia, and Mostar, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We seek to understand how an everyday aspect of those societies – language education – becomes subject to (in)security practices.

A growing body of literature analyses everyday practices and places to understand the outcomes of a conflict and the relations between security, reconciliation, justice and peace in post-conflict societies (Mac Ginty, 2014; Forde, 2019; Gusic, 2020). Those authors argue that the everyday is a crucial site to be investigated in order to escape a top-down, structural or statist analysis of post-conflict situations, stressing the more complex, nuanced and dynamic features of an analysis based on the everyday. However, this does not necessarily mean that an everyday approach will constitute a 'bottom-up' analysis or a focus on the local or the 'micro level'. We argue that the everyday favours a transversal approach in which politics of scale such as 'top-down,' 'bottom-up' or 'micro-macro' and 'macro-micro' are destabilised. Through this approach, scales are somehow flattened, and we understand relations transversally (Summa, 2021). The everyday is, therefore, a meeting place between institutionalised, official structures and a myriad of practices conducted by people.

In the post-Yugoslav region, researchers have been discussing several aspects of the everyday life through the analysis of space and place (Forde, 2019; Summa, 2021); renaming and memorialization (Palmberger, 2017;

DOI: 10.4324/9781003080909-4

Wollentz et al., 2019); mobility (Jansen, 2015) and school segregation (Bozic, 2006; Laketa, 2019; Hromadžić, 2015a). Although the latter have already explored how formal education becomes a battlefield in post-conflict Mostar, this chapter focuses more specifically on how language education is mobilised in this 'battle' and the role that silence plays in it – e.g. silencing other groups, other languages and other ways of thinking or silencing as a tactic to coexist. Thus, we ask: What does silence do in post-conflict spaces?

We ask this question while analysing two contested cities: Mostar, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Vukovar, in Croatia. They are understood as contested in the sense that they are regarded as urban spaces where ethno-national aspirations to exclusive sovereignty manifests spatially into the desire to acquire more territory for one community at the expense of others (Carabelli et al., 2021, p. 117). One of the features of those two contested cities is the stigmatisation of the 'other' community, often portrayed as a threat to stability and peace and/or as guilty for deadlock situations in which those cities find themselves. Our methodology combines multiple visits to both cities between 2013 and 2017, where we carried semi-structured interviews with students, teachers and other inhabitants, together with detailed research in the media regarding the cases of planning, integration and/or segregation in/of schools.

We proceed in this chapter as follows: First, we discuss the role of language, and language education in what concerns discursive claims about (in)security in post-conflict societies, and how they entail (in)security practices in everyday life. Second, we analyse silence in the multiple ways it is used and employed in such contexts. Then, we present a contextualisation of the two cases we analyse – Mostar, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Vukovar, in Croatia. Finally, by presenting the findings of multiple visits to both cities, we analyse how the cases speak and contribute to understanding the relation between language education, everyday (in)security practices and silence(s).

Language and everyday practices of (in)security

On the eve of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, a popular comedy show in the region, *Toplista Nadrealista*, made a sketch that was regarded, years later, as a prediction of the future. In a country where basically all its citizens could at least understand Serbo-Croatian[1], the show mocked nationalist impulses of the time, presenting a situation where a journalist declared that 'there were now six different languages in the region' of (now former) Yugoslavia, in the place of Serbo-Croatian. Then, the show presented a clip of everyday situations where customers and acquaintances suddenly no longer understood each other and requested a dictionary or a translator to carry on the conversation. This third person would 'translate,' using the exactly same words but, since it was supposedly now in 'Serbian' or 'Bosnian,' instead of, say, Serbo-Croatian, they would finally understand what was being said.[2]f

Although the vignettes are meant to be surreal, they reflect current struggles in the region. Even though inhabitants from the ex-Yugoslavia region have no difficulties in talking and understanding each other, almost 30 years after *Toplista Nadrealista*'s episode, language is increasingly presented as a matter of state and peacebuilding in the region. Along with Yugoslavia, the Serbo-Croatian language was dissolved into Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and, more recently, Montenegrin.[3] What we notice is that language – and, more specifically, language education - has become increasingly associated with (in)security.

Security, here, is understood as a process, a 'practice of making enemies and fear the integrative, energetic principle of politics' (Huysmans, 2014, p. 3) and, therefore, it is an intrinsic political project. We can establish a close relation between security practices and the feeling of insecurity. Where security practices are supposedly designed and/or employed to address a threat, they may also be the very source of production of a threat or the feeling of insecurity (Huysmans, 2006). This is why we adopt the term (in) security through this chapter – in line also with the approach followed in this volume (see Introduction).

In post-war societies, where the concept of 'otherness' has been associated with the idea of the 'enemy,' security practices became embedded in many aspects of everyday life. More precisely, in order to create independent states, people who once were neighbours – and everything that was associated with the 'other group,' such as food, culture, religion, scripts, accents – became targets of (in)security practices. When those groups were not presented as immediate physical threats, their very presence in a city or in a certain area represented a threat to the attempts of homogenisation driven by nationalist groups who fomented the war and who thrived since. Therefore, nowadays, the 'other' hardly represents a violent threat in the ex-Yugoslavia region (although memories of violence are still present), but it can represent a threat to the idea of an homogeneous city or state, these considered as the main guarantee of safety in official and non-official discourses.

