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Urban formations of difference: borders and cities in post-1989 Europe

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The devastation of the historical cities of the former Yugoslavia, perpetrated by the contending parties in the civil war, was regarded in Western Europe as an act of destruction against European cities. However, the cultural rhetoric of the European identity of cities, such as Sarajevo, Dubrovnik, and Vukovar displays a stark contrast with the European Union's lack of political engagement with the future of Bosnia and Croatia. This rhetoric is also diametrically opposed to the collective politics of exclusion of Bosnian and Croatian migrants from a United Europe. These ambiguous approaches to the notion of 'Europe' prompt an analytical focus on the concrete, localized and at times contradictory urban sites where Europeanization is taking place.

European Cities, European citizenship, Europeanization

In 1993, when the Baroque city centres of Vukovar and Osijek in Croatia lay in ruins, while the Ottoman Old Town of Mostar in Bosnia was in the process of being destroyed, after Dubrovnik had been shelled, and in the midst of the siege of Sarajevo, Bogdan Bogdanovic, an architect and former mayor of Belgrade, published an essay, 'The City and Death,'[1] the subject of which was the ongoing destruction of cities in Bosnia and Croatia:

> Sooner or later the civilized world will dismiss our internecine butchery with a shrug of the shoulders – how else can it react? – but it will never forget the way we destroyed our cities. We Serbs shall be remembered as despoilers of cities, latter-day Huns. The horror felt by the West is understandable: for centuries it has linked the concepts 'city' and 'civilization', associating them even on an etymological level. It therefore has no choice but to view the destruction of cities as flagrant, wanton opposition to the highest values of civilization.[2]

Bogdanovic posed destroyed cities in Bosnia and Croatia as juxtapositions of Western urbanity and non-Western violence. The outcome of these juxtapositions was destruction. He regarded this destruction as the most salient characteristic of the wars in the former Yugoslavia. In other words, what was significant about these wars was not that violence took place *in* cities, but that violence was directed *against* cities – a violence termed 'urbicide' in Yugoslavia.[3]

Bogdanovic aptly anticipated 'Western' readings of violence in Bosnia and Croatia but these readings may induce unease as much as engender familiarity. Given the violence in and of the city, how can the city and civilization still be so easily equated? How can 'the West's' own history of destroying cities be forgotten? And in the inquiry most famously pursued by Adorno and Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* – how can the 'highest values of civilization' be separated from the violence wreaked in their names?

Despite such questions, the inhabitants of cities throughout Bosnia and Croatia spoke about the war as Bogdanovic did. For almost four years, the citizens of Sarajevo lived and died through what they represented as the slow destruction of a 'European city', a city 'in the heart of Europe', a city an hour by air from Venice and Rome. After the Old Bridge in Mostar was destroyed, the President of Bosnia-Herzegovina wrote in an open letter that the bridge 'linked the banks of one of the most beautiful European cities [so] we expected the civilized world … to stop its destruction.[4] In Croatia, Slavenka Drakulic wrote that Zagreb was understood to be 'a capital city, a European city', so that 'Europe would not let [war] happen … When cluster bombs started to fall in the middle of the day, Zagreb was taken by surprise. "Is it possible?" people asked almost in disbelief, even though they lived only 30 miles from the frontline.'[5]

As these quotations indicate, the scripting of the urban sites of violence in Bosnia and Croatia as European were enmeshed with entreaties to Europe, either literally in the form of letters to European institutions pleading for help, or psychologically in the form of hopes and desires for European interventions in the war. The interventions, of course, never came. Nonetheless, throughout Europe, the violence in Bosnia and Croatia was regarded as occurring in 'European cities'. Bogdanovic's essay itself was widely translated and republished across Europe.[6] The 'Western' voice that Bogdanovic ventriquilized as horrified by the destruction of European values was not at all different from voices one could hear at the same time speaking about this destruction in a variety of European languages. The violence taking place in the former Yugoslavia was horrifying because it was taking place in *European cities*. This was expressed in London, Paris and Frankfurt, just as it was in Sarajevo, Mostar and Zagreb.