Language has a very long and broad history throughout the multiple human experiences of societal organisations, but the idea of national language is more recent and intrinsically related to the emergence of the modern nation-state (Hobsbawm, 1996). Indeed, although language has always been an important tool to construct and maintain a polity (Kamusella, 2009 p. 8), it has been only a recent development in history that a language has to equate to a certain, bounded, territory and its people. Multiple discussions have been made about its place in modern societies (Hobsbawm, 1996; May, 2016; Shapiro, 1984). In the late 1800s, the development of national languages was considered a fundamental aspect to support political claims about both the distinction of a nation towards the other, and its internal cohesion and homogeneity. The efforts to create distinctive languages out of the Serbo-Croat to match the new, independent countries, in the 1990s and to demarcate national identities are, thus, not new. However, in a post-conflict context, what we pay attention to is how language education is intertwined with the

consolidation of the idea of (internal) other(s). Language(s) became an issue of dispute in this context. It served as a cover for conflicting national aspirations and strategies that were to cause the ultimate destruction of the state of Yugoslavia (Bugarski, 2004: 12). And it is still an ongoing issue, since the production of distinct, "pure languages" (Shapiro, 1984: 198) is mobilised to promote segregation at the educational system and elsewhere in these societies.

The aspects of language we are looking at go beyond their capability of communication and comprehension. Indeed, we are interested in how language becomes an issue of dispute, and how this issue permeates the everyday of post-conflict societies. Although all languages have elements of political self-assertion, this becomes more evident when claims for political independence are enhanced by language separatism (Hobsbawm, 1996). And when those disputes structure the educational system, demarcating students from one another and promoting segregated spaces in a city, language also becomes a base for nationalist agendas. Therefore, language – and its consolidation through formal education - is an important political tool for bolstering identity. It is in this context that we understand how language becomes embedded in practices of (in)security.

Charalambous et al. (2018) and Charalambous et al. (2017) have already approached this subject, by looking at language, (in)security and everyday practice while discussing the sociolinguistic context in the UK and Cyprus (see also Chapter 3 this volume). Charalambous et al. (2018) discuss how 'enemy' and 'fear' can be active principles in language policy development. The contribution provided by the Cyprus case is particularly relevant for our analysis, since it shows 'how legacies of large-scale violent conflict can generate rather unexpected ground-level enactments of language policy' (p. 635). It reveals how language (1) played a crucial role in the historical development of identities and distinctions among Turkish Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots; (2) how it becomes an object of (in)security, when associated with the 'language of the national archenemy' and (3), how it can be (de)securitised through policies of teaching and learning the 'other language,' notably, Turkish for Greek-Cypriots. By showing how other bodies and cultures are produced as threats to the state both in Cyprus and the UK, the authors highlight how securitisation may turn some aspects of everyday life 'exceptional.'

A different approach is provided by Ochs (2013). The author investigates how the militarisation of the streets, cafes and transportation in Israel produces the seeming paradox of an everyday/exceptional life. The author argues that everyday security practices enhance the perception of insecurity, rather than mitigate it, and produce a state of fear and alertness in Israeli society. Therefore, everyday life, which is usually associated with the banal and uneventful, becomes increasingly involved and captured by exceptional practices, producing an atmosphere of perpetual insecurity.

The two cases we analyse give us an example of an exceptional everyday, even if not through extensive militarisation, physical barriers and violent threats such as in Ochs' (2013) narratives. The disputes we look at are over crucial sectors of a society, such as the educational policies. While the everyday lives in the two cities we study are no longer plunged into armed conflicts, the securitisation of other ethnonational communities is still at work.

Silence andlas security in post-conflict societies

Understanding everyday (in)security practices towards language depends not only on what is being said, but especially on what has been left unsaid or has been suppressed from the public debate. Silence is a common feature in post-conflict societies, and may happen in various situations, serving a range of different intended and unintended purposes (Eastmond and Mannergren Selimovic, 2020). In this section, we explore the link between silence and (in) security (Dingli, 2015; Rampton & Charalambous, 2016; Guillaume, 2018), but focus more specifically on the multiple forms silences may take in the lived space of post-conflict societies. Then, we discuss the relation between silences and (in)security, and how they are used in regard to language education. To promote this debate, we discuss the works of Eastmond and Mannergren Selimovic (2020), more precisely, their distinction between 'silence that enables peace' and 'silence that disables peace' and of Orlandi (2009) and her concept of 'silences and interdicts.' We also argue that silence can be a crucial feature of everyday peace (Mac Ginty, 2014; also Chapter 2), where unwritten rules establish what can be discussed where and by whom, and it is 'highly context-, location- and time-specific, and relies on well-honed interpersonal skills' (Ibidem p. 554).

Silence has been associated, in International Relations, with corporeal and epistemic violence (Dingli, 2015). Feminist perspectives highlight the everyday efforts by groups at the centre to keep (silenced) marginal groups silent and at the margin of the political debate (Enloe, 1996). On a different, but related note, scholars have called attention to the epistemic silence in the discipline towards the racial question (Krishna, 2001). Highly influenced by the linguistic turn, security studies have given centrality to language and associated speech to action, implicitly relegating silence to inaction. Guillaume (2018), however, shows that things can be done with silence, and he introduces the notion of 'silence-as-doing,' highlighting that silence is more than an absence. Important here is the idea that silence carries an ambiguity that makes different meanings possible. It could be a form of violence, as previously discussed, a choice of not engaging with a specific matter, or even a form of resistance. This corroborates the idea of silence as an important feature of 'everyday peace' (Mac Ginty, 2014), which is very context-dependent and a possible tool to navigate one's passage through post-conflict societies.

Let's now look at how silence has been used as a tactic in post-conflict ex-Yugoslavia. Eastmond & Mannergren Selimovic (2012, 2020), Kolind (2008) and Stefansson (2010) have exposed situations in different locations in the region where dwellers silenced sensitive topics – especially regarding what happened during the war. Kolind (2008), in his research about a small, ethnonational 'mixed' town in Herzegovina, concludes that the "parties have to develop some kind of 'working consensus' or unspoken agreement about social interaction". He recalls the story of a 'Muslim woman who told me (him) that she never discussed politics with her Croat colleagues. They only talked deliberately about cooking and children' (p. 78). Silence, here, works as a 'possibility of living together,' or being 'civil' especially in places shared by different ethnonational groups or in situations where one finds him/herself as a minority (Eastmond & Mannergren Selimovic, 2012).

Stefansson (2010) also explores the role of silence as a way to live together. Although the literature that approaches transitional justice in post-conflict contexts usually understands silence as something oppressive and related to impunity (Connerton, 2011), Stefansson highlights silence as a way of rebuilding the pre-war social fabric. He suggests that reconciliation does not occur only through outspoken empathy, but also through silencing controversial topics.

Those authors who think silence as a productive tactic stand in contrast to more classical approaches in peace and transitional justice literature that highlight the importance of bringing the truth to the surface and speaking out about injustices and crimes. According to this approach, silence is associated with impunity, and provides a less fertile ground to blossom a peaceful and just society. Silence is thus perceived as the opposite of speech, action and empowerment and even politics. It is considered as 'lacking' and possibly demining. Jansen (2015), however, argues that, in the everyday, people (in his case, dwellers of the Sarajevo neighbourhood of Dobrinja) made the shared concern with 'normal lives less through action and more through non-verbal communication: "It was in rants and laments, in sighs and silences, that 'normal lives,' and (…) state-craft took centre stage" (p. 16).

Eastmond and Mannergren Selimovic (2020) provide an analytical framework which explores silences in their different meanings, instead of fixing one single interpretation to them. They classify different forms of silences as those that 'disable peace' and 'enable peace.' In the first category, they rank the denial and revisionist approach towards the Srebrenica's genocide by some (Bosnian-)Serbian leaders and citizens and so on. Usually, they are the kind of silence that drives to impunity of war crimes or crimes committed by the State, while establishing an official (often negationist) narrative to the events. On the other hand, they discuss silence as a tactic to make peace durable. These are particularly present in societies that have experienced interethnic or interreligious violence and that are trying to return to 'normality' and live together after such events. Here we notice an attempt to avoid recalling painful memories in public, of trying not to discuss historical

events or 'politics,' of silencing as a way to disapproving past or present attitudes and even as a way of showing respect to those victims of violence.

We corroborate with Eastmond and Mannergren Selimovic's (2020) point on the multiplicity of meanings silence may acquire, and the need to analyse different forms of silence within their context. Also, we pay attention to the dynamic relationship between silencing and speaking out and between disabling and enabling silences (Ibidem). Therefore, we share the idea that silence is not a phenomenon of secondary importance and or a 'residue' of language. Moreover, as Orlandi (2009) states, the words are made of silence and silence is full of meaning. 'Silence is not merely a complement to language. It has its own significance.' (Orlandi, 2009, p. 23).

During fieldwork in Vukovar and Mostar, we could observe those different kinds of silence operating in everyday life: the revisionism of crimes committed during the wars (both World War II and the 1990s wars), the renaming of streets, the abandonment of monuments to just 'not talking about the war'; silences are a strong presence – and not an absence – in everyday life. We want to stress here the relation between silence and language education, a relation that is still under-explored.

The fluctuation between the act of silencing and saying is of utmost importance, as it is where the interdictions function. Orlandi (2009) explains how interdictions function as operators that cut or prevent all saying. And furthermore, in order to be able to say something, one must decide what to say and what not, and here the idea of a discursive cut is fundamental. Discourse analysis in this way helps us to see that if it were possible to say everything, nothing would be said, since there would be no differentiation between one speech and another. We can say that history and the society intervene here to the extent that what is available (and what is not) for discourse making depends on what is expected or permitted to say in a situation and moment. An individual learns over time what their own group, community or society deems fit to be said, and if he or she breaks 'the rules,' they learn the consequences. The learning process is one made of different discourses that are embedded in speaking about almost anything in the world, and our way of dealing with the silence and the interdictions are a result of everyday experiences. When something is defined as a threat, it may not always be overtly said or communicated, but it can make itself present in the silence that one receives or the unwillingness or refusal of people to speak about it. This is not just a personal decision, but one of societal importance as the way one speaks or acts can be perceived as a risk or threat by others. Therefore silence and the interdictions of speech are of great importance if we are to understand better how everyday life functions in post-conflict societies.