The term 'border city' describes a city functioning as a contact zone between communities differentiated by nationality, ethnicity, language, culture, or any other property. Such contact zones have been traditionally sited at or near the borders between nation-states or national territories. Vienna, perhaps the archetypal 19th-century European border city, was thus understood as a *Vorposten* *der Kultur* on the border between Europe's Austro-German nations and the uncivilized Slavic lands to the east. The continued narration of the damaged and destroyed cities of Bosnia and Croatia as European positioned them as contemporary cultural outposts, as occupying a space where European urban culture was violently conjoined to its supposedly non- or anti-European counterpart. In other words, descriptions of Bosnian and Croatian border cities represented attempts to define Europe's new borders after 1989, when the formerly clear-cut separation between 'West' and 'East' was suddenly removed, or appeared to be so.[7]

But the disintegration of Yugoslavia took place at the same time as the unification of Europe. And just at the moment when sentences declaring that 'Sarajevo is a European city' and 'Dubrovnik is a European city' echoed back and forth through the parliaments and television studios of Europe, the Treaty of Maastricht defined European citizenship in such a way as to exclude nationals from Bosnia and Croatia. The term 'European' thus functioned completely differently according to its cultural or political context: a cultural rhetoric of European inclusiveness was balanced against political legislation of European exclusiveness. The conjunction of this rhetoric and this legislation was, in the former Yugoslavia, a topography of European cities inhabited by non-Europeans, and, in the European Union, of European cities inhabited by both Europeans and non-Europeans: two types of disjunction, two types of borders, and two types of border cities.

In Europe after 1989, the term 'border city' has come to encompass two distinct urban formations: first, in the accepted sense of the term, the 'city at the border', as represented by the urban sites of violence in Bosnia and Croatia; but second, an emergent 'city as border', as represented by cities across the European Union. Both formations comprise conjunctions of borders and cities, but in different ways and towards different formulations of 'Europe'. The term 'Europeanization' has been used to describe the process of institutionalized European identity-formation driven by European unification.[8] In this essay, I shall explain the bifurcation in the status of the border city in order to describe a bifurcation in 'Europeanization', a split between an inclusive Europeanization expressed in cultural discourse about cities at European borders, and an exclusive Europeanization played out in the political legislation of borders within European cities.

Attention to this split illuminates not only the contemporary form of the city in Europe, but also the contemporary form of Europe itself. Writing at almost the same time as Bogdanovic – a time simultaneously marked by European unification and European violence – Jacques Derrida stated that the name, 'Europe' was undergoing an unprecedented transformation: 'To what concept, to what real individual, to what singular entity should this name be assigned today?' he asked. 'Who will draw up its borders?'[9] Border cities, in both their accepted and emergent forms, are among the key places where answers to such questions are being proposed, negotiated, legislated, and enforced.

Cites at borders: cultural Europeanization in the Balkans

As described most famously and influentially by Max Weber, the city has been the single privileged site of European self-identity. Not only is the city understood to represent that identity, but – to Weber and subsequently many others – the city was the very instrument by which Europe came into being.[10] A product of this genealogy of Europe is the conjunction of 'city' and 'civilization', as cited by Bogdanovic: the inevitable movement from the city to civility, civics, and all the values and traditions ascribed to and located within the city's society, economics, and culture. Counterbalancing this heritage, of course, is the structural split between 'civilization' and the non-urban, with the latter becoming synonymous with barbarism. To be urban is to be civilized, so the decisive matter in the recognition of civilization becomes the recognition of the city. Thus, a prominent issue negotiated in the voluminous discourses on the 'Islamic city', the 'socialist city', the 'colonial city' and other urban formations is the degree to which they are similar or dissimilar to the 'European city' and all else regarded as European.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a unifying Europe was confronted with the necessity of defining its relationship to the formerly separate states behind and alongside the Iron Curtain. This necessity became acute when Yugoslavia began to disintegrate and collapsed into war in 1991. Narrations of 'ethnic violence' taking place in the 'European cities' of Bosnia and Croatia may have appeared to engage Europe with spaces beyond European borders as they were then formulated – and these narratives were certainly regarded as such in Bosnia and Croatia. In Western Europe, however, the recognition of Europe's urban heritage in Bosnia and Croatia functioned quite differently; it was a specifically cultural discourse that blocked the recognition of Europe's possible political responsibilities in the former Yugoslavia.