Contextualising language and silence in two contested cities

Vukovar has a complex history of heterogeneous contacts between ethnic groups, especially between Croats and Serbs. It lies on the border between

Croatia and Serbia, geographically in eastern Croatia. After 1991, Vukovar became the frozen fragment of the war in ex-Yugoslavia, since the so-called post-war period is still full of (non-armed) conflicts. Nowadays, what seems to prevail is that it is no longer a multinational city and there are many attempts to forget this shared past and silence minorities. During Puh's field trips between 2013 and 2016, which were made initially to understand how the local language policy functions in cities with a present Ukrainian community in Croatia and Brazil, many interlocutors reported the lack of coexistence among different ethnonational groups in their everyday convivial life. According to them, the lack of coexistence turned the multicultural city into an abstraction rather than into a place of encounter. When asked about the practices and events of other groups other than their own, our interlocutors would reply with vague responses: 'well, people say that they (*the other group*) have x or y in that place' or 'I hear that they meet in x place, but I'm not sure' or 'I don't really know, probably they do something, but who is to know,' accompanied by a uneasiness to speak and creating an awkward silence in order to ensure that the topic would be changed. There were many of these situations occurring during the observations and interviews realised within the four-year period, much more so in Croatia than in Brazil, a phenomenon that caught the researchers' attention. Not only it became an issue while trying to comprehend the local linguistic policy that was created and enacted by the Croatian Ukrainian immigrant community, but also required the development of special ethnographic strategies in order for the research to be possible. We can sum them up as situational and interactional strategies; thinking things through and carefully before the interviews and field observations; avoiding certain topics that would create overt commentaries; and using additional types of sources to triangulate the data: Official documents and media texts. The interactional strategies were used in moments where the uncomfortable situation could not be foreseen, reinforcing the idea that the anonymity would be guaranteed and that things could be said 'off the record.'

As for Vukovar, despite its past, it is now used discursively by the Croatian institutions as a symbol of war destruction but also resilience (it even has its own day to 'celebrate' – 18th of November), following the entry of the Serbian and/or Yugoslav forces in the city on November 18th in 1991 after the three month resistance by the local Croatian forces. Thus, the city represented the first step towards the liberation of the Serbian people and/or the subjugation of the Croatian people, depending on the perspective and the interpretation of History. The relationship between neighbours and communities disappeared or changed significantly after the war with urban, economic and industrial destruction, eliminating congregation points and severing social and family ties until they caused almost total separation. This dissolution of the social fabric created a psychological void, which was filled with other stories, values, attitudes and conceptions, as stated by Čorkalo (2008).

However, the city did not become ethnically homogenous as other places in Croatia and the region. In the 2011 national census, the percentage of Croats in Vukovar was 57,37% and of Serbs 34,87%, while 7,76% were from other ethnicities/nationalities. Reconciliation, nevertheless, seems far to be reached. The predominant political discourse is that it is expected that the 'other' side assumes its crimes and pays accordingly, which is translated in a state of tension in everyday life. Official politicians bring up the war and ethnic tensions almost on a daily basis, not allowing the silence to take over itself, but also interdicting that certain discourses of conciliation are brought up. This resonates with the educational system, with separate classes for Croatian and Serbian children who study on different curricula, with almost no interaction among them. Changes are met with resistance, as in the case of a proposal to put in place bilingual signs in Croatian and Serbian with Latin and Cyrillic scripts, as we will explain later.

The situation in Mostar is not so different from Vukovar. Although Bosnia and Herzegovina has constituted itself as a multinational state, home of three constituent peoples – Bosniaks (or Muslims), Serbs and Croats – there are nowadays few municipalities in the country which are not actually dominated by one of the three ethnonational groups. With over 100,000 inhabitants, Mostar has been historically known as a multi-ethnic and multicultural city, home of Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs, with none of them being a majority. It is important to note that, during Tito's Yugoslavia, the language spoken in the city was only one: The 'Serbo-Croatian' or 'Croatian-Serb.'

The 1990s war hit Mostar severely, shifting the social fabric of the city – which was *de facto* and *de jure* divided into East Mostar (mostly inhabited by Bosniaks) and West Mostar (mostly inhabited by Croats). The Serb community almost completely fled during the conflict. At this point, the war front went through the centre of the city, cutting neighbourhoods and the relation among former neighbours, while transforming Mostar into a contested city – a similar development to what we saw in Vukovar.

After the conflict, Mostar emerged as one of the few cities that do not have an expressive ethnonational majority in BiH as the result of war-induced migrations, deaths, and demographic shifts across the country. Instead, it houses two communities (Bosniak and Croat), roughly equal in size, that are both contending the city's territory. Accordingly, there are nowadays two official languages in the educational system: Croatian and Bosnian.

In what follows, we look at both Vukovar's and Mostar's educational systems to understand how language(s) represents an issue of security for the cities and their inhabitants. We analyse how language education becomes a factor of segregation, stigmatisation or maintenance of the privileges of a certain group, and also how language education might also represent a possibility of dialogue in these two cities. Finally, we look at silences and interdicts, both in how they might be detrimental to coexistence and in how they might provide a possibility of living together.

Mostar: A segregated and 'reunified' school system

The emergence of three official languages in the place of Serbo-Croat was both concomitant to and had consequences to the education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Mostar, more specifically. The educational system was affected by the war and split among the different sides of the conflict, becoming a tool for nationalists to both enhance and consolidate divisions in the everyday of the city. As Hromadžić (2015a) argues, "children began to be educated according to the 'tripartite pattern,' which was based on the area in which people lived and the ethnicity to which they belonged". Among other consequences, war thus left Mostar with this segregated 'infrastructure' legacy. Moreover, from 1992 onwards, the country has adopted three separated curricula: a Serbian, a Croatian and a Bosniak (Kreso, 2008: 357).

Language plays a decisive role here: Since there are three official recognised languages in the country, education on the students' mother tongue must be assured. In our visits to the city, this aspect was highlighted by some of our informants, who argued that either they or other people they knew would prefer to send their children to school in their 'own language,' bringing also the aspect of how history and religion are taught in different curricula.