Consider in this respect the words of the British Foreign Minister, Douglas Hurd, spoken to Parliament during the siege of Sarajevo:

> When, night after night, people see on television destruction and massacre in a European city, most of them do not expect us to send in troops, but they do expect us to take some sensible action, if we can, to bring that suffering to an end. I am not in favour of exaggerating what we can do, or of pretending that we are or can be a policeman. I am not speaking on behalf of the [EU] twelve or of the United Nations: I am merely saying that, where we can help to bring such suffering to an end, I am sure that it is the wish of the House and the country that we should do so.[11]

This is the seeming cosmopolitanism of cultural Europeanization, a discourse of affiliations across cultural borders. But this is also a cosmopolitanism that is by definition held apart from politics. In the words of Bruce Robbins, ‘the separation of culture from politics allows us to put ourselves in other people’s places without feeling like we have to do anything about it; cultural affiliations are by definition blocked from transmutation into political institutions, or perhaps even politics.’[12] There is, then, a necessary relation between Hurd’s citing of Sarajevo’s violence in a ‘European city’ and the following exclusions of any possible political implications of that citing on the part of any of the possible political actors.

Throughout the wars in Bosnia and Croatia, the most sustained involvement that institutionalized Europe had in the war zones was *cultural*: protesting and monitoring the destruction in and of the European city, establishing working groups, conventions, and policies on this destruction, and planning post-war reconstruction. This was ‘culture’ explicitly emptied of politics. One of the first formal decisions of the EU, for example, was undertaken by Ministers of Culture of member states to reject a proposal to name Sarajevo an official ‘European City of Culture’, between Antwerp and Lisbon in 1993–94. [13] ‘Culture is a luxury in times of war,’ a communiqué from the ministers pointed out, although the EU was also conducting an arms embargo against the former Yugoslavian states at the same time. In fact, the gap between rhetorical declarations of Sarajevo as a European City and the formal nomination of Sarajevo as European City of Culture was that between the cultural and the political, and one that was, for the EU, impossible to cross.

The European institution that assumed primary responsibility for the cultural losses suffered in Bosnia and Croatia was the Council of Europe’s Committee on Culture and Education. The Committee described the stakes of their work as follows:

> The wars in Croatia and Bosnia are a tragedy … for all Europe. They have led to a major cultural catastrophe for all the communities of the war zone – whether Croatian, Bosnian or Serb – and also for our European heritage, which will emerge from the war singularly amputated … The worst destruction is reserved for cities and villages – the heritage in which men (sic) live.[14]

As the Council of Europe’s subsequent *Recommendation on the Cultural Situation in The former Yugoslavia* stated, what was collapsing in the former Yugoslavia was ‘European civilization and values’, whose primary manifestation was architectural and urban and whose collapse was marked by the destruction of that manifestation.[15] Thus, Bosnian and Croatian cities were positioned at Europe’s border, at the nexus of European heritage and a different tradition emanating from the other side of that border. Europe was thus staged in terms of its traditional urban, urbane and urbanizing roles, and Europe’s outside – in many cases, an outside named ‘the Balkans’ – was staged in terms of its opposition to all of the above.[16] Europe's own history of urban destruction was pushed further into oblivion, the history of what Hans Magnus Enzensberger has termed 'Europe in ruins', the ruins of Europe's 'overwhelming act of self-destruction' during the Second World War.[17] And the concept of a Europe unified by nothing else than democracy, the rule of law, and multicultural tolerance was thereby reproduced.

Cities as borders: political Europeanization in the European Union

But Europe did act politically while cities at 'European borders' burned in Bosnia and Croatia. While it did not act politically in the spaces of that destruction, it acted in response to the destruction in its own political space, the space of the EU's member states. Within that space, European political borders became fundamentally reorganized. A key chronicler of this reorganization is the political theorist, Etienne Balibar. Balibar describes the nation-state border as over-determined, as 'sanctioned, reduplicated and relativized by other geopolitical divisions'.[18] But with European unification, Balibar points out, this border has been transformed along with the nation-state itself: functions and meanings previously located at this border are now migrating to other sites, and in particular to cities dispersed throughout the political space of the European Union.

In an essay, 'The Borders of Europe,' Balibar discusses a series of processes that have migrated from the edges of the European nation-state to a network of cities within the European Union: the management of populations awaiting entry to or exit from a state or negotiating their status in that state, whether as refugees or economic migrants; the control and diffusion of information transmitted by telecommunication; and the prosecution of modern warfare. In Balibar's words:

> The borders of new socio-political entities, in which an attempt is being made to preserve all the functions of the sovereignty of the state, are no longer situated at the outer limit of territories; they are dispersed a little everywhere, wherever the movement of information, people, and things is happening and is controlled – as in cosmopolitan cities, for example.[19]