According to the 2018 OSCE report 'Authorities commonly re-named schools to honour persons or events from the conflict and displayed nationalist insignia or religious symbols. The teaching process was also conducted based on curricula and textbooks that were ethnically coloured, including the victimisation of one constituent people and the exclusion or even villainization of the other constituent peoples.' Immediately after the war, many parents refused to send their children to local schools with students 'from the other side.' The international community responded to this by formulating the controversial practice of 'two schools under one roof' – i.e. bringing together in a single building two schools corresponding to two different communities, two different curricula, two different groups of teachers and, sometimes, even two different entrances or shifts. What was supposed to be a temporary solution for the lack of infrastructure after the war is still an ongoing practice in 56 schools (OSCE, 2018) throughout the country. Moreover, while the 'two schools under one roof' was understood as a first step towards the full integration of schools – and, thus, cherished at first by the international community as a step towards removing the the educational field from the security sphere – it has, through all those 25 years, been ruled as a breach to multiple national and international conventions[4].

As such, this educational practice has been portrayed from a solution to a threat to the well-being of the students, to the integration of the different communities and even to the future of BiH itself. The international community and some groups of parents are certain to affirm that the two school under one roof segregate children and instil division and the notion of differences: 'In post-conflict BiH, this fosters mistrust, impedes reconciliation

and is a long-term threat to stability and economic prosperity' (OSCE, 2018: 10) and '(segregation) emphasised differences and encouraged mutual ignorance and, perhaps more important, mutual suspicion' (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000: 15). The lack of coexistence and dialogue among the youth, therefore, is seen as detrimental to a sustainable peace.

The New York Times, in its article 'In a divided Bosnia, Segregated School Persists' (2018), argues that 'since the end of the war, the hard-line nationalists (...) have turned the school into a battlefield,' while showing many examples of students who have demanded through multiple initiatives to unify schools. The article presents a distinction between nationalist politicians from both sides, who would like to silence any attempt to reunify schools, and students, who work against the interdiction to attend school together and, at the same time, break with the logics of war.[5]f

The segregation in the educational system, however, is far from being eradicated from local educational practices, as it could be observed during multiple fieldwork visits between 2014 and 2017 by Summa, who investigated how ethnonational boundaries are enacted, contested and displaced in post-Dayton BiH. During several stays in the city, Summa conducted 20 interviews with students from private and public high schools, one school director, journalists and 'ordinary citizens' from different ages, gender, economic and ethnonational backgrounds. Most of them deplored the educational system and the silences that are being instilled in BiH's youth, while sometimes also mocking the linguistic argument to justify it: 'Nobody in my school speaks pure Croatian ... we all speak this mixture of everything (Croatian, Serbian and some Turkish words, as she explained earlier). I seriously doubt that even our professors speak Croatian ...' – according to a high school student who attended the Croatian curricula.[6]

The argument on which the maintenance of school segregation in BiH relies carries in its core the principle that each ethnonational community has the right to be taught in its own language. This is why it is so important to understand political engineering to foster and deepen the demarcation and division of national languages in the region. The existence and maintenance of three different curricula opens the gateway to multiple practices of segregation. Indeed, in the ex-Yugoslavia region, 'linguistic human rights discourse, despite its conscious goal of preventing discrimination, has actually helped legitimise ethnic divisions' (Pupavac, 2006). Moreover, it forces children and their parents to identify with one or other ethnonational community, and it is particularly damaging to children who were born from so-called 'mixed marriages' (Hromadžić, 2015a).

Mostar stands out as an important city to study this phenomenon. The city hosts a 'two schools under one roof' and another school which has been 'reunited.' The Secondary School of Machinery and Traffic and the Secondary School of Traffic share the same building, have a common entrance and a joint teachers room. However, the first one teaches the curricula in Bosnian language and the second, in Croatian language. Although

they share a school yard, which could facilitate the socialisation and integration among students, students go to school in different shifts. On the other hand, there is the Mostar Gymnasium. The sizable Austro-Hungarian building dating from 1893 has hosted one of the most popular High Schools in Yugoslavia. It was almost completely destroyed during the war when only one wing of the ground floor was left functioning. During nearly ten years, thereafter, only students following the Croatian Curriculum of Mostar Gymnasium could use that building.

While the Gymnasium was one of the first schools to be integrated in BiH (in February 2004) after years of heated negotiations, demonstrations and the investment of an important amount of money (Hromadžić, 2011), the integration of the opposite group is yet to be proved. The reunification of Mostar Gymnasium was cherished by many who opposed the 'two school under one roof model' as an example that would be followed by other schools and a proof that students did not need to be segregated. However, this landslide effect did not take place. Moreover, even if the school is unified, Bosniak and Croat students still attend different classes in two different curricula. Official places for mixing inside the school exist, however, as Hromadžić (2011) explains, 'mixing' does not happen there.

The Christian Science Monitor (2007)[7] highlights the attempts of Croatian nationalists to seize Mostar Gymnasium by naming it after a Catholic priest after the war and fiercely opposing the reunification of the school: "(Opposition) was particularly strong from Croats, who emerged from the war clinging to a threatened sense of national identity and who insisted on speaking their 'own' language, even though the differences in language used by Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs are barely distinguishable". This attempt to rename the Gymnasium can be interpreted as a discursive practice of silencing this multicultural past of the school while interdicting Bosniak students to attend it. As Palmberger (2017) argues, renaming is a practice of inscribing one's group claim upon that landscape or institution. The article stresses this dispute by stating that 'there was some fierce resistance initially, even the proposed name of the reunified school was subject to months of political debate.'