Balibar's analysis suggests the emergence of a new configuration of border/city relations: not only are certain cities defined by their proximity to nation-state borders but, in the member-states of the European Union, all cities are being more or less defined by the location of border-functions within their precincts. The term 'border city', in other words, no longer only refers to the city *at* the border, but also to the city functioning *as* a border. Balibar, then, describes contemporary European political space in this way:

> Borders and the institutional practices corresponding to them have been transported into the middle of political space. They can no longer function as simple edges, external limits of democracy, which the mass of citizens see as a

> barrier protecting their rights and lives without ever really interfering with them. More and more, however, borders are creating problems in the heart of civic space where they generate conflicts, hopes and frustrations for all sorts of people, as well as inextricable administrative and ideological difficulties for states.[20]

Although the formation of the European city as a border arose with European unification, its development was soon exacerbated by the perceived problem of migration to Europe motivated by the wars in Bosnia and Croatia. The shift should already be clear: while Europe's cultural space might be expanded to include cities in Bosnia and Croatia, Europe's political space was something else, a space that was not to be expanded but defended. In other words, the political problem after 1989 was the conjunction of 'European citizenship' with the status of extra-European Union immigration, a conjunction that, Balibar writes, forced a general problematization of the notion of the border.[21]

The Treaty of Maastricht thus limited 'European citizenship' to citizens of member states, excluding all workers and their families from extra-EU states as well as refugees seeking asylum. A category of 'non-citizen residents of Europe' was forged, a category that constitutes, to Balibar 'an apartheid at the very moment when [Europe] proclaims progress in universalism'.[22] The subsequent instability and wars in the former Yugoslavia did not serve to lessen immigration controls and asylum requirements for Yugoslav citizens in EU member states, but actually further increased them. In 1992, the majority of Western European states imposed a visa requirement for Bosnian nationals in response to the rising exodus of refugees, as Maastricht permitted them to do.[23]

In the words of a 1993 Amnesty International report, there was 'a clear reluctance on the part of the EC and other governments to admit and grant protection to asylum-seekers from the former Yugoslavia arriving at their borders'.[24] Thus, having arrived in cities inside those borders, asylum-seekers were confronted with another set of borders separating European and non-European citizens. During the first half of the 1990s, then, while Europe insisted on the recognition of cities in Bosnia and Croatia as part of European cultural space, Europe also transformed its own cities into borders where the citizens of Bosnia, Croatia and other non-EU states were barred from European political space and from the rights and privileges that inclusion in this space conferred.

The borders of difference: Europeanization and the city

In the 1990s, as a 'Europe without borders' was concretized through cultural affiliations, European cities were being closed to Yugoslav immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Through *cultural* Europeanization, European cultural citizenship was extended to Bosnian and Croatian cities, while through *political* Europeanization, European political citizenship was withheld from people that occupied and fled from those cities. European cultural space was founded on a cosmopolitanism of aesthetic spectatorship, and European political space on a neo-liberal supranationalism of belonging. The cultural affiliations that Europe extended to the former Yugoslavia's border cities and continues to extend by various programmes and initiatives to border cities elsewhere in the 'East' thus mobilize culture as a resource to compensate for political resources that are themselves withheld.[25] Culture has thereby become, in George Yúdice's term, 'expedient', incapable of standing alone, necessarily engaged in projects of social betterment or economic development.[26]

To consider Europe's 'border cities' only as cities at national or supranational borders is to place the problem of Europeanization itself at a distance, at borders far from the European heartland. To consider European cities themselves as borders, however, is to recognize the problem of Europeanization everywhere in Europe. It is to recognize that, particularly with the onset of European unification, Europe's others are not distant and autonomous – the barbarians living across the borders of Europe, wherever those borders may be – but are in close proximity and in touch – the aliens, outsiders, and strangers living across borders in every European city.[27] It is to recognize that Europe's relations to these others is constitutive, inseparable from its self-avowed forms of identity.

Europeanization is typically framed via dichotomies or tensions between state and supra-state forms and interests, framings in which the city has no place. As conducted by the EU, Europeanization has no specifically urban component: there are no urban benchmarks that candidate states must meet and no urban policies for those states to conform with or implement. However, given the articulations of European identity through urban formations, Europeanization provokes an analytical focus on the city, on the concrete, localized and at times contradictory sites where Europeanization takes place. There is an urban geography of Europeanization, and it includes not only cities at the borders of Europe and, thus, the borders that are marked as such, but also cities throughout Europe and the borders that are usually perceived only by those who cannot traverse them.

References and Notes

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12. B. Robbins (1999) *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress* (New York: New York University Press), p. 5.
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