The Bosnian television show 'Perspektiva' (2015) brought together high-school students from both the segregated and unified schools in Mostar to discuss their impressions of their everyday life and the reminiscences of war in their city. Although many students said they got along with students from other ethnonational group, what stood out was the declaration of some students who had never crossed to the 'other side' of the city (meaning, the side mostly populated by the other ethnonational group) and others reporting fear to cross. The show may be perceived as a portrait of the consequences of two decades of segregated education in the young generations who were not even born at the time of the war and the continuous nationalist politics that foster division among the constitutive groups from BiH. Moreover, it stood out as an attempt to break the silence among students from different communities in

Mostar and make them talk to each other, exposing their fears, hopes and the things they had in common. It provided a rare opportunity for dialogue broadcasted in national television, and was portrayed as a general attempt to break with silence and interdictions.

However, silence also emerged in research data as a strategy to live together. Some of our interlocutors stressed the importance of, for example, silencing political and religious subjects in public spaces, such as the reunified Gymnasium. Moreover, they added that they would feel unsafe if they are 'at the other side' of the city, on the street or in a club, and somebody would shout their names (which are usually strongly associated with one ethnonational group or the other). Hiding their background, thus, is considered an important tactic to get by in their everyday life. One former teacher of Mostar Gymnasium explained how the division in schooling system also contributes to foster a sense of (exclusive) belonging and identification that might be used against people from the other school (and ethnonational background): 'You always have some street bullers, and they can always recognise you are from some school … one student of mine from Gymnasium, who was completely lacking any division in his mind, went out in the Old City (predominantly Muslim side) for a drink, some people recognised he was from the Croatian side and he was attacked out of the blue'[8].

Therefore, we notice that different forms of silence are present in the everyday life of Mostar and they are closely related to practices of (in)security. Language, that supposedly enables dialogue and shared coexistence, is also used to justify a segregated scholar system, where 'sensitive' topics such as the historical events of the 1990s war have been silenced and designated to be discussed only in private spheres[9].

Vukovar: Silencing spaces of coexistance

Our analysis of the Vukovar case-study is based on the ethnographic research made between 2013 and 2016 with yearly visits to two other municipalities (Lipovljani and Šumeće) as well as to Vukovar through participant observations and semi-structured interviews. In total, one of the authors conducted nine interviews[10] and six observations[11] with the Ukranian community in Vukovar, to understand how a third ethnic community lives in the city and preserves its identity and culture. The educational system in Vukovar stood out as an important site to be studied, since it crystallises ethnonational distinctions.

Moreover, special strategies were created in order to resolve some of the issues regarding the unwillingness or discomfort of our participants. We conducted an extensive research of the official legislation regarding Education and Languages Status in Croatian, as well as academic and media texts, which would 'fill in' the silences that we perceived while doing the fieldwork. While conducting research, some interviewees mentioned the project of an intercultural school that was supposed to open in 2017, and

which had received enough money to be built and operate in the city. This would become our case to study and present here as a example of the way silences and interdictions happen in Vukovar. Along with interviews and observations, we explore media articles that brought the intercultural school project into the public debate, creating a discourse quarrel by confronting different sides.

Before we go further in with our analysis we will comment briefly on the formal education in Vukovar and how language is a part of the division, based on the studies of Kasunić (2018), Čorkalo and Ajduković (2007; 2008; 2012), Milčić and Majsec (2010). The school system is divided as a direct result of the 1991–1995 war in Croatia and the Peaceful Reintegration, which ended in 1998, accompanied by a slow normalisation and integration of the East Sector in Croatian educational system with a lot of negotiations since the original 1995 Erdut Agreement. The right to minority education was later specified by the 2000 Act on Education of Minorities, acknowledging the right to have schooling in the native language and alphabet, establishing the 'A, B and C Model' as a part of The National Pedagogic Standard for Primary and Secondary Education[12].

The National Pedagogic Standard is a complex model, which brings three possibilities for the students and their parents, sometimes limiting the contact they have in everyday (school) life. The more present an ethnic minority is in the *županija*, *grad* and *općina* (county, city and municipality), the more options it has for education in its language. On the other hand, the more present it is, depending on the historical moment and context, the more the discourse of insecurity is evident, like in the case of the Serbian population in Vukovar. This is clear by the public discourses portraying the actions or the existence of an ethnonational group as a problem to Croatian national sovereignty.

As our ethnographic research showed, smaller groups such as the Ukranians, are, on one hand, really present as a group in everyday life (with presentations in events, publications and educational projects), but on the other hand, they are silent when they deem that interfering might cause them to be seen as a possible threat. Here we have to remember that they also use the Cyrillic alphabet and are mostly of Orthodox religion, just as the Serbians, which, as all interviewees highlighted, is a constant 'ethnic risk' of being compared and equalised to them.

An important discussion on language and security in the everydaylife of Vukovar relates precisely to the role of Serbian language and the Cyrillic scripts in the city. This is a right foreseen in the actual Croatian Constitution and the Law on Use of Languages and Scripts of National Minorities but questioned (violently) by part of Vukovar and Croatian political elites and population, even forcing the Croatian Supreme Court to give a ruling. From 2013 onwards, there is a growing reclaiming of giving the Serbian Cyrillic Alphabet a co-official status in the city. At the same time, other voices in the city question the 'peril' it brings, trying to silence communication through

Cyrillic scripts (using even physical violence, with several signs being destroyed covertly and overtly – many of them were filmed). As Kapović (2016, 2020) argues, for many in Vukovar the Cyrillic alphabet acts as a visual presence and is considered a threat, since it brings about the memory of the war suffering for the Croatian population[13].

Besides the Model and its three possibilities, there is space for new propositions, like the creation of an intercultural school in Vukovar. The school was supposed to have a different kind of curriculum that would combine alternative educational objectives and contents in order to provide a less segregated school environment. This would allow for desegregating the schooling model. The existence of the intercultural school would also prevent situations in which parents feel like they could be looked upon like traitors due to the school choice they made for their children (Kasunić, 2018).

So, we shall take as an example the intercultural school Dunav (Danube) which was brought to public debate even though, in our experience, was accompanied with silences. We believe it is a good example to analyse how language and education are intertwined within the ongoing (in)security practices of Vukovar everyday life. It was first revealed by the media at the end of 2016 when the decision to create the school was made by the local authorities. At the time, neither the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) nor the five members of the Serbian minority were interested in the project. The project had already been discussed three years before by the social democrats from the Social Democratic Party of Croatia (SDP) on the local level, however, without the support of the central government. The project, then, was silenced, until it came up again through the pressure from the Ministries of Education and Regional Development, along with the Norwegians. They wanted to use a larger sum of European Union money, as the Norwegian government stated, according to Enis Zebić in his article 'Intercultural school in Vukovar: Croats unwillingly for and the Serbs against,' published on the website of Radio Slobodna Europa (Radio Free Europe).

Through Zebić's article (2016), it is clear that the two main parties – the ruling HDZ and oppositionist Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS) – were against the intercultural school. Other voices were heard, such as members of the SDP, which had a mixed Serbian and Croatian, and the liberal party Croatian People's Party (HNS). Both of them were in favour of the creation of the intercultural school, but received much less attention in the article and in that context more generally.

This debate reveals that those voices have been continuously silenced in the city, as their previous attempts to put forward an intercultural school. Two of our interlocutors stressed in 2016 that, in Vukovar, there is no space for a 'third voice,' i.e. a discourse in favour of connections in the city. So, the interdiction here is made by minimising the presence and importance of those 'third voices,' while not recognising them also as protagonists of the intercultural school project. Those who are in favour of stronger connections inside of the city are regarded as 'foreigners' by the two ruling parties as we will see below.

The following is indicative of the vocabulary used by the HDZ, when justifying why they were against the school project: 'the State … should not bring foreign bodies in its legislative frame.' Similarly, SDSS was against the school project because it 'can jeopardise the existing educational programme.'

The metaphor of foreign bodies is representative of the non-Croatian, usually European, institutional pressures for changes and policy enactments, which can put at risk the commonly cited 'hardly conquered (Croatian) sovereignty and liberty.' So intercultural ideas are seen as pushed from 'outside' (even when they came from groups based in Vukovar) to threaten Croatian statehood and status quo. The 'threat' was explicitly cited in the second metaphor of jeopardy of the Educational system. Here the (seemingly) opposite sides (nationalist Croats and Serbs) come together to restrain the campaign in favour of the intercultural school, by arguing that the idea comes from the 'outside.'

Similar political moves were revealed to us in conversation with members of the Ukranian community in 2015 and 2016. As they argued, the two main local political parties would sometimes make silent agreements when they felt threatened by the central government and/or the European Union. In this sense, they presented themselves as local resistance to national or foreign propositions for the solution of ethnonational questions, 'preventing things to happen,' ignoring their requests or just interdicting a public debate about it.

Six months later, in 2017, the intercultural school situation reached a paradoxical state as Dragana Bošnjak writes in the article '*New school, old habits*' in the journal Novosti (News). The school building was built, while elected representatives of both Croats and Serbs were still reluctant. In this text we see that a common metonymy portrays the political representatives who were against the school as 'the community,' silencing all of those who were in favour of the project. For example when mayor Penava, introduced as 'City of Vukovar, the founder of the school,' said that: 'we are cautious because we are a very specific milleu'; his use of the pronoun 'we,' in our view, equalises the 'we – city' as 'we – people,' the official or political 'we' as the ethnic or all comprehensive 'we.' The only dissonant voice reported in this article is the local Hungarian minority, depicted through its president at the time as one of 23 minorities, which were supposed to attend the school. Most importantly, the Serbian minority is singled out in the text (here we have to take into account that the journal is financed by the Serbian People's Council) and pointed as a separate minority. The president of the Board of Education of Joint Serbian Municipalities even stated that the intercultural school represents a 'big trap for Serbs and a way to be assimilated.' Moreover, the mayor of Vukovar, member of the ruling party, declared scepticism towards the project because of the specific context in which the city is located, alluding to a particular tense and risky situation, where breaking the silences might trigger conflict and violence.

The last 'act' of this story was the cancellation of the project, in the end of 2018. At that point, the school buildings and installations were not yet

completed and, more importantly, in the fall of that year there were no interested candidates. Drago Hedl sums it up well in the title '*What coexistence. The State, we found out, had to give back money for the failed project of the intercultural school*' in the journal Telegram. The term 'we found out' makes clear that those decisions were not transparent to the public. Several articles with similar content were published in 2018, trying to explain why the intercultural school did not succeed, which we can summarise through the idea of the 'intercultural school in Vukovar as a counter-state element,' as stated by Ivan Markešić in his column in Večernji list (Evening paper). The project that would allow for a shared educational system in a contested city, was considered a threat to the state-building and the current understanding of 'peace.'

In December of 2019 we contacted some of our interlocutors and two of them commented that the whole idea was again silenced. One of them argued that media articles on the case were not frequent, usually they related to some kind of official decision or individual journalistic research, and there was generally a lack of public debate about the future of language and education in the city. For all of them, remaining silent also represented a way of surviving in a tense environment, leaving room for other discussions that bring about less problematic topics; therefore, being inconsistent and not persistent on certain topics could also be understood a strategy to ensure the functioning of everyday interaction.

To conclude, there was an overt process of silencing the intercultural school project and interdicting the public debate by evoking, even indirectly, that it posed a threat to the painfully achieved status quo. A project like the intercultural school was transformed in public and media discourses into a 'foreign body,' embedded in 'foreign ideas,' unacceptable for the Serbian and Croatian political elites. In a sense, security concerns in everyday life in Vukovar created a situation where any proposition that did not corroborate to the status quo was dismissed as an external threat, while the local and national mistrust between the two dominant ethnonational groups was the fuel for perpetuating (in)security practices. The apparently two opposed groups in fact silenced other voices. The interdiction, in this case, concerns more alternative claims about a shared educational system and a less segregated everyday life.

Conclusion: Silence and interdicts and the possibilities for post-conflict societies

In this chapter, we have looked at struggles involving the educational system in two contested cities in the post-conflict, post-Yugoslav region – Mostar and Vukovar. We have exposed how, despite the absence of great linguistic differences that could make ethnonational distinctions strike out, language was still used to demarcate, identify, separate and segregate the educational system and other aspects of the everyday life in these two cities. We have

also argued that silence – and silencing – is a prevalent feature of post-conflict societies. Instead of being only a sign of a lack of agency and absence of meaning, we have argued that silence can have different meanings and 'do' things, and it can even be an important aspect of 'everyday peace.'

The cases we have analysed show how silences fall often in a discomfort, if not fear, of speaking out about subjects deemed delicate in a post-conflict society. In this sense, silence might be understood as a possibility to co-exist without digging deeper in past events or a way to 'change the conversation,' by not engaging with some topics or by not abiding to specific (ethnonational) categories. More often, however, silence reveals the inability to promote a public debate about the recent past and the future of the nation. The political project in place in both Mostar and Vukovar produces lots of silences and, in some cases, interdicts the debate about the recent war and dissonant voices who promote agendas and initiatives that are not based on ethnonational lines.

Our research has suggested that silence can both enable and disable co-existence in these two cities. By avoiding 'sensitive' discussions and by keeping a certain degree of ambiguity, it is possible to create spaces where everyday interaction is made possible, as in the reunification of Mostar Gymnasium. On the other hand, attempts to silence proposals such as the intercultural school in Vukovar, which wanted to promote a shared space for all the communities in the city, corroborates to the feeling of insecurity and segregation, and to the political projects that thrive through segregation and fear.

Notes

1 According to the 1981 census, Serbo-Croat was the mother tongue of 73% of Yugoslavia population of 22.4 million (Bugarski, 2004).
2 Episode available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DztrX5dXmxU
3 For a linguistic-oriented analysis of the do Serbo-Croatian construction and dissolution, please refer to Bugarski, 2004.
4 So far, the "two schools under one roof" has been considered by both national and international courts as discriminating and violating human rights conventions ratified by BiH such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention against Discrimination in Education, the European Convention on Human Rights (OSCE, 2018).
5 A similar argument is advanced by Balkan Insight, in its article from 2017, "Pupils Challenge Ethnically-Divided Education in Bosnia". It describes the situation in one Bosnian town, Jajce, where local politicians were opening a new school specially conceived for Bosniak students - who used to attend the same, mixed school, until then. According to the article, many students were against segregation and were supported by "around 100 students of all ethnic backgrounds from across the country (and which) attended (a) conference in support of the students from Jajce". Again, students are portrayed as breaking the silence

around this question and working against attempts to interdict common education among different communities.

6 Interview with S. 7 May 2015.

7 "Students mingle – sort of – in post-war Bosnia's only integrated school"

8 Interview with V. 06.05. 2015, in the Gymnasium building.

9 In 2000, the Council of Europe issued a recommendation that Bosnian schools refrain from teaching about the Bosnian War "to enable historians from all communities [...] to develop a common approach." The topic has thus not been addressed in the schools of any of the cantons since 2000. In 2018, Canton Sarajevo has started teaching about the war, and other cantons followed suit. See: https://www.euroclio.eu/2019/08/19/dealing-with-the-past-challenges-as-sarajevo-tackles-the-bosnian-war-in-classrooms/

10 With three age groups: Between 20 and 35, 35 and 55, 55 and 75.

11 Two each year on different occasions: Festivals, schools events and folcloric rehearsals.

12 Basically the models establish the way the education has to be organised when it comes to minorities on Croatian territory, depending on the census which gives the percentages of specific ethnicities needed to confirm its existence, which in practical terms is always problematic. So the Model A permits that all of the schooling process is done in the minority language and script with no formal contact with the Croatian education, Model B is made within the Croatian schooling system with specific courses (History, Language, Geography, etc.) offered for minority students and Model C is entirely in the Croatian schooling system but with additional language and culture classes for the minority.

13 Recently, the Cyrillic question caused turmoil in the ruling HDZ party and they coalition partners, the SDSS (which represents the Serbs in Croatia), threatening the government to fall.

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Security, Ethnography and Discourse

Transdisciplinary Encounters

Edited by Emma Mc Cluskey and Constadina Charalambous

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK