

Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

Claiming Ownership in Postwar Croatia

The Dynamics of Property Relations and Ethnic Conflict in the Knin Region

Carolin Leutloff-Grandits



LIT

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This book examines the dynamics of property relations and ethnic conflict in the Knin region in postwar Croatia. The ethnically mixed region of Knin was the scene of war between Croats and Serbs, from 1991 to 1995. During the war, Serbs declared the region to be Serb national territory, expelled the Croatian neighbours, and destroyed or occupied their homes. When the Croatian army regained the territory in 1995, this prompted the flight of almost the entire Serbian population from the region. In the aftermath of the military operations, new laws were adopted which legalised the occupation of Serbian houses by incoming Croatian settlers. Many other Serbian houses were destroyed.

Building on theories of legal anthropology, property relations, and ethnic conflict, this book examines the enforcement of the new property legislation and links this to inter-group relations in the locality of Knin after the war. By differentiating various Croatian and Serbian returnees as well as new Croatian settlers, and focusing on their everyday experiences and concerns, the study provides insights into the complexity of the problematic return of the Serbs to Croatia and the difficult position of new Croatian settlers and many local Croats. It reveals the logic of persistent nationalism, but also the gradual reconciliation of the former warring parties after the war.

Throughout the book, inter-group relations at the local level as well as strategies concerning housing and land are carefully analysed. New Croatian settlers, who had been uprooted by the war and torn from their own local community, declared themselves in favour of a more 'national' interpretation of property rights than the local people, for whom the locally based values and structures formed an alternative frame of reference. Furthermore, this study shows that there is an interplay between national, social as well as civil property rights, and the strength of nationalist parties.

The book is structured as follows: The first chapter introduces the central research focus, the theoretical implications and the methods used in the study. Chapters 2 and 3 provide the historical background to postwar property and community relations in the Knin region, while chapter 4 analyses the changing property relations in the region after the cessation of war in 1995. Chapter 5 deals with the slow and difficult process of house repossession by their Serbian owners, and Chapter 6 extends this by analysing inter-group relations with respect to land access and land use. Chapters 7 and 8 provide further background to the analyses of the complex power-play in postwar Croatia by looking at the role of both the Catholic and Orthodox churches and their local festivals, as well as local election campaigning by the various political parties.



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Cover Photo: Croatian soldiers showing the Croatian coat of arms on a Catholic Church festival in a mainly Serbian inhabited village near Knin (summer 2000) (Photo: Carolin Leutloff-Grandits).

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Preface

It is not easy to combine in a single volume a serious engagement with several branches of anthropological theory and a level of applied analysis more typical of a field manual for NGO specialists in conflict analysis. Carolin Leutloff-Grandits links these goals in the course of a rich ethnographic analysis of Knin and its rural hinterland. This is a region which did not experience tragedy at quite the same level as some other regions of the former Yugoslavia but which in many ways exemplifies the everyday banality of inter-ethnic violence and its consequences.

Those unfamiliar with the recent history of the western Balkans may be surprised to discover that Serbs could be victims as well as villains. Leutloff-Grandits' original concern was with the Serbs who were forced to leave their homes in and around Knin, but her major insights derive from what she found during her fieldwork among the Croats who dominate today. Solidarity along national lines is by no means the sole basis of group formation, since local Croats have increasingly come into tension with Croatian refugees from other parts of the former federation. Yet the power of nationalist discourses and exclusionary practices remains immense. She shows that the programme adopted in 1998 ostensibly to promote the return of the Serbs in reality merely established a 'procedure' that the authorities had no intention of implementing. Adapting the concept of *Vermachtung* from her former teacher Georg Elwert, Leutloff-Grandits argues that such initiatives should rather be seen as a sop to the international community; they are pernicious in the sense that such ruses undermine the entire system of law and order.

The case study is developed with careful attention to both presocialist and socialist history at local (village), municipal, regional and national levels. Particular attention is paid to patriarchal forms of landholding and to the 'nationalisation of village life' that began in the nineteenth century and culminated in the inter-ethnic violence of the 1940s. This background is important for the later argument about the historical embeddedness of people's attitudes to their most valuable goods. In the socialist period houses became the more significant object of property – both privately owned houses, which dominate in the village, and the 'socially owned' flats to which urban workers were entitled. Although there were many interethnic marriages in this period, after 1990 groups formed along national lines to fight over territory. National symbols and rhetoric were revived and loyalties to the respective national churches intensified.

Within a few years an apparently clear ethnic divide was complicated by the arrival of large numbers of Croatian settlers, sometimes referred to by local people as 'Bosnians'. Leutloff-Grandits draws on ethnographic materials to allow the reader to understand the (often ambivalent) subjectivities in all groups. The interests of Croatian settlers have apparently been buttressed by Croatian nationalist politics, yet Leutloff-Grandits maintains a balanced coverage and shows that many of these newcomers remained among the most marginalized, entirely dependent on the authorities for the basic conditions of existence. To frame her materials theoretically she draws not only upon the Elwert's theories concerning violence and conflict and my own studies of property but also, very appropriately, on the legal anthropological model developed by Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann and on the economic anthropology of Stephen Gudeman.

The same social groups have been competing for land as well as houses, but a general lack of confidence in agriculture's commercial potential seems to reduce the significance of group affiliation in this sector. As in the case of houses, Serb prior property rights over land are generally respected by the local Croats, who show a tendency to cooperate across the ethnic boundary rather than with their co-ethnic settlers from Bosnia. Sentiments of homeland are regularly evoked and mobilized in settings such as domestic *slava* celebrations. Leutloff-Grandits pays particular attention to the active role of religion. Festivals and rituals are important in cementing cohesion and, especially in the Catholic case, ideologies of national belonging to a territory that is exclusively 'ours'.

Leutloff-Grandits offers sobering analysis of what formal organizations have achieved in the region; the international community has been largely ineffectual in promoting reconciliation on local level despite the good results concerning legal reforms, though one American NGO has played a more positive role. The entirety of Chapter Eight can be viewed as an exercise in political anthropology, occasioned by the fact that local elections were held towards the end of her fieldwork in 2001.

The author concludes by noting that, as violence recedes, more cooperation is taking place across the ethnic boundary, notably between those who have for centuries been neighbours in this region. In consequence, 'property rights other than those defined by national categories received increased significance' (p. 325). This is good news indeed: if warfare can be considered the ultimate institutional rupture, provoking endless incivility and *Vermachtung*, this work demonstrates that it is possible to re-establish some basic norms within a few years of the catastrophe, even when this means favouring the ethnic 'other' at the expense of one's 'own people'. This

aspect of property recognition suggests, then, that the prospects for civility in this part of Europe are improving. Unfortunately this note of optimism is not sustained in the Epilogue, which brings the story up to the end of 2004. A change of government and further deceptive procedural gestures to smooth the path to EU accession will do little to increase the likelihood that significant numbers of Serbs will return to this region.

Carolin Leutloff-Grandits undertook this work with a high degree of individual responsibility. Her project was unique in the entire set of projects on property which we have carried out at the Max Planck Institute since 2000, which focused mostly on land and the consequences of 'decollectivization' in postsocialist countries. She was the only team member who took houses as her main property object, and was therefore able to remind us constantly that houses present different problems to land, and that socially owned housing evokes different attitudes to private houses. Carolin was also the only group member whose fieldwork took place in locations where rival groups had been fighting each other ferociously just a few years earlier. Inevitably, these circumstances have colored her work throughout: all the more important issues of property in this setting were simultaneously issues of national identity and territoriality.

Carolin Leutloff-Grandits' work deserves to be widely read by anthropologists and other scholars engaging with topics pertaining to property, ethnicity, law, and conflict. It should be obligatory reading for external advisers concerned with problems of conflict management in the western Balkans.

Chris Hann

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I am deeply grateful to Chris Hann for his supervision of my PhD thesis. Thanks to his encouragement, his close reading of various drafts and his helpful comments, I did not lose confidence and could sharpen my argument. Georg Elwert, who was originally the second supervisor of my PhD thesis, as well as Richard Rottenburg, who took over this position after Elwert's tragic death, gave me fruitful insights on their views on the topic and drew my attention to wider theoretical considerations.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to Joel Halpern, who read large parts of the manuscript, made stimulating suggestions and did the first language editing. Special thanks also go to Andrea Behrends, Konrad Clewing, Julia Eckert, Kristof Goztonyi, Deema Kaneff, Michaela Pelican, Frances Pine, Sabrina Ramet and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann, who critically read various chapters and/or articles emerging from them. Karl Kaser provided me with a workplace and the intellectual atmosphere I needed to finish this book at the Centre for South-East European History at the University of Graz.

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List of Abbrevations

APN (Agencija za Promet Nekretnine) Agency for Mediation in Transactions with Specified Real Estate
ECHO European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office
FLAG Firm Level Assistance Group
FNRJ (Federalna Narodna Republika Jugoslavije) Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia
HDZ (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica) Croatian Democratic Union
HNS (Hrvatska Narodna Stranka) Croatian National Party
HSLS (Hrvatska Socijalna Liberalna Stranka) Croatian Social Liberal Party
HSP (Hrvatska Stranka Prava) Croatian Party of Rights
HSS (Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka) Croatian Peasant Party
HVIDRA (Hrvatska Vojini Invalidi Domovinskog Rata) Association of Invalids of the Croatian 'Homeland War'
ICG International Crisis Group
ECMM European Commission Monitoring Mission
ICTY International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IRC International Red Cross
JNA (Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija) Yugoslav People's Army
KPJ (Kommunistička Partija Jugoslavije) Communist Party of Yugoslavia (until 1952)
NDH (Nezavisna Država Hrvatske) Independent State of Croatia
ODPR Office of Displaced Persons and Refugees of the Republic of Croatia
OHR Office of the High Representative of the United Nations in Bosnia-Herzegovina
OSCE Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SDP (Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske) Social Democratic Party of Croatia
SDSS (Samostalna Demokratska Srpska Stranka) Independent Democratic Serbian Party
SFRJ (Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija) Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SKJ (Savez Komunista Jugoslavije) Union of the Communists of Yugoslavia (since1952)
SNS (Srpska Narodna Stranka) Serbian People's Party
TVIK (Tvornica Vijaka Knin) Rail Factory of Knin
UNHCR United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees
UNPROFOR United Nation Protection Force (in Croatia and Bosnia)

UNTAES United Nations Transitional Authority in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirium

Glossary of Croatian Terms

badnjak. yule log, also used to denote Christmas Eve
balote. Dalmatian game similar to bowls
bevanda. drink of wine mixed with water
Blijesak. Flash – name of the Croatian military offensive in May 1995
blago. wealth (also used for livestock)
božić. Christmas
Bratstvo i Jedinstvo. brotherhood and unity (ideology of Tito's Yugoslavia)
bratstvo. brotherhood/lineage; also hamlet
Četnik. Serbian nationalist fighter, especially active in World War II; supporter of a Greater Serbia
Comintern. Communist International
dom kulture. cultural centre in a village/town founded during the socialist era
domaćin. head of the household
domaćica. housewife; lady of the house
domicilni Hrvati / Hrvati, koji su se vratili / starosjedioci Hrvati. local Croats
domicilni Srbi / Srbi koji su se vratili / starosjedioci Srbi. local Serbs
Domobrani. Army of the 'Independent State of Croatia' (NDH) during World War II
Domovinski rat. 'homeland war', Croatian expression for the war in Croatia lasting from 1991-5.
doseljenici. settlers
društveno vlasništvo. socially owned property
državna imovina. state-owned property
etničko čišćenje. ethnic cleansing
gazda. prosperous or respected farmer/landowner or houseowner
glava(r) kuće. head of the household
glavar sela. head of the village
građani. city population; urbanites
Hrvat. Croat
janjetina. roasted lamb
kmetovi. in the Knin region previously used for families who were paid to work on other people's land
kolon. person who had use rights to land based on a private agreement (in the Venetian Republic)
kolonat. property system in the Venetian Republic
krsna slava. celebration of the house patron saint in Orthodox families
kumstvo. godparenthood

matične knjige. church registers with vital records (concerning birth, marriage and death)
mesni odbor. village council
na svojem. on their own property (used to express emotional relationships with land and houses in private/family ownership)
nacionalizacija. nationalisation of land or property
odojak. roasted sucking pig
ognjište. hearth, used to symbolise belonging. Often used in the 1990s with reference to 'home' and 'homeland'.
Oluja. Storm – name of the Croatian military offensive of August 1995
općinski savez. municipal council
oranica. arable land
Partisani. partisans under the leadership of Josip Bros Tito in World War II
podstanar. subtenant
poglavarstvo. socialist community council
poljoprivredna zadruga. agricultural cooperative
privremeno rešenje. temporary decision (use permit for housing)
pršut. smoked ham
pura. maize porridge
radna samouprava. workers' self-management
radni staž. span of employment
raki(ja). schnapps
samodoprinos. certain percentage of the monthly income paid into a fund by workers under socialism
seljačka radna zadruga. agricultural cooperative
seljak. peasant; villager
seoska ronda. village council in Venetian times
slava. Serb Orthodox festival celebrated in various forms
Sveti Duhovi. Pentecost
težak. agricultural labourer; poor peasant
Udruga Doseljenika. settler organisation in the region of Knin after the 1990s war
Ustaša. Croatian fascist elite as well as a separate military organisation in the 'Independent State of Croatia' (NDH) during World War II
vladika. Serb Orthodox bishop
zadruga. older ethnographic term for large family households
zajednica. local term for large family households in the region of Knin
zauzeto. occupied

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Property and ethnic conflict: background to the research issues

Postsocialism for Croatia meant independence from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – but this came at a high price. An inter-ethnic war broke out between Serbs and Croats in 1991 and lasted for four years. The region and town of Knin formed one of the centres of this conflict. Using this region as a case study, this book examines the way in which property relations were transformed by this violent ethnic conflict and also the extent to which the postsocialist transformation was determined by values and practices which had been established in pre-socialist as well as in socialist times.

In pre-socialist Yugoslavia, land was central to economic activity and to social identity in local society and was owned mainly by male family members. From 1945 to 1991, when Croatia formed part of the Federal Republic of Socialist Yugoslavia, property relations were shaped by socialist policies. However, unlike other parts of socialist Eastern Europe, the republics of the former Yugoslavia retained a pattern of widespread private ownership of land and property. The collectivisation of land was initiated but then abandoned in the early 1950s (as also occurred in socialist Poland), and the category of 'socially owned property' (*društveno vlasništvo*) existed alongside private and state-owned property. This category was in many ways unique to socialist Yugoslavia and tightly interwoven with the right to self-management (*samouprava*) of firms and factories (Uvalic 1992). Socially owned property was very important to such firms and factories: their urban housing apartments, for example, were occupied by their workers and had a similar status to those owned privately. The right to housing was one of the social entitlements formulated by the socialist state to which all working people were entitled. In rural areas, however, socially owned housing property was rather marginal. Most of the housing was not socially owned

but privately owned despite the centrally held ideology of socially owned property (Turner 1992: 2–3).

During the conflict-driven political transformation of Croatia in the 1990s, only two forms of property were retained: private and state property. The category of socially owned property was removed. Former socially owned property was placed under state administration and later privatised. Other forms of social entitlements, such as free access to medical treatment for all citizens, were also withdrawn. As in other former socialist countries, the changes in property relations had far-reaching social effects (Hann 2001). At the same time, massive social changes were also caused by the war in Croatia between Croats and Serbs, which led to the occupation and destruction of property belonging to 'other' ethno-national groups and the strategy of 'ethnic cleansing' (*etničko čišćenje*) across wide areas of the former Yugoslavia. In Croatia, which gained independence from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991, this strategy was supported politically by the Croatian nationalist government of Franjo Tuđman as well as by the Serbian nationalist government of the wartime Republic of Serbian Krajina in 1991 under the influence of the then Serbian president, Slobodan Milošević.

The region of Knin, the focus of this book, had a mixed Serb and Croat population before the war in the 1990s. Unlike large parts of Croatia, the Serbian population here was in the majority, and when Croatia pushed for independence in 1990 the extremist Serbs in the Knin region stirred up a revolt against the newly elected nationalist Croatian government. In 1991, with increasing help from the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), directed by the political leadership in Belgrade, they established the Republic of Serbian Krajina in those regions of Croatia which had a mixed Serbian and Croatian population. Although this 'republic' was never internationally recognised, the town of Knin became its capital and its territory stretched along the border with Bosnia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from the Dalmatian hinterland in the west to the Danube in the east. It comprised the Knin region, Lika, Banija, Kordun and Eastern and Western Slavonia. During the 1991–5 war, Serbian forces and private individuals violently expelled the Croatian population from the Serbian-held territory and looted and destroyed most of the property belonging to the Croats. At the same time, many Serbs elsewhere in Croatia, where they were in a minority, chose to emigrate or were forced to flee, leaving their houses to be destroyed or occupied. Many of them found shelter either in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia or the Republic of Serbian Krajina where they occupied Croat-owned houses. This resulted in largely 'ethnically clean' territories on both sides of the border.



Map 1.1. Croatia and the Serb-occupied territories ('Republic of Serbian Krajina') 1991-1995.

In 1995, the situation changed drastically when the Croatian army regained the Serbian-held territory in two military operations called *Blijesak* ('Flash') and *Oluja* ('Storm'). The military offensives prompted the flight of almost the entire population of the so-called Serbian Krajina to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Serbian Republic in Bosnia. While many Serbian houses in rural areas were destroyed in the aftermath of these operations, those in urban areas tended to be spared and were later occupied by

incoming Croatian settlers. Many of the settlers were refugees from Bosnia, whose houses had been destroyed or occupied, or Croats from other parts of Croatia who were in need of shelter. This new pattern of settlement was encouraged by new laws that legalised the occupation of Serbian property after Serbs had fled the area.

It soon became clear that the occupation of Serbian housing in regions reclaimed by the Croatian army would make the return of Serbs very difficult. However, the international community (especially the European Union) pressured the Croatian government to remove any obstacles that would prevent the return of the Serbian population to Croatia. In the eyes of the international community, the return of the Serbs became a touchstone for the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement and a measure of Croatia's commitment to the European Union. Based on this international pressure, the Croatian government adopted a return programme in 1998 which was mainly directed at Croatian Serbs, and which promoted procedures for the repossession of property. Still, the return of Serb refugees got under way very slowly in 1998 and those refugees that did manage to return were effectively restricted to rural areas since the houses in Knin, as in other towns of the former war region, were already occupied and repossession was almost impossible. In 2000, Croatian settlers occupying Serbian housing units made up the large majority in Knin, outnumbering local Croatian as well as Serbian returnees. Matters did not change much when, after ten years' rule, the nationalist Croatian government (comprising the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) headed by Franjo Tuđman) was toppled from power. It was replaced by a coalition of former opposition parties led by the former communist Social Democratic Party of Croatia (SDP). Little changed, and the rural villages, which were less attractive to Croatian settlers, were again mainly inhabited by Serbs.

My decision to base my study of property relations and ethnic conflict in the former Croatian war zone, and more especially in the region of Knin, was influenced by some personal considerations. In 1996 and 1997, I had spent a few months in Belgrade carrying out research for my master's thesis in social anthropology. There I concentrated on the survival strategies and shifting identities of Serbian refugees from the wartime Republic of Serbian Krajina, who had left the area in 1995 following the Croatian military offensives. In Belgrade I realised that the housing and land questions were fundamental to the return of the refugees. Housing and land were also highly emotional topics since they were connected to memories of home and peace, as well as of expulsion and flight. Listening to the sad and very touching stories about experiences in the home communities of the refugees, I became very interested in visiting these places myself.

I came to Knin for the first time on a short trip in the spring of 1997, visiting the local office of the UNHCR. Along the main traffic route between Zagreb, the Croatian capital, and the port of Split on the Dalmatian coast, which leads through the former war zone, the landscape appeared to be empty of habitation for most of the way. It was an area essentially without industry and, because of the poor karst soils, unsuitable for commercial agriculture. There were only a few hamlets of ruined houses, which looked as if they were perched in the middle of nowhere. Still, there were some small towns along the route that did not seem to have been heavily damaged, such as Korenica, Udbina, Gračac, and finally, the town of Knin.

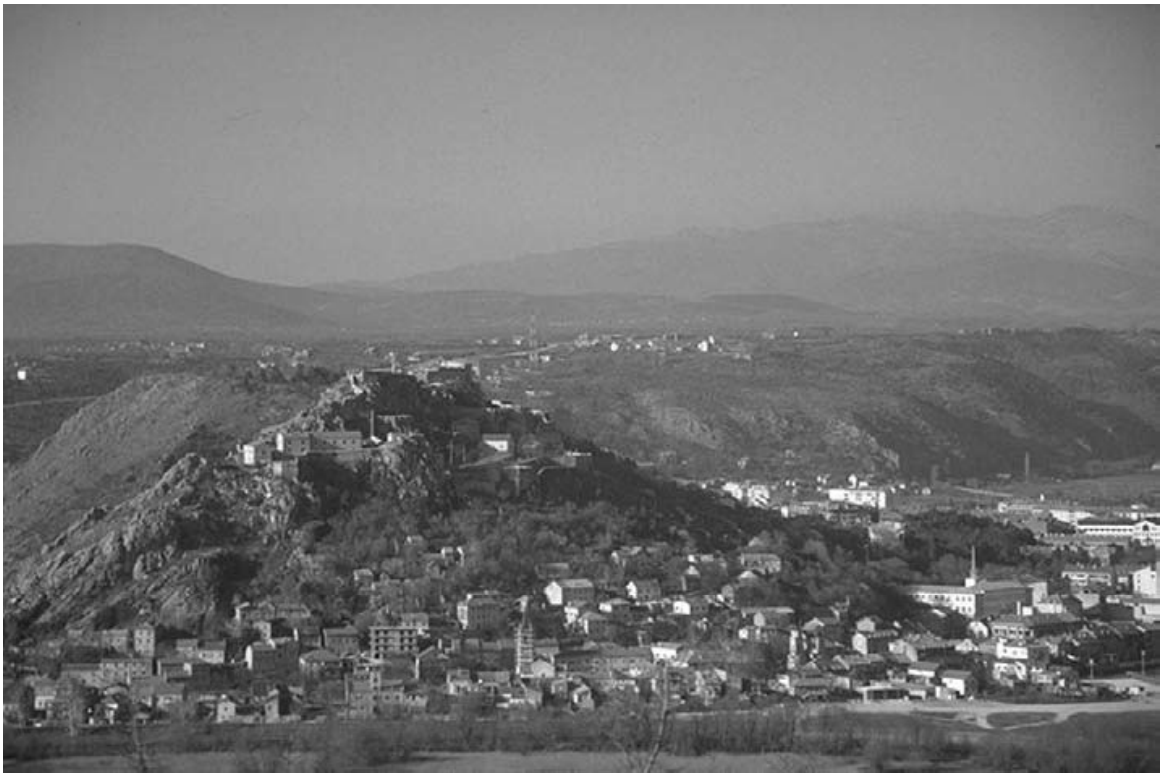


Plate 1. Panorama of the centre of Knin and the medieval castle (winter 2000).

Coming from Zagreb, my first view of Knin was quite impressive. After a glimpse of the ruins of its medieval castle, with the Croatian flag flying above it, the town came into view, embedded in a valley encircled by mountains and hills. But as we snaked our way down the valley, the town revealed itself to be disappointingly unspectacular. I had expected to find indications of the town's fame as (until recently) the capital of the Serb-declared Republic of Serbian Krajina, and yet it looked far too small for that. Furthermore, refugees from Knin in Belgrade had told me vividly about the beauty of the city. In 1997, Knin could offer little aesthetic comfort to the eyes of an outsider.

My second encounter with Knin was in the autumn of 1998. As an OSCE election supervisor for the Out of Country Voting programme in Croatia, I had specifically asked to be based in Knin to monitor the voting there. This programme sought to ensure that the 70,000 refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina were able to cast their ballot in the September 1998 general elections in Bosnia. At that time, more than 2,000 inhabitants of Knin, all of them Croats from Bosnia who had settled in Knin after the 1990s war and who still had Bosnian passports (most often in addition to Croatian ones), were eligible to vote in their home municipalities in Bosnia.

However, my interest in the situation in Knin was not shared by the other election observers (who would have preferred to be based somewhere along the coast), nor by my driver and translator, a young and stylish Croat from Zagreb. When he heard that it was not simply misfortune that had landed us in Knin but a deliberate request on my part to be placed there, he was quite angry, not understanding why I had wanted to go to a town which in his view was the worst city in the whole of Croatia. He claimed to have relatives all over the country where we could have stayed for free, except in Knin, where he knew no-one. This meant he had to spend some of the money he earned on accommodation. For me, however, these few days in Knin were extremely informative and made me aware of the different perspectives not only of the Serbs and Croats from Knin – the two ethnic groups who had been at war with each other – but also of the Bosnian Croats in Knin and the Croats outside Knin.

During my preparation for fieldwork at the Max-Planck Institute in early 2000, I decided to study the perceptions and experiences of Serbs and Croats, locals and settlers alike. I wanted to acquire different horizons of understanding instead of reducing my scope to a single 'ethnic' or 'national' group, as is the tendency in many studies of ethnic conflict. The investigation of different perspectives would enable the creation of a multidimensional picture of society, which is especially important in a situation of conflict where the points of view of the different population groups can be very divergent (Elwert 2002).

My research therefore elaborates on the different functions and meanings of property and focuses on the values, claims and practices concerning the property of the various groups of people in the locality of Knin. As access to property is very much connected to domination, hegemony and the contestation of the legal order (Benda-Beckmann 2003: 1), I have sought to consider property in its embeddedness in political, economic and social structures and to investigate who has the power to decide property conflicts, and by what means. Based on these considerations,

my research into property and ethnic conflict in postwar Croatia discusses the following three thematic fields:

- The history of property and ethnic relations:

What kind of relations did people in Knin have to their houses and land? What meanings did property have for them? In what way was a house or piece of land a marker of national and/or local identity? How did these relations, meanings and values change over time, in the longue durée and in the violent transformation from socialism to the postsocialist and postwar period?

- Property conflicts over rights and legitimisation:

How were changing property relations connected to transformations of the regime and ideology, i.e. the change from socialism to a democratic and neo-liberal – but primarily nationalist and war-affected – society? How was new property policy legitimised? In which ways did violence and war function as a form of legitimisation?

- Property and ethnic conflict as a conflict of governance:

How were laws concerning the return and repossession of property implemented and through which kind of institutions and actors? Who profited from their implementation and who lost out? Did a disempowerment ('Vermachtung'; Elwert 1999a: 10) of property rights take place, so that clientelistic structures dominated over the rule of law? How far have international organisations influenced property and ethnic relations?

1.2 Frameworks for comparison

As already indicated, the war-related property conflicts in the region of Knin and in other parts of Croatia cannot be treated as a single phenomenon. Instead, it is necessary to understand that the conflicts in Knin were closely connected to the progress of war, to ethnic cleansing and to related property conflicts not only in other parts of Croatia but also in the other republics of the former Yugoslavia, primarily Bosnia, but also Serbia and Kosovo (see, for example, Duijzings 2000; Rose et al. 2000; Čapo-Žmegač 2001). The war-related property conflicts that occurred in one region of the former Yugoslavia had a domino effect and were partly responsible for property conflicts in other regions, though not necessarily with the same political and national coordinates. In most cases, the victims and perpetrators in the war cannot be clearly divided. When 'Serbs' appear mainly as 'victims' of war and war-related property conflicts in Knin from 1995, and 'Croats' appear mostly as 'victors' in war and as 'occupiers' of Serbian property, it must be recognised that Serbian forces had pushed out the Croats in the war of 1991–5. Many Croatian Serbs who had to flee their homes in Knin in 1995 and

whose houses were destroyed or occupied in the aftermath would have been involved in the expulsion of Croats from the Serbian-held territories and in the destruction and looting of Croatian-owned houses earlier in the war. Furthermore, several hundred Croatian Serbs who fled their homes in Knin in 1995 settled in the homes of Croatian and Bosnian Muslims in the region of Banja Luka in the Serbian Republic of Bosnia, or in Croatian houses in Vojvodina. In some cases, they violently expelled the Croatian inhabitants. At the same time, some Croats from Banja Luka settled in the region of Knin or in other formerly Serbian-held regions and occupied Serbian houses or apartments after the war.

The UNHCR counted over 600,000 displaced people in Croatia at the end of 1991, of whom the majority were ethnic Croats. According to OSCE estimations, in Croatia approximately 220,000 Croats were still displaced from their homes by the end of war in 1995,[1] while at the same time over 300,000 Serbs had been internally displaced or had fled the country (International Crisis Group 2002: 3). In Bosnia, the number of displaced persons and refugees was even higher: about 40% of the pre-war inhabitants of 4.4 million were made refugees or were displaced. Of these, around 1.2 million were granted asylum in other countries of the former Yugoslavia, Western Europe and elsewhere. A further 1 million individuals, representing roughly a third of the remaining population, were displaced from their homes but remained within the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Rose et al. 1999).

By investigating the dynamics of property relations and ethnic conflict in the Knin region, I therefore take a diachronic view. Before focusing on the postwar situation, two chapters provide a historical perspective. I furthermore try to avoid dealing with 'the Serbs' or 'the Croats' as homogeneous national groups. Individual differences inside the Serbian and the Croatian national groups, as well as alternative processes of group formation will be highlighted.

My investigation of changing property relations and ethnic conflict in Knin also broadened my interest in ethnically defined property conflicts in other European and non-European countries. The conflicts in Cyprus and Lebanon caught my attention most keenly, as I realised that they showed many similarities with the case of Knin despite also many differences, including the fact that these countries had not had a socialist phase of government. In Cyprus, massive population transfers took place from mid-

[1] See an article published on the website of the OSCE Mission to Croatia headquarters: 'Internally displaced persons, refugees and return', at http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/idpSurvey.nsf/wViewCountries/6F47AED7AB34CF53C1256A7A004DF0B1/$file/OSCEMay+2001.pdf.

1974, when the Turkish army invaded the island and occupied about one-third of its territory. The military invasion was followed by huge flows of refugees, which transformed about 40% of Cyprus's inhabitants into internally displaced people, and by the occupation of the property of the expelled population by members of the other national group. Greek Cypriots left the Turkish-held regions and their property was occupied by Turkish settlers, mainly originating from Anatolia. Since the 1970s, the issue of the restitution of property has been disputed. Only recently (in 2003), was the border between the Turkish and the Greek parts of Cyprus re-opened. But an attempt by the United Nations to find a solution to the ethnically motivated property conflicts failed in 2004. The anthropologists Peter Loizos (1981) and Julie Scott (1998) have dealt with the changing relations of refugees and settlers to the houses they lost or occupied, as well as with the complicated legal procedures and divergent claims for compensation or repossession. Their findings stimulated my research and its implicit basic questions.

The 17-year civil war in Lebanon (1972–89) can be seen as another case of a violent conflict in which property disputes became a fundamental component of everyday life in war and postwar times. During the war, nearly 1 million people were internally displaced based on their religion (Christian or Muslim), which resulted in numerous instances of illegal occupation and squatting. Even ten years after the Taif Agreement ended the war in 1989 there were still around 450,000 internally displaced people in Lebanon – almost 14% of the entire population. According to the scholars Assaf and El-Fil, 'although huge funds have been allocated to resettling the displaced, remedies have generally been ineffective and unjust' (2000: 31). Only about 20% of the refugees have been able to return to their villages and many people have been left without proper compensation for the loss of their homes and property. Anthropological studies by Anja Peleikis (2001, 2005) discuss the treatment of war and the home, as well as the recreation of community in postwar Lebanon. Her analysis inspired my view of the situation in Knin. My understanding of the conflict in Lebanon was deepened when I visited the country myself in spring 2002.

Looking into my personal family history, narratives of flight and a lost home accompanied my childhood and youth as well. My father's parents lost their home close to Breslau (Wrocław) in 1945 and fled the advancing Soviet army. The personal story of my grandparents is only one of several million people – not only Germans, but also Poles, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Czechs, Finns, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians, Belo-Russians and many others – who had to leave their homes and lost their property, often their health and sometimes even their lives in the aftermath of World War II (see Ther 1998). In some cases, unresolved property claims and the emotional

longing for a lost home still have a negative impact on the relations between the persons and states affected. Many other examples of the linkages between changing property relations and ethnic conflict and war could be easily found, like the conflict between Israel and Palestine over Gaza and other occupied territories, as well as between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.[2] Given such diverse conflict situations, and the perspectives of their different actors, research on the dynamics of property relations and ethnic conflict may have great relevance to the processes of reconciliation and reconstruction following war that has been triggered along ethnic or nationalist lines.

However, the situation in postwar Knin should not only be compared with countries that have seen violent conflict or war, but also with other postsocialist countries. As argued by Hann (2002), Humphrey (2002) and Verdery (2002), after the collapse of 'real existing socialism', features relating to socialism were not simply replaced or emptied 'overnight' in the countries concerned but were moulded into different forms of social organisation. It can be assumed that despite the changes that Croatia and other former socialist countries went through in the 1990s, people looked back on and were somehow influenced by the socialist property regime in which they had lived over the past 45 years or so. Furthermore, large parts of the population in former socialist states presumably still perceived some aspects of their 'socialist' lives as positive. It therefore makes sense to compare the transformation of property relations in postsocialist Croatia with the transformation in other postsocialist countries and to discuss the ways in which socialism was used as a frame of reference for the social actions in postsocialist times, despite the fact that transition in many of these countries was not accompanied by large-scale violence but accomplished by peaceful means.

1.3 Theoretical concepts

1.3.1 Anthropological approaches to property

Throughout this work, I have taken a functional approach to property whereby property relations can have a variety of social, economic, political, religious and (not least) national functions. Property relations in everyday life tend to be multifunctional, i.e. they can have different functions at the same time. This approach allows the researcher to look beyond the economic

[2] For a comparison of the dynamics of property relations and war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, in Croatia and in Tchad, see Yalçin-Heckmann, Behrends & Leutloff-Grandits 2003.

function of property – an aspect that is overemphasised by many political as well as economic scholars – to the various social functions that may impact, for example, on social or national identity and social security. With regard to postwar Croatia, the national function of property as 'national homeland' can therefore be highlighted without seeing it solely in economic terms.

The different functions of property can best be understood when property is seen not as a relation between persons and things, but as a social relation between persons in respect of material or immaterial objects, which is embedded in a political and social system (Hann 2000a: 1). This approach was first put forward by the comparative lawyer Henry Maine in the second half of the nineteenth century. Maine (1861) showed that many different forms of property rights existed, which could even be applied to one and the same material or immaterial object (Hann 1996: 8). These property rights might be loosely categorised as use rights (the rights to use an object for specific purposes: in the case of land, for example, for grazing, subsistence agriculture and so forth, or in the case of forests for hunting, harvesting timber, or collecting mushrooms and pasturing livestock (Cellarius 2003: 205)), control-rights (the rights to make decisions on how the property object is to be used) and transfer-rights (the rights to determine the transfer or allocation of property objects).

Seen from this perspective, property relations have been described as a 'bundle of rights' (Hann 1996: 8). Ownership is seen as a full bundle of rights including use rights, control rights and transfer rights (Hann 1999: 196). However, it is important to note that even these full ownership rights are never absolute but refer to a legal system and are restricted by obligations and duties. Sometimes the legal owner is not allowed to fully use the property due to special legal provisions, but has to leave the use rights to other legal persons, or sometimes he is not allowed to transfer property rights (Hann 2003: 23, 24). Generally, rights to property are manifold and may be shared between different property right holders.

The notion of property as a social relation between persons embedded in a social and political system was taken up by the substantivist school represented by social scientists such as Karl Polanyi (1944) and Max Gluckman (1965). Gluckman is often associated with the British functionalist school in that he related property to conceptions of power and control mechanisms as well as to systems of social orientation. From the 1990s, when the research of property relations became (once again) a central concept of anthropological research, this approach to property remained fundamental (cf. Hann 1996; Elwert 1999b: 1143). Anthropologists differentiated this approach from the western and liberal paradigm, which assumes that the judiciary protects property rights and is independent of the

social, economic and the political sphere (Hunt 1998; Benda-Beckmann 1999: 33; Hann 1999: 197).

In his discussion of the concept of property relations, Hann (1999: 198) emphasises that as well as the social relationship between property holders and others concerning the material or immaterial property objects, it is important to understand the relations which people have with the property object itself. This relation might be called 'culturally' specific, as it develops over a long period of time and is expressed in values and norms, as well as in the emotions by which people are guided. As Hann (1999: 198) states, 'these relationships are vital to the constitution of their personhood and their collective identities'.

Let me at this point turn to the question of defining the nature of the specific elements of property relations. How can we define the holders of property relations, the objects of property relationships, the relationship between holders and others concerning the objects, and the temporal dimension in which property relationships are expressed?

The holders of property relations are first of all individuals, but also social groups or organisations. In the postwar regime in Croatia, it is obvious that national groups comprise an important category as property holders. However, it makes sense to look at other attributes of group membership as well, such as religion, age, kinship, profession, gender, social class and so on. While national groups build an external unity towards other national groups, they may show different forms of internal differentiation based on the above-mentioned characteristics. It is therefore necessary to ask what kind of property use-rights, control-rights and transfer-rights are held not only by the different groups but also by the individuals inside those groups. Through the internal differentiation of access to and use of property inside the groups, sub-groups may be formed which might build cross-cutting ties to (the) other group(s) as well (cf. Gluckmann 1966; Barth 1969; Schlee 1997, 2002; Benda-Beckmann 1999: 24).

The objects of property relations include material things such as (agricultural) land, houses or flats, and other material objects such as consumer goods or agricultural machines. Immaterial properties such as knowledge and symbols might however also be expressed as cultural property and might be linked to various claims for territory or for identity. Hann (1999: 213) argues further that social entitlements such as medical treatment, public transport, pensions and education should also be seen as property rights. These rights are often bound to citizenship and also entail obligations and duties (Hann 1999: 198). According to Hann, such a broad notion of property is less ethnocentric and makes it possible to address social existence as an integrated whole. It enables comparative analysis in fields of

social organisation at the interface of economy, politics and law (Hann 1996: 5). However, as Elwert points out, there is a danger of embracing everything as a property right, so that the definition loses its sharpness and clarity. In order to bridge these two positions, I will not import categories used in Germany to describe property rights, but restrict the analysis to the categories used in Croatia, and explore their different meanings. This may in some contexts include so-called 'social entitlements', as this is an important form of property rights in some situations (cf. Thelen 2003).

Throughout the book, my focus is primarily on privately owned houses and land, but I also include (former) socially owned apartments in my investigation. These apartments in socialist Yugoslavia were viewed as a social entitlement, and the abolition of this social entitlement in postsocialist Croatia and the accompanying transformation of property relations form a key element in my investigation. Although my study does not encompass other social entitlements of the socialist state as property rights (such as the right to medical treatment and employment), the transformation of these other social entitlements still builds an important reference frame for my analysis of changing relations to residential property and land.

When analysing property relations it is also important to investigate the conditions and procedures under which property holders might have acquired rights to the property objects. For example, they may have been acquired through sale, gifts, inheritances or through a form of lease contract. Property rights are transferred at a particular point in time, at a particular place within a particular society. Those property rights that are only temporarily transferred are even more strongly bound to particular time and space coordinates than property rights which are maintained over a much longer time span. Furthermore, the different forms of transfers are also differently recognised as valid or permissible. Who recognises such a transaction might again depend on the underlying norms behind it and the groups within which these norms are accepted. In some cases, rights must also be negotiated. Although they may exist as a principle, they have to be transformed into a right actually given or received by a process of negotiation (Benda-Beckmann 1999: 26, 27).

In order to take account of the fact that property relations are embedded in social, legal and political contexts, Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (1999: 20–2) proposed an analytical model in which they identified four 'layers' of social organisation where property relations manifest themselves: (1) cultural ideological notions; (2) legal regulations and institutional frameworks; (3) social property relationships; and (4) practices. Generally, the assumption of layers of property relations is only an analytical distinction. Empirically, the layers are interwoven and

interconnected and cannot always be separated from each other. The concept of the different layers of property relations makes clear, however, that formal property rights which are defined by state laws and administrative procedures can be very different to the ideology concerning property, and also very different to the situation 'on the ground'. Here, local social networks can be far more important in the achievement of access and use rights to property than legal forms and state laws. By distinguishing different layers of property it is also possible to explore the existence of diverse ideologies, norms, and social relations and practices. Let me now describe in more detail what is meant by each of the layers.

Ideologies and cultural understandings define what 'property is or should be, for which purposes it should be used and why … Though legal concepts and rules also have an ideological character, they tend to be more specific in their definition of the property status of resources and the legal consequences in terms of rights and obligations' (Benda-Beckmann 1999: 30). The Benda-Beckmanns also argue that there might be more than one ideology that influences property relations as well as more than one legal frame. This depends on the fact that state ideology does not have to coincide with the cultural norms about property which are accepted by the society or the group of people in that society, and which are built up over a long period of time.

Furthermore, it has to be considered that even at the formal, state level there might be different ideologies concerning property, which stress different functions of the property itself. Often this is the economic function, i.e. where a special property relation is seen as fostering economic development and modernisation. In addition, the ideology might also highlight other functions, which may be in opposition to the economic one. This is the case where notions of property embrace ideals to support the weak in society and create social justice. Furthermore, as in Croatia in the 1990s, the ideology behind the formal state property system might be to support people who belong to a particular national group – or, in cases of more liberal oriented states, people who are citizens of the state.

On a communal level, ideologies bound to property might be linked to the conviction that property provides a form of social security to all members of the community. This is particularly so in social units such as kin-groups, in which property is inherited and is supposed to secure the continuity of the descent group over generations. In this way, property can even have a religious character. These notions can of course also exist on a higher level, the level of nationhood. Here, property can take on the function of national homeland for which one might have to fight to retake or fight to defend.

However, ideological notions may not always be fully reflected in the legal prescriptions. This is especially so where laws have to express conflicting or even contradictory ideological notions of property. Laws can express the nationalist notions of property, for example, in giving people of one national group better access to property, or they can support private property rights by regulating the repossession of occupied private property and disregarding the national group membership of the owner. Furthermore, owing to the multitude of laws concerning property objects and property holders, as well as to the various changes or amendments made to the laws, legal regulations can become complicated, and can even overlap or contradict each other. People might refer to different legal frames, and might therefore use these frames differently. On the other hand, despite the number of existing laws, not all property relations might be regulated, with some being left outside the legal framework. The actual social property relationships may deviate from the legal and ideological level, too, as the latter define property normatively, while the actual social relations 'show the distribution of property among concrete [groups of] persons, which cannot be inferred from legal categories of property rights as such' (Benda-Beckmann 1999: 33). The description of actual property relations can also indicate how property relations are embedded in other forms of existing social relations, like kinship relations, friendship or client relations, as well as relations to one's national group. In fact, the prevailing social relations might be far more important for the actual property relations than the laws and procedures concerning property (Benda-Beckmann 1999: 36).

The analysis of existing property relations may also shed light on the various political and ideological functions of property as well as the more obvious economic and social ones. We can therefore explore the motives that drive different groups of people as well as individuals to act in particular ways. Property can certainly be expected to have different functions for people according to their age, gender, nationality, social class, profession and so on.

Under property practices Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann differentiate two social processes: first, '(inter)actions that deal primarily with concrete property objects and rights: practices in which people simply use, transfer, inherit, or dispute the right to a concrete resource' (Benda-Beckmann 1999: 33); and secondly, interactions in which 'property law and rights are reproduced and changed, in which the nature of property law is explained, discussed or disputed in interaction settings such as parliaments, university or mass media' (Benda-Beckmann 1999: 34). According to the Benda-Beckmanns, the fourth layer of property practices influences and reshapes all other layers.

The applied practices may also lead to disputes over property and sometimes even to changes in the property system. In these disputes, the conflicting parties can use their insights into property ideologies, norms and the legal level of property rights on the one hand, and the existing property relationships and the practices concerning property relationships on the other, when putting forward their claims for changes or when justifying their wish to maintain the current property system.

In times of legal change and political transformation, existing relations between property holders and the property objects may be retained, at least partially, on account of the influence of local social networks. In most cases, however, legal change and political transformation will also lead to radical changes in existing property relations. At such times, social exclusion and inclusion regarding property rights can be much more easily achieved and might have greater dimensions than in times of political stability (see Elwert 1999a: 14). This can be achieved on an ideological and legal level, for example when people are deprived of their rights to property. In times of political instability, rules and regulations tend to be less important in defining actually existing property relations than the local political parties and personal connections (Benda-Beckmann 2003).

In cases where the path of transformation is accompanied by violence and war, as in Croatia, social restructuring may occur on an even greater scale (Elwert 1999a: 14). Exclusive group formation, population displacement and disruption of infrastructure have a deep impact on property relations and property disputes. Furthermore, violence has to be treated as a factor in its own right, as it can dominate the use of law. In times of war and violent conflict, decisions about property rights may transfer from the courts to the local administration or other local groups of people, and these groups tend not to adhere to customary property laws about and/or legal provisions. Elwert (1999: 12–13) calls these processes *Vermachtung*, which can be translated as *disempowerment of the law*.

With the restructuring of the social world in times of (violent) transformation, the diverse functions of property relations also change in terms of their relative importance to the holder and his or her position in society. While some functions may increase in value, others diminish (Benda-Beckmann 1999: 39). The value of the property in itself is bound to the social world and social relations, and is therefore sensitive to social change.

1.3.2 Anthropological approaches to (ethnic) conflict and ethnicity

Having reflected on the anthropological approaches to property relations, some general anthropological theories of ethnicity and (ethnic) conflict can

be added at this point. The anthropological literature on ethnicity and (ethnic) conflict is vast and so this discussion is limited to those aspects of the debate which form the central theoretical framework for the analysis of my empirical data.

Following Barth (1969: 13–15), Elwert (1989) and Schlee (1994), ethnic groups distinguish themselves on the basis that all members of the group are thought to derive from the same origin, which is often also connected to cultural markers, such as language and religion. The kinds of cultural features that are recognised as marking ethnic group membership depend on their relevance within the social and political frame.

National group membership in south-eastern Europe is particularly oriented towards culturally specific values, which are believed to be unchangeable. Most members of a nation believe that national group membership derives from ethnic group membership (Sundhaussen 1994: 406). However, in contrast to ethnic groups, national groups refer to a common state and exclusive state citizenship (Elwert 1989: 446). In this sense, national group membership is even more clearly bound to a social and political frame. Furthermore, despite the fact that national group identity claims to be exclusive, people belonging to one national group might have many other identities and group memberships, based in professional groups, age groups or client groups, for example. They can develop cross-cutting ties to other national groups based on these other group memberships, on shared cultural values or other markers of social organisation. The common features can be used as a means of alliance thereby diminishing the meaning of nationality as a group-structuring factor (Gluckmann 1966), but they can also be seen as a factor of competition (Schlee 1997).

Research on ethnic conflict has highlighted the use of ethnicity and/or nationality as a mobilising force by ethnic entrepreneurs to conquer the state. In this view, the importance of ethnicity is emphasised in the struggle for power by political actors (Waldmann 1989; Scheffler 1991).

It has already been indicated that in conflict and war, violence can be a means to structure and stress national group boundaries and create a social order very different from that which existed prior to the outbreak of violence. The use of violence creates impermeable divisions between friends and enemies and therefore is a strong catalyst for group formation. The consequences of such violent conflicts are very often mass movements of people from their land and homes, death and injury within the population, substantial damage and the breakdown of infrastructure, as well as the substantial breakdown of governmental and legal institutions. When we speak of 'postwar' or 'post-conflict' situations, this often only means the end of official military operations; it does not signify that the conflicts are over

and peace reigns (Thomson 2003). In most cases, the reshaping through conflict of institutions and norms, as well as existing social relations, may continue long after the official 'end of hostilities'.

In contrast to the common assumption that (violent) conflict is chaotic and disorderly, anthropologists have stressed that most conflicts (as well as the use of violence) are socially embedded and framed by norms, values and/or social institutions which generally regulate social life (Elwert et al. 1999; Elwert 2001: 2543; Koehler and Zürcher 2003: 15). Such institutions can be at the administrative or state level – for example 'official' institutions like the police, the courts, or housing administrations – and/or at the communal or 'unofficial' level, in the form of kinship, neighbourhood, friendship or clientelism. Again, both levels of interaction, the state and the communal one, or the official and unofficial one, cannot be sharply differentiated from each other, but often overlap. Sometimes, however, they also compete with each other.

Following this approach, the collapse of socialism in most former socialist states was accompanied not only by the disintegration of the central state and a lack of legitimisation, but also by the reshaping of institutions and the restructuring of society. While some socialist institutions may become dysfunctional, others may retain their functionality or may even assume greater importance in the postsocialist period and serve to channel the conflict. In this sense, property rights can be seen as an institution, too. The way in which property rights are transformed can have both stabilising and destabilising effects.

In his analysis of conflict settlement, Elwert (2001, 2004) differentiates three strategies: avoidance, procedure and violence. The power of violence to restructure group boundaries has already been mentioned, so we will look briefly at the first two of these. Conflicts are avoided either by ignoring them or by not reacting to a potential conflict in order to reduce the tension. However, the avoidance of conflict restricts innovation. The second strategy, which relies on procedures, makes action calculable and generates legitimation to help solve conflicts. Pending procedures, in which the anticipated action fails to materialise, are not real procedures and are seen as catalysts or reasons for conflicts (Elwert 2001: 2544; 2004: 30). According to Zitelmann (2004: 43), who refers to the ideas of anthropologist Viktor Turner (1969), rituals can be seen as procedures, too, because the ritual character can channel action. When looking at the dynamics of property and ethnic conflicts in postwar Croatia, it therefore makes sense to analyse the ways in which these conflicts were settled.

1.3.3 Anthropological approaches to property relations and ethnic conflict in (post) socialism

Social anthropologists who have studied property relations in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe from the 1970s (e.g. Hann 1980; Humphrey 1983) looked first at the differences between the ideological notions of property and the existing property situation. They found that despite the ideological importance of collective property for the legitimisation of the socialist state, and despite the widespread collectivisation of private property, people had retained some individual rights in land, as well as other property. Anthropologists and sociologists working in this field also discovered that under socialism a private market evolved which was nurtured by the socialist economy and which was complementary to it and even synergetic (Kornai 1980; Hann 2003: 10).

By exploring the different functions and rights attached to property in socialist countries, social anthropologists discovered that socialist collectives and factories not only performed economic functions for the community, but were intended as 'total social institutions', a term coined by Humphrey (1998) to indicate that they embraced the diverse social needs of people as citizens. For example, they provided medical treatment and childcare, and were concerned with matters such as village electrification and the construction of water pipelines. Through these social measures, the collectives achieved greater social equality among the citizens and tried to build up a moral economy instead of simply fostering egocentric development.

At the same time, Hann and others stressed that the process of the nationalisation and expropriation of land and other material goods was often experienced as a violation of personal property rights by the people (Hann 2003: 26), and that clientelism and corruption was system-immanent to the socialist state. It tended to create injustice and violate societal norms (see e.g. Kornai 1980). The distribution of state-owned or socially owned housing space created inequality and was often perceived as unfair (Turner et al. 1992; Bodnar and Böröcz 1998). The Hungarian sociologist Ivan Szelenyi (1987), who studied state-owned housing in urban areas of Hungary, found that despite the ideological notions of housing as a social entitlement, there were marked inequalities in people's opportunities to gain access rights to state-owned housing. The *nomenklatura* as well as better-educated people had many advantages over the rest of the population.

In relation to the links between socialist property relations and ethnic conflict, Giordano (2003) has emphasised that nationalism had been a leading concept of social organisation long before the socialist states of

south-eastern Europe came into being. According to him, land reforms carried out before socialism often prioritised one national group in a strategy of cultural homogenisation and in order to 'nationalise' the territory. Socialism was unable to balance out the injustices that it inherited from pre-socialist times and which were fixed along national lines, and instead often cemented or even aggravated ethnic and national antagonisms. Verdery (1996: 86–7) has stressed that in times of economic hardship, ethnicity became one structuring element of clientelism and favouritism. Verdery (1996: 85) also stressed that the socialist reordering of society and the nationalisation of land which accompanied it was often implemented along ethnic lines, for example when social class and ethnic group membership overlapped.

Several social anthropologists in postsocialist countries have described and analysed the ongoing social restructuring of the socialist agricultural cooperatives and institutions which followed the legal property reforms and which took place (and in some cases are still taking place) during the so-called transition following the breakdown of socialism. Their work has shed light on the winners as well as the losers of the transition, the construction of (new) social identities and group formations, and their strategies to take advantage of the situation or to cope with the crises (see e.g. Kideckel 1995; Creed 1998; Kaneff 1998; Pine 1998; Thelen 2003).

A number of social anthropologists who studied the transformation of the socialist system in the 1990s have stressed that it was not only new ideological and legal notions that influenced property relations in the postsocialist period, but also some norms, expectations and practices that were connected to socialist property forms. Some showed, for example, that despite the restitution of private property, many people in the locality adhered to communal forms of economy and property, relying on local social networks and social norms deriving from socialist times (see Hann et al. 2003: 6, 32; Torsello 2003, 2004). In her comparative study on the transformation of property relations in a Hungarian and a Romanian village, Thelen (2003, 2004) comes to the conclusion that in the Hungarian case, where the use of violence during the socialist transformation in the 1950s was socially embedded and framed, the social order was largely retained, while in the Romanian village the extensive use of violence in the 1950s resulted in the dissolution of the social order. Violence was the main reason for the different development of the two villages under socialism and influenced the different transformations of the villages even in postsocialist times.

Other social anthropologists have explored the degree to which the problems concerning the restitution of property were connected to socialist

property relations. Verdery (1996: 133–68), for example, describes restitution in postsocialist Romania and reveals the difficulties in relating documented property rights to the situation on the ground. She shows that during the socialist period formal land titles were still kept despite the land being placed under state administration. However, because the land-registers were not updated under socialism, the restitution of private property in the 1990s had to be based instead on the formal land titles of pre-socialist times. Because some heirs had died or had moved away permanently, such restitution of property proved very difficult to achieve in practice, and not surprisingly, conflicts arose over the exact location and size of the landholdings. This is what Verdery called the 'fuzziness of property rights'.

Concerning the linkages between property relations and ethnic conflict in times of transition, Verdery (1996: 83–103) and Kaneff (1998) describe the ways in which ethnicity and nationality can become an important concept in acquiring resources, not least land, during the demise of socialism and the ongoing process of privatisation. They argued that with the socialist and pre-socialist reordering of society along ethnic lines, a degree of competition arose in the postsocialist era between ethnic groups over historic rights to land, the need to legitimise property rights, territorial claims and claims for managing state power.

1.3.4 Anthropological approaches to socialist and postsocialist Yugoslavia/ Croatia

My research on changing property relations and ethnic conflict in postsocialist, postwar Croatia also draws on the work of other social and historical anthropologists who have studied socialist Yugoslavia, as well as the successor states of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. This section looks briefly at some of the topics they examined that are most relevant to my own study.

Anthropologists such as Halpern (1967), Hammel (1968), Simić (1973a, 1973b) and Rheubottom (1976), who carried out their research in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and later Olsen (1989, 1993), Bringa (1995) and Grandits (2002), have all stressed the importance of communal and 'unofficial' institutions such as ethnicity, religion, kinship and the family, friendship and godfatherhood, in structuring social organisation. They viewed these as second only to the official institutions of the Communist Party. The authors also elaborated on the transformation of these 'unofficial' institutions during the socialist period, and how this influenced relations to land and houses, and their functions. At the same time, the 'unofficial'

institutions also infiltrated the official institutions, thereby helping to create social norms that differed from the socialist ones.

Anthropologists working in the 1990s, who concentrated on war-related topics such as ethnic cleansing, violence, nationalism and shifting identities, stressed the negative impact of the authoritarian character of the socialist regime on the potential for ethnic conflict, the use of competing symbols and discourses of the past to claim exclusive ethnic rights, and finally the power of violence as a group-structuring mechanism (Denich 1994; Hayden 1996). Two anthropological films made by Bringa (1993; Bringa and Loizos 2001) provide excellent but disillusioning insights into the dynamics of inter-ethnic neighbourhood relations in times of conflict escalation, as well as following return and resettlement, in an ethnically mixed Bosnian village where she did extensive fieldwork in the 1980s. Bringa's first film shows how fear and the experiences of violence infiltrated the village from outside and created ethnic divisions between Muslim and Croat neighbours who, in many cases, had hitherto been life-long friends, finally leading to the destruction of the village community and the flight or even killing of Muslims and the systematic destruction of their homes. The second film shows the return of some of the Muslim families to the village after having been expelled during the war. It reveals the complexity of the return process by also including the perspective of the Croatian refugees who temporarily settled in Muslim (Bosniak) houses. Interestingly, the relations between the Croatian refugees and the Muslim returnees are relatively relaxed. The film gives the impression that this is because both groups had been expelled and suffered violence and so showed a certain degree of mutual understanding and empathy. However, as Bringa concludes in a final statement in the film, the war created rifts between people, even when they lived as close neighbours. Bringa does not expand on the perspective of the local Croats in the village who had lived side by side with Muslims up until the war. This might be because the boundaries between the Muslim group, which featured largely in her fieldwork, and the local Croatian group were even stronger than between the Muslims and the Croatian settlers. It would have been interesting to hear more about the local Croats to get a better picture of the situation in the village and the inter-ethnic and intergroup relations among the villagers (cf. the analysis of the films by Helms 2003).

A study by Duijzings (2000) concentrated on the links between religion, identity and ethnic conflict in Kosovo in the 1990s. Gosztonyi's (2002) work dealt with mediation and the de-escalation strategies put forward by international organisations during the war in Bosnia. For the postwar period, a revealing study of war-related property transfers between Serbs from Croatia and Croats from Serbia was conducted by the Croatian

anthropologist Jasna Čapo-Žmegač (1999, 2001). She highlights the perspective of Croats from Serbia who had exchanged their property with Serbs from Croatia during the war, and who had difficulty adapting to the new social environment in Croatia. In addition to social anthropologists, interesting studies concerning the transformation of property relations in the former Yugoslavia have also been conducted by political scientists and law experts, as well as by international practitioners (e.g. Turner 1992; Borić 1996; Hovey 2000; Belloni 2001; Eyre and Wittowsky 2002). In the course of this book, I will refer to these authors – as well as the topics they raise – in more detail.

1.4 Fieldwork sites

In formulating my research proposal it became clear that I would need to undertake fieldwork not only in the town of Knin but also in rural communities, where I would be able to investigate people's relations to land as well as residential property. This would allow me to study the interconnectedness between the two property forms. However, the prime motivation for carrying out research in two different localities was the need to consider the different ethnic make-up of the population in the town and in the countryside, which had a strong influence on property relations. After the 1990s war, the town of Knin was almost exclusively inhabited by Croats – comprising a majority of Croatian settlers and a minority of local Croats – despite the fact that it had previously had an ethnically mixed population. Serbs tended to return to those villages which before the war had been mainly Serbian, although a minority of villages had been Croatian or mixed. The majority of Serbian houses and apartments in the town of Knin were occupied by Croats, while in the villages the influx of Croat settlers was much smaller. By extending my field sites to include the surrounding rural area and thereby repositioning my viewpoint, I was better able to grasp the different perspectives of local Croats, local Serbs and Croatian settlers, as well as the changing relations between the villages and the urban centre of Knin. Below I describe these field sites in more detail and expand on these considerations.

1.4.1 The village of Biskupija

The village of Biskupija, situated about five kilometres from Knin, served as my main field site. I spent a total of 12 months there, first from May 2000 to January 2001 and then from May 2001 to July 2001. In 2000–1 the village was inhabited mainly by Serbian returnees and by some Croatian settlers and local Croatian families who had returned after the war.

In 1981, Biskupija had 1,008 inhabitants living in 271 households (Hrženjak 1983: 436). The majority of the village inhabitants, about 95%, had been of Serbian nationality before the war, the rest being Croatian. Between 1991 and 1993, nearly all the Croats were forced to leave the village. Their houses were then occupied by Serbs who had left their homes in other areas of Croatia. In 1995, following the Croatian military operation, almost all the Serbian inhabitants left the village and fled to other Serbian-controlled areas. The Serbian houses were partially destroyed. In the months following the reintegration of the territory into the Croatian state, a small number of Croats from the village returned to their homes and over 300 Croatian settlers from Bosnia and other parts of Croatia occupied the Serbian houses. As a result, about 20% of the housing stock owned by Serbs was occupied by Croatian settlers, while another 20–30% of the Serbian houses were damaged or even completely destroyed.[3]



Plate 2. Serbian hamlet in the village of Biskupija, the Orthodox church and the *dom kulture* with the Dinara mountain in the background (spring 2001).

From 1997, an increasing number of Serbs also returned. By 2001, almost 350 Serbs had returned, corresponding to about 35% of the pre-war

[3] This is my estimation based on the number of destroyed houses relative to the number of pre-war households.

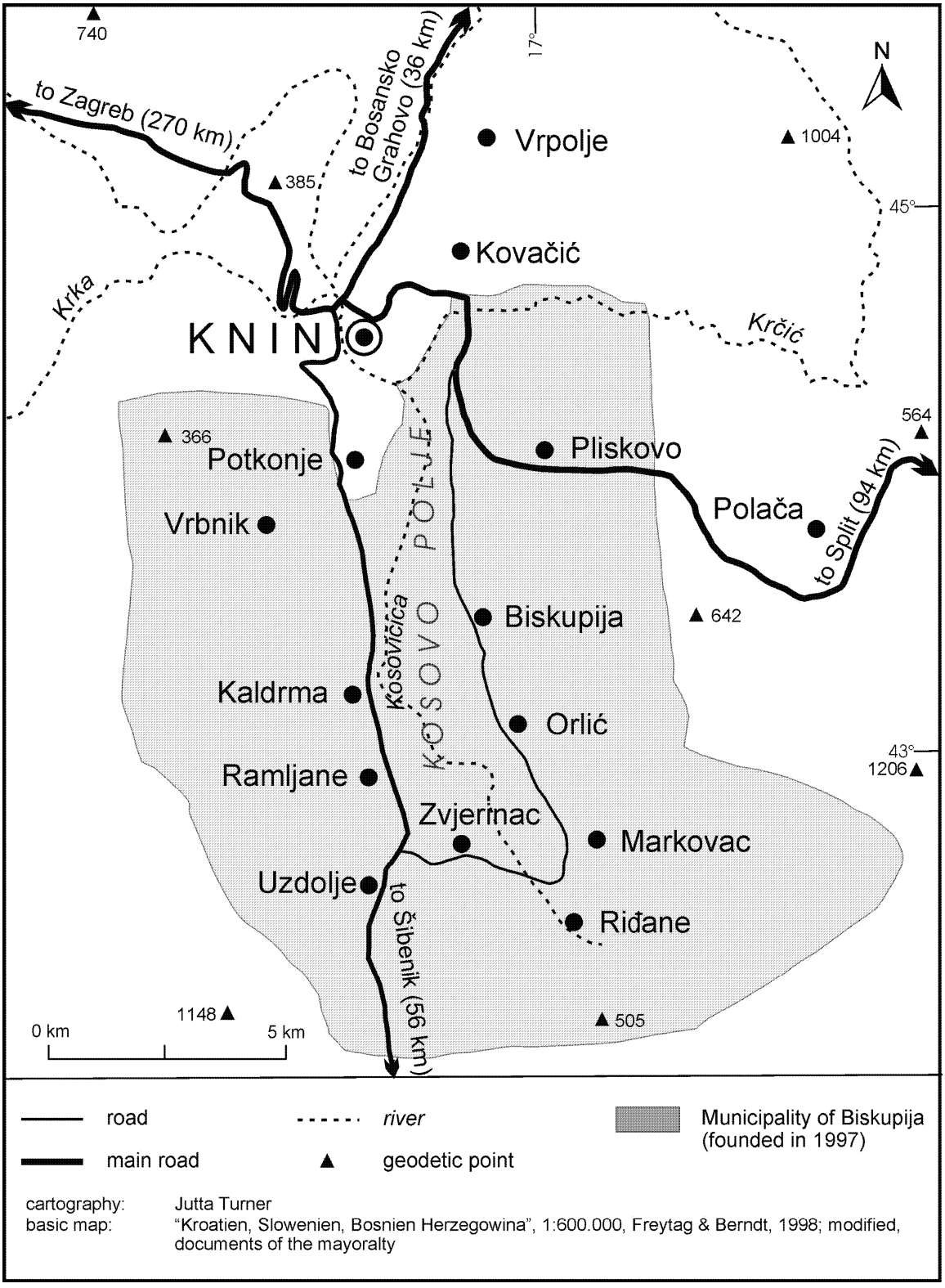
population, and others expressed their wish to return.[4] Although the number of Serbian returnees was above average for the former war zones in Croatia and therefore not representative of postwar village life across the whole of the country, it is still possible to assess the different functions of property as well as social and inter-ethnic relations in more general terms. The relatively high percentage of returnees made it easier to take a diachronic view of village life. Narrative interviews provided insights into property and ethnic relations going back to (pre-)socialist times. Moreover, it was relevant to my research that the village of Biskupija had an Orthodox as well as a Catholic church, which gave insights into the role of religion in the pre- and postwar period. This made it easier to draw conclusions about the religious functions of property relations, as well as the connections between religion and nationality. However, after the war there was no village association that met regularly, nor was there a school or any other functioning public buildings, nor even any cafés to provide the most basic social infrastructure for the inhabitants. Most people were unemployed and relied on pensions and/or welfare benefits, supplemented by subsistence agriculture.

1.4.2 The municipality of Biskupija

The municipality of Biskupija, which was only founded in 1997 and represents the larger political unit for the village of Biskupija, served as a second unit of analysis. It stretches out into the Kosovo plain and includes several smaller villages. Besides the village of Biskupija, the municipality also comprises the villages of Orlić, Markovac, Riđane, Kaldrma, Uzdolje, Zverinac and Vrbnik. As in the years prior to 1990, in 2000–1 these villages were again mainly inhabited by Serbs.

From 1997 until 2001 the municipality of Biskupija was ruled by the Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka – HSS). The HSS opposed the Croatian nationalist HDZ, the party in government at the national level from 1995 to 2000 and whose local power was undiminished in Knin even in 2001. The newly founded office of the municipal mayor, as well as the housing commission which resolved occupancy cases, were located in one of the abandoned buildings belonging to the agricultural cooperative and were situated in the village of Orlić next to Biskupija.

[4] There are no exact figures on Serbian refugees who wished to return. My estimations are derived from information provided by relatives who had already returned.



Map 1.2. The municipality of Biskupija (established in 1997).

Biskupija municipality's political orientation in conjunction with the relatively high number of Serbian returnees attracted a lot of attention from international organisations. This was highly appreciated by the local

municipal council. For example, in 2000 the municipality was included in a programme to reconstruct 108 (mainly Serbian) houses organised by the German *Arbeiter Samariter Bund* and funded mainly by the European Union (European Union Programme for Reconstruction 2001). Other organisations also showed their willingness to support the economic and communal development of the municipality. In many ways, the municipality of Biskupija could be seen as an example of 'good practice', with international involvement in reconstruction and economic revitalisation projects helping to facilitate the return of the refugees. This helps to explain why more returnees were to be found in Biskupija than in many other villages.[5] The political openness of the municipality with regard to international aid programmes and its opposition to the Croatian nationalist HDZ leaderhip in the town of Knin made fieldwork much easier, as I could rely on the support of the local mayor and his staff.

Moreover, most villages in the municipality of Biskupija (but not the village of Biskupija itself) had been integrated into an agricultural cooperative (*poljoprivredna zadruga*) under socialism, which was to some extent re-established after the end of the war. By treating the municipality of Biskupija as an analytical unit I was able to observe transitions in the agricultural sector and to analyse the changing meaning of land as an economic, social, emotional and also political asset.

However, like Biskupija village, the municipality of Biskupija was bereft of any infrastructure. A small factory producing gypsum operated in the municipality, but only employed a handful of people. Primary schools and cultural centres had been destroyed or devastated during the war and had not been rebuilt. All other institutions, for example the regional court, high schools and other administrative units, had always been located in Knin. This did not change with the foundation of the municipality in 1997.

1.4.3 The town of Knin and the village of Potkonje

The town of Knin, where I spent an additional three months of my fieldwork (from February to April 2001), and the small Croatian village of Potkonje close to Knin, served as my third and fourth analysis sites. Knin was important because it had always been the main administrative, economic and cultural centre for the surrounding villages. In 2000–1, as in the last decades of socialist rule, Knin had a range of schools, a home for the elderly, a

[5] Reconstruction does not necessarily imply that return rates increase, or that they can be sustained. Various studies have shown that economic reconstruction is as important as the reconstruction of homes (for Bosnia, see for example, Belloni 2001).

kindergarten and a hospital. In addition, the town housed a land register and cadastre office, as well as a court, police headquarters, army barracks, the offices of international organisations and various local NGOs, shops, numerous cafés, a cinema, a market, churches and graveyards, a railway station and an international bus station – all marking it out as a regional centre. Most of the factories that employed people from the villages were also situated in Knin. However, these had closed down during the war and had not reopened.

Other reasons for conducting fieldwork in Knin and Potkonje were their different ethnic composition and political situation in comparison to the municipality of Biskupija. In 1981, the town of Knin had 10,859 inhabitants (Hrženjak 1983: 436), excluding the villages in the direct vicinity of the town. After the war, in 2001, the number of inhabitants was much the same. However, a great population exchange had taken place, with the Serbian population having largely left in 1995 and thousands of Croatian families from Bosnia and other places in Croatia having settled in the town. These Croatian settlers now formed the majority of the population, with only small numbers of local Croats having returned.

In the village of Potkonje, however, local Croats still formed the majority of the population after the war. Only two settler families had moved into previously Serbian-owned houses. The few Serbian families who had lived in Potkonje before the war of the 1990s had not returned to the village.

1.4.4 Visits to Zagreb, Belgrade and towns in Bosnia

Short visits to Zagreb, Belgrade and Bosnia enabled me to capture a further perspective of the situation in Knin as transmitted through the views of Croats or Serbs who either did not live permanently in Knin or had chosen not to return. The trips also enabled me to gain further insights into the situation of the Serbian refugees in exile, as well as of Bosnian Croats 'at home'. Their views on housing and land helped me to understand the dynamics of property relations and their connections with various social, economic and political factors. During my fieldwork in the Knin region, I was also able to talk to people visiting from Belgrade or places in Bosnia and Serbia. By including this wider perspective, I was able to relate the dynamics of property relations and ethnic conflict on the local level to the national and transnational level and explore their interrelationships.

1.5 Fieldwork methods

In order to explore changing property relations in the postwar region of Knin, I used a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods in which the

classical anthropological method of participant observation had a prominent place. The process of data collection, however, also depended on my personal access to the field and my special role in it. This again depended on several factors, such as my age, nationality, my language abilities, gender and personality, as well as on the people I stayed with and/or who served as informants (see e.g. Clifford 1983). In the following I elaborate on these factors, explaining my access to the field and the establishment of social networks, and describing the methods used.

1.5.1 Access to the field and the establishment of social networks

During the first nine months of my fieldwork, and during the later additional three months, I stayed with an elderly Serbian couple, Milica and Pešo, in a mainly Serbian-inhabited hamlet which formed part of the village of Biskupija. In contrast to the situation of most Serbian returnees, who were not in a position to offer any accommodation at all, the living conditions of this couple were relatively good.[6] With substantial help from their two children, who were married to Croats and lived in Croatian towns outside the former war zone, they had managed to repossess their private family house (built in the 1980s) following its occupation by Croatian settlers and refurnish it with the basic necessities. I was rented a room in their house and joined them daily for lunch.

The couple were very helpful and friendly from the outset and our relationship grew closer with each day that I stayed there. Early on in my stay, my landlady sent me out to meet other people in the village and, because people were curious to find out who I was, such contacts developed quite easily. It was in this way that I met Danijela, a young university-educated Serbian woman from the neighbouring village who became my research assistant for the first three months. Together with Danijela I visited many households in the municipality of Biskupija.

For the establishment of contacts within the village of Biskupija in order to better understand social structures, I also relied on the help of Jasmina, another young university-educated Serbian woman. I had known

[6] At the beginning, it was not very comfortable – the rooms had no doors and little furniture. There was no phone connection and during the summer months we had no running water. But Milica and Pešo were very eager to improve the conditions and used every opportunity to invest in the house using the money they received from me as rent. Over time they bought curtains, carpets, furniture and doors, as well as lamp-shades. In the winter, they also procured a small electric heater especially for my room. When I left the Knin region 15 months later, their home was – compared to other households in the region – quite well equipped.

her since my research in Serbia in 1996 when we became friends and she had helped me to understand the situation of the Serbian refugees in Belgrade. At that time, Jasmina had worked as an NGO activist in Belgrade after fleeing her home village of Biskupija in 1995. Although she herself did not return permanently to Biskupija in 2000–1, her parents had returned in 1997 and she visited them from time to time. During her visits, she accompanied me when I conducted interviews with both elderly and young people, and she helped me to establish further contacts in the village. I was also able to follow closely the property situation of her own extended family: one family house was occupied in Knin and a further house belonging to close relatives had been destroyed. However, for understanding the social and kinship structures of the village, which constituted an important base in my analysis of property relations, my landlady – with whom I had endless chats – proved to be my most important contact.

The relationship I developed with my landlords, as well as with Danjela and Jasmina, helped forge links with the wider Serbian community and helped me to create a relationship of trust. In addition, I also managed to establish friendly contacts with local Croats and Croatian settlers. In both cases, particular people approached me and acted as key informants, and helped me to establish links with others in their community. For some young Bosnian women in Biskupija, I represented a bridge to Germany where some of them had lived as refugees. They enjoyed speaking German as well as telling me about their experiences in Germany, which they generally remembered as having been very positive. Being able to use their German language skills and speak to me in a language that others did not understand gave them greater status within the community of settlers in Biskupija. For some, I also represented a further bridge to the life of young women in Western Europe generally, which they associated with educational opportunities and living independently away from their parents. Because life in Biskupija was essentially dull and had little to offer young people, they also appreciated my company when playing cards or just drinking coffee and chatting. Other Croatian settlers who had heard that I was going to write a book about the postwar situation invited me to their homes to hear their stories. They wanted me to listen and understand that they were not winners but losers themselves.

However, especially during my first weeks of fieldwork I found it difficult to win people's trust once they saw that I was talking to the 'other side' as well. Several events brought this home to me. When I took part in an Orthodox village festival for the first time, a Serbian villager openly accused me of being a spy. This I put down to the postwar atmosphere, in which trust between people had been badly shaken and was difficult to rebuild. It could

also be connected to the people's socialist past – the political system during socialism was based on surveillance and 'spies' were a part of daily life. In fact, Halpern describes experiencing a similar situation in socialist Yugoslavia, and Verdery (1996: 7) describes such an occurrence in socialist Romania.

During my fieldwork in Biskupija, this accusation of being a spy was fortunately not repeated and others in the community reacted very negatively to it or felt shamed by it. Nevertheless, because memories of the war hung about every conversation, it took months before I could be sure that people would tell me something that really touched them during my interviews. To become a trusted partner in a conversation was in fact very much connected with the process of learning how to deal with certain situations and knowing how to address sensitive topics. For example, I remember conducting an interview with an elderly Serbian woman who was very keen to get to know me. When I visited her she was very pleased and showed me around and talked a lot, but this changed as soon as I started to record on tape a narrative interview about her life. When I asked about her son and where he was now, she became suspicious and did not want to answer, but switched to other topics. At that time, I was not aware of the possible sensitivity of this question. Fearing my language skills were letting me down, I repeated the question thinking that she had not understood me. Embarrassed about this, she stopped talking completely, which caused me embarrassment too. Reflecting on this situation later, I realised that perhaps her son had been in the army of the Republic of Serbian Krajina during the war and she may have been afraid that there was a trial pending against him and that I was trying to elicit information as to his whereabouts.

In another case, I again hit a communication barrier when contacting a young Serbian woman returnee who had recently arrived from Belgrade with her two small children. Her house was situated in a neighbourhood comprising Bosnian Croats who had occupied Serbian houses. I used to socialise with her Bosnian Croat neighbour, a woman with a small son, and realised to my astonishment that the two were contacting each other and inviting each other over for coffee, a fact that was rather rare between Croatian settlers and Serb neighbours. One day, after having visited the Bosnian woman, I stopped at the house of the young Serbian woman and asked her to tell me about her situation as a returnee. She agreed but told me that she was busy and that I should come another day, a response that was rather unusual in the village, as visitors would normally be asked to enter the house and have a drink, even if the hostess continued to work in the kitchen or go about some other tasks. When I arrived the next day at the proposed time, she declared that she was busy again. By now it was obvious that she

did not want to talk to me. I realised that she did not trust me, most likely because she knew that I was also socialising with her Bosnian neighbour. This might have been a barrier for her to open up to me and speak about her relations with Bosnian Croats as well as about her life as a returnee in general, since this would doubtless involve negative aspects.

As in many other societies, the people here were often reticent to talk openly about conflict situations. There was a saying in Biskupija that you should tell others only what you would want them to talk about. In daily village life, where people could not escape face-to-face social relations and were always interested to know about other people's lives, villagers avoided talking about conflicts or complaining about others. If two people had a personal dispute that could not be easily resolved, they preferred to avoid speaking to each other. This kind of conflict avoidance behaviour was also displayed by Serbs towards Bosnian settlers and vice versa. Most Croatian settlers and Serbs thus preferred to ignore each other completely when passing by, or simply to greet each other but without entering into small talk. Although this was again largely due to the postwar atmosphere and the legacy of the conflicts between Serbs and Croatian settlers, this may also reflect behaviour that can be traced back to socialist times. Balikci (1965: 1466), who carried out research in a Bosnian village in the early 1960s, writes about the conflict behaviour of Bosnian villagers in the following way:

> People who particularly fear jealousies and suspicions may tend to withdraw from social interaction. Visiting other houses will be reduced to a minimum, and neighbouring visitors will be admitted only to the porch behind the entry, never invited into the guest room or the kitchen where envy may seize them. Thus interaction with neighbours takes place only from a distance, shouting across the yards or at the walls. Furthermore, there is a strong tendency to refrain from gossip when talking to an 'unreliable' person. A wealthy peasant stated: 'We don't talk about other people, we keep away from other people and never visit other people's houses.'

Seen in this context, it is not surprising that Serbs as well as local Croats and Croatian settlers were uneasy about talking of conflicts with their neighbours and so used carefully measured words when speaking to me. This also largely prohibited them from speaking to me about their roles in the war and other conflict-laden topics, and made it difficult for me to look back on this period and reappraise it.

On the other hand, reluctance to speak about the war and about conflicts in neighbourhood relations in the postwar period was not universal. Many Serbs, local Croats and Croatian settlers alike hoped that I could

positively influence the conflict they were involved in, or that they could gain humanitarian help or reconstruction funds by telling me about their losses during the war and telling me in great detail about their current miserable living conditions. Or they just wanted me to hear their version of the 'truth'. Perhaps I learned most about the war and the postwar period by listening to conversations which were not explicitly directed at me but were everyday conversations between people in Biskupija.

Generally, my social relations within the village developed in a positive way. I only had to walk through the village to be warmly welcomed by the people passing by, or I was often asked to stay for a chat and a cup of coffee, or to come by another time, as was the villagers' habit. Serbs welcomed me most often since they made up the majority of the population in the village and in my neighbourhood. But local Croats and Croatian settlers also showed me hospitality. Despite the tense relations between local Serbs, local Croats and Croatian settlers, people were tolerant enough to accept that as an outsider I would have established relations with the 'other side' too. People seemed to want to show their hospitality and they strived for recognition. Serbs, for example, joked that in a way I resembled a Bosnian Croat, as I had settled in the community. On other occasions, they described me as one of them (*ona je naša*). Altogether, people of all groups seemed to be proud to have me in the village and enjoyed introducing me to their friends and relatives from other villages, and also to those visiting from Serbia, Bosnia or Western countries. The fact that I lived in the village with them seemed to give them hope that a normal way of life was returning to the village, independent of national or group boundaries.

In the town of Knin, where I was based for about three months, I was able to establish closer contacts with local Croats and Croatian settlers since I stayed with an elderly local Croat woman who shared a house with two Croatian settler families. I also regularly visited the Croatian village of Potkonje, situated about a kilometre from Knin in the Kosovo plain and in the neighbourhood of Biskupija village, to deepen my perspective on local Croats in relation to neighbouring Serbs. Being at a greater physical distance from Biskupija, and by widening my perspective, I was able to cross-check the observations I had made in the village and to establish the representativeness of the housing relations I had observed. I continued meeting inhabitants from Biskupija who often came to Knin and whom I met in cafés. I was also able to interview various representatives of the administration, the local NGOs and international organisations located in Knin.

1.5.2 Participant observation

Through my daily participation in and observation of village and town life over more than a year, I gained some very valuable insights into the social structures and organisation of everyday life, inter-ethnic relations and problems, as well as the processes surrounding the reconstruction and repossession of property. There were several 'domains' of life in which I regularly took part and which I observed through daily and yearly cycles, like farming, church services and festivals. These domains were not necessarily obviously linked to property relations and ethnic conflict, but were clearly central to the life of the villagers and/or town dwellers. More generally, the various domains highlighted the meaning of social parameters like kinship and nationality, for example, or of circumstantial constraints at the economic and political level. It was my analytical and interpretative task to evaluate the way in which these domains were related to changing property relations and ethnic conflict in the Knin region, and the degree to which property conflict was embedded in (or disembedded from) the social, political and economic life of the villagers. By participant observation in agriculture, for example, I could begin to unravel patterns of mutual assistance, equity and reciprocity, as well as of boundary drawing, status differences, competition and conflict. Furthermore, I could begin to understand what kind of relationship the inhabitants had with the land they worked on, not only in economic terms but also in symbolic and emotional terms. By participating in church services, religious and national festivals and life-cycle celebrations I learned what they meant in the re-creation of communities, and in the development of notions of home and 'homeland', which were interrelated with property claims.

By tracking several legal cases concerning the occupation and repossession of a house over a long period I was able to grasp the dynamics of settlement and occupation, as well as of resettlement and repossession. This contributed to a diachronic picture of the dynamics of population movements, changing household compositions and proceedings in regard to residential property cases. By speaking regularly to owners who were waiting to regain possession of their house, as well as to the occupants of that house and the officials involved, I could grasp the different logics and perspectives of the actors in property conflicts.

Observation of political campaigning and the outcome of the local elections in May 2001 enabled me to see how property, social and ethnic conflicts were handled at a political level. By spring 2001 I had lived for nearly a year in the community and had established a wide range of contacts and relationships with many population groups. This was very advantageous for understanding and analysing proceedings in the election campaign.

1.5.3 Narrative, semi-structured and expert interviews

In addition to participant observation I also conducted narrative and semi-structured interviews with all the population groups, that is with Serbs, local Croats and Croatian settlers. Most of the interviews were taped and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. I also conducted expert interviews with some local and national politicians, representatives of the settlers' and the veterans' associations, employees of the agricultural service, the cadastre and land register office, the Agency for Property Transmission in Knin, local school teachers and priests, as well as numerous representatives of the international organisations located in Knin, such as the UNHCR, OSCE, IRC, ECMM and others (see the glossary for the full titles of abbreviations and acronyms). Interviewing the representatives of these organisations and institutions enabled me to observe different decision-making processes in the realms of housing and agriculture, which contributed to broadening my understanding of the social situation in the Knin region.

The narrative and semi-structured interviews of local people in Biskupija as well as in Knin helped me to reconstruct the past from both a village and a town point of view and to shed light on changes and continuities in values and social relations. Throughout my fieldwork, and in the analysis of the postwar period, I also dealt with narrative sources about the past in order to gain information about the present, as narrative histories can be used to legitimise current claims. Following the method of narrative interviews of Schütz (1971), I encouraged the informants to structure the interview themselves. This meant finding out what was of relevance to them instead of narrowing down the focus of the interview, and helped me to grasp the social, political and economic embeddedness of changing housing relations and ethnic conflict. Later, I also encouraged informants to discuss specific topics that proved to be relevant to issues of property relations and ethnic conflict, to the use of property and land, or to the social life of the community more generally. In these semi-structured interviews I asked their views on topics such as the occupation and repossession of houses, or about their opinions on agriculture and the general social situation. Again, all three population groups were interviewed on these topics.

However, engaging with the different perspectives and histories of the informants meant hearing different and often conflicting or contradictory opinions and accusations. For example, by observing the transactions concerning a particular house and speaking to the occupants as well as the owners, I often could not determine whether the occupants had harassed the owners or if it had been the other way around. I had to struggle with questions as to who had lost what and who had won what, who was needy

and how I could measure guilt and crimes. Here I had to cope not only with my own subjectivity, but with the subjectivity of the informants, as well as with nationalist propaganda. As already outlined by Malinowski (1922), narrative memories are always selective and are interpreted from the viewpoint of the present. It became clear again and again that absolute truth is elusive – and that matters are not always what they seem. In the two historical chapters I therefore use narrative interviews for the reconstruction of property and ethnic relations, but link them to historical sources. I have also avoided reconstructing the past of individual settler families, as they arrived in the Knin region from very different places.

To establish empirically provable models of trustworthiness and plausible motives for action, I generally used indirect questioning (Elwert 2002) and avoided confronting the informant with what another person had said about him or her or about the specific property case under discussion. On other occasions, however, I deliberately pointed out specific events or recalled opinions I had heard from the 'other side' (for example, the side of the occupants when speaking to Serbs who were waiting for the repossession of their houses – but of course, I protected the personal identity of the informant) to encourage the informants to take a definite position. The thematising of conflicting topics on occasion led to fruitful discussions and enabled me to find out more about the contexts and connections of the conflicts. Using 'provocation' as a method (Elwert 2002), I was able to gain a reputation for being informed and trying to understand the situation (even when taking the 'wrong' side). This was often a precondition for people to start talking about these conflicting topics at all, since as I indicated earlier, in non-focused narrative interviews most informants preferred to avoid talking about such difficult issues. On the other hand, provocation was a dangerous method of gaining information because there was always the risk that informants would be outraged by my perceived impertinence or that they would stop talking to me altogether.

It sometimes happened that provocation occurred unintentionally, particularly at the start of my fieldwork when I did not know how to use or interpret the information I received. In fact, unintentional provocation often started from the moment I opened my mouth and tried to speak to informants in 'their' language. For example, at the beginning of my stay I was theoretically aware of the differences between the Serbian and the Croatian languages. The vocabulary is largely the same, but words are often pronounced slightly differently. While people can easily communicate with each other in either language, differences are loaded with national connotations. However, not all Croats speak the so-called Croatian standard language, and nor do all Serbs speak the so-called Serbian variant. Having

learnt Serbian in Belgrade in 1996, it happened that I used Serbian words when speaking to Croats, and did not always know the corresponding Croatian word. Some Bosnian Croats reacted negatively to this, highlighting the fact that I spoke Serbian instead of Croatian. They interpreted this as a sign of my political and emotional partiality. The Croats concerned further linked this to the fact that I was staying with Serbs in Biskupija, although the local Serbian community, including my landlords, spoke the local (Croatian) dialect and not the Serbian standard language.

A further predicament concerned the fact that not all the information I received was meant to be communicated to me, let alone to be analysed for later publication. This put me into an ethical dilemma about how to use such information. Throughout my fieldwork as well as throughout this book, I have paid attention to this fact and generalised personal information as much as possible in order to safeguard identities and not to violate the privacy and confidentiality of the informants. The personal names of people who are still alive have been changed to guarantee their anonymity. Only the real names of people in high-ranking public positions are mentioned, as well as the names of people who died during the socialist period or earlier and had held a special public position in the village.

1.5.4 Ethnographic sampling and the use of statistical and archival data

Because qualitative methods do not deal with every member of a community in the same way and also risk missing segments of the population, I used ethnographic sampling to obtain comparable data on the property and social situation of the households in Biskupija, as well as on single household members. This made it possible to compare the groups of local Serbs, local Croats and Croatian settlers and helped to answer the question of how representative the findings of the qualitative analysis were (cf. Schensul 1999: 239). However, the survey was used only to supplement the qualitative empirical research, which was of primary relevance.

Altogether, I covered 101 households in Biskupija, including a total of 278 individuals for whom I recorded basic data. There were about 180 households in the village in 2000 with about 450–500 people, so I effectively surveyed about 60% of all the households in Biskupija in 2000–1. Of these 101 surveyed households, 31 were Croatian settler households (approx. 60–70% of all settler families in the village), eight were local Croatian households (90% of all local Croatian families in the village) and 62 were local Serbian households (60% of all local Serbian families in the village). For the survey I selected four village hamlets and all their respective

households, as well as the households along a section of the main road where modern houses were located. My aim was to build confidence in the survey by not leaving out any family in the investigated area. The fact that I went from household to household showed people that each household – whether local Croat, Serb or settler – received as much recognition as the others. The method of 100% sampling also proved useful in that it saved me from conducting a pre-study of household locations in order to apply random sampling methods, which would have been very time-consuming since neither a complete map of the dwellings in the village nor current household lists were available. Furthermore, on account of the extent of postwar destruction and occupation of housing, Serbian returnees sometimes lived in buildings that had not been designed for human habitation, such as barns and stables, which would have been difficult to find by random sampling methods.

I started my survey by asking for the personal data of each household member: name, father's name, relation to the household head, sex, year of birth, birthplace, nationality, religious confession, marital status, number of school years, education, profession, state of health, information on health insurance, income in terms of salary, social assistance, child benefits and pension. Because the impact of the war on people's lives had in most cases been life-changing, I included a diachronical perspective in the survey. For example, I asked about the type of work of each household member and his/her residence both before and after the war. Because the history of settlers and local people differed (even more than the history of local Croats and local Serbs), I developed two surveys with slightly different questions for local people and for settlers.

For most of the households questioned in this way I also conducted a household questionnaire which covered different fields, like the state of property and housing after the war (including questions regarding ownership or legal documents for occupation), the economic situation of the household (including the main sources of household income), the state of agriculture (including the ownership and lease of land, the ownership of machines, livestock, production), and household equipment (including key consumer goods and status symbols). Again, I constructed two slightly different questionnaires: one for local people who had lived in the community before the war, and the second for the settlers who had moved into the community after 1995.

The results of the survey of individual household members and the household questionnaire based on the sample for Biskupija are drawn upon in several chapters of this book. Generally, the data of the three groups – local Croats, local Serbs and Croatian settlers – are analysed separately.

However, I did not receive complete data for every individual or household. As a result, the numbers of individuals and households referred to in the tables fluctuate throughout the book. To complete the information gained from the qualitative and supplementary quantitative methods, I used statistical sources such as census data on changing population numbers, ethnic composition and household sizes of the village of Biskupija, as well as the wider region, published by the Croatian Statistical Institute and by the UNHCR and OSCE. To gain historical insights into marriage practices, I studied the marriage registers stored in the archive in Zadar for the village of Biskupija from the beginning of the nineteenth century up to the 1930s. Unfortunately, the births, marriages and deaths registers (*matične knjige*) of the more recent past were not available in the archive. They had been lost when the parish house of the Orthodox church in Biskupija was destroyed during the 1990s war. Furthermore, I had no access to the Catholic Church registers. They were kept in the Franciscan monastery in Knin, and although I approached the abbot several times about the matter, he repeatedly suggested I should come another time.

To trace the history of the structure of land ownership and settlement patterns, I studied an historical cadastre map of the village of Biskupija that originated from the eighteenth century and which was also kept in the Zadar archive. I studied the current cadastre map and the land register for the village of Biskupija and the town of Knin. When it came to tracking specific housing issues of the postwar era, I was very fortunate to have access to the documents of the housing commission for the municipality of Biskupija. For information about the socialist agricultural cooperative, I looked at documents relating to the cooperative in the municipality of Biskupija. However, many documents dating from the socialist era had been destroyed during the war or were simply classed as 'missing'.

1.6 Outline of the book

The following chapter provides an historical background to the field sites, focusing on property and social and ethnic relations through to the end of World War II. It stresses that from the end of the seventeenth century to the socialist era, land was not just the economic basis of life but was decisive in moulding the social identity of the mainly rural, patrilineally organised family households in the Knin region. In many respects, the Orthodox and Catholic villagers comprised a coherent social group. However, the demographic explosion, monetarisation and modernisation that marked the nineteenth century led to the impoverishment of the peasants and the fragmentation of land. In the framework of the nation-building processes of the early twentieth century, during which time Orthodox peasants became

Serbs and Catholics became Croats, land took on the added function of national territory in addition to its economic and social functions. The political polarisation of the two national groups culminated in World War II in a civil war along shifting national allegiances.

In Chapter 3 the focus turns to the transformations as well as the continuities in property relations and social and ethnic relations between 1945 and 1995. This chapter covers the socialist era and, briefly, the 1990s war. Under socialism, land as property lost some of its importance but remained an economic asset as well as a source of social identity. The economic significance of private agriculture was strengthened by a successful partnership between the agricultural cooperative and private farmers. However, with growing industrialisation and economic development, other assets and entitlements gained in value too. In comparison with land, houses now became the more significant form of property – both privately owned houses, which dominated in the villages, and the 'socially owned' apartments found in the town. In addition, other social entitlements, like the right to education and medical care, became important. This encouraged migration from the villages to the town of Knin and the construction of a new type of society that went beyond ethnic and national borders. Still, ethnicity and nationality never fully lost their influence, which was also true with respect to access to property. With the growing economic and political crisis in the 1980s and the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia, the importance of ethnicity and nationality increased. During the war, national identities, enforced through the use of violence, became the key issue in property rights and access to property. The region of Knin belonged to the Serbian-occupied Krajina, where Croatian houses and land were occupied or destroyed following the expulsion of their owners.

This analysis is extended in Chapter 4 to look in detail at the impact of the violent conflicts of the 1990s on the property relations of various sections of the population. The population is differentiated primarily according to national group membership, but, just as local Croats differ markedly in outlook and property strategies from their refugee counterparts from Bosnia, so there are many differences between local Croats and Croatian settlers. Furthermore, for all groups it is also important to take age into account. The chapter shows that the relations people have with their property were embedded in an interplay of changing cultural ideologies, legal regulations, social relations and property practices in which the role of violence was one decisive aspect. It shows that property strategies are not based on economic and national considerations alone, but importantly on emotional attachments to houses and historical experiences. One important difference in the property strategies relates to different perspectives towards

Serbian private property: while local Croats generally recognised and respected the existence of Serbian private property, the Croatian settlers argued that they had gained rights to Serbian houses on account of the war and on the basis of their nationality.

Chapter 5 concentrates on housing conflicts in the locality of Knin in the years following the reintegration of the territory into the Croatian state. Based on the observation that the new legal provisions and programmes for the return of Serbs and the restitution of their property adopted under the pressure of the international community were poorly implemented (if at all), the chapter investigates the underlying reasons and consequences. It describes how the local power-holders maintained principles of national solidarity as well as private interests and thus found many ways to circumvent the implementation of the provisions. Another problem in the restitution of (Serbian) property was the lack of ownership documents, which had its origin in socialist and even pre-socialist times. The legal proceedings concerning former socially owned property indicate that this property was treated differently in legal terms to private property, making it even more difficult to reclaim rights to such property. However, it also shows that despite the national framework for housing transactions, which made Serbs the primary losers in housing conflicts, many Croatian settlers also lived in insecure conditions since they depended more on local power-holders to secure their housing rights than on their citizenship rights.

Issues relating to access to land and agricultural land use following the 1990s war are investigated in Chapter 6. The chapter shows that in contrast to housing, nationality was not the most important factor in matters concerning land; rather, the crucial factor was being a native of the region – which became a key element of policies put forward by the international organisations. Most farming was at a subsistence level and relied mainly on private property, social networks and a moral economy based on kinship or community relations dating back to socialist times. This partly united local Croats and Serbs. Among locals, the emotional and symbolic meanings of land as 'homeland' were often impediments to the economic use of land, i.e. its sale or rent, even where people did not work it and most land lay fallow. At the same time, this intimate relationship with the land differentiated the locals from the Croatian settlers who held only restricted use rights to it, had little emotional connection with it and were essentially only newcomers and outsiders in the community. For agricultural entrepreneurs attempting to progress beyond traditional forms of agriculture, the ability to be innovative and take risks, and to establish connections with members of international organisations transcended nationality and offered the best route to economic success.

Chapter 7 describes how communities were recreated through religious celebrations and rituals after the war in the 1990s and examines the ways in which these festivals and rituals were used, directly and indirectly, to express views on property claims. In describing the celebration of public festivals, the chapter demonstrates the tensions between national propaganda and the everyday life of the inhabitants of Knin. It stresses that in public narratives the lines of national conflict were constantly being reinforced by the symbolic construction of a Croatian national homeland and the commemoration of the war, an activity heavily supported by the Catholic Church. The discursive construction of national communities and a Croatian national homeland helped to legitimise the occupation of Serbian property by Croats. Looking at intra-group processes and what the participants of the festivals declared privately, the study shows that national borders partly lost their meaning while local identities gained prominence. Part of the local rural population even began to join their neighbours of the other nationality when they celebrated particular festivals and invited them to their own festivals. Here, they relied on local customs established over many decades and even over centuries. In this sense, festivals not only became national platforms but places in which local Croats and Serbs re-established community ties across national boundaries. These alliances between local Serbs and Croats, expressed in joint festivals, have had an impact on property conflicts as well, since they served to legitimise Serb claims to their homes and supported local Croat claims of being superior to Croatian settlers.

The political elements of the municipal election campaigns held in May 2001, and particularly the influence of the national parties in Knin, are looked at in detail in Chapter 8. It analyses the ways in which the Catholic Church, political parties and individual politicians dealt with social and national questions of unemployment, settlement and return to Knin, as well as the occupation and repossession of property. In this connection, it illuminates the normative and pragmatic strategies used by the various actors as well as the ritualisation of politics. We see that because of the continuing lack of citizen rights, which form the basis of property and housing rights, and because of the heavy use of national propaganda to unite social and national questions, the population of Knin – Croats and Serbs alike – still voted along national lines.

The book concludes with a final chapter summarising the findings and an epilogue which brings the postwar situation up to date (as of 2005).

Chapter 2
Property, Social Organisation and Ethnicity: The Knin Region before Socialism

2.1 Introduction

When embarking on my fieldwork in the Knin region I quickly became aware that the various national groups used different versions of history as evidence of their group's exclusive claim to the region. Local intellectuals, as well as local and national politicians who heard about my project, tended to point out particular pertinent facts to support their case: for example, the exact date of the founding of the first settlements (of Serbs or Croats), or the building of the Orthodox or Catholic churches. Others, who sought to explain their victimisation by the other national group, asked me if I was aware of the history of crimes and discrimination against their own national group and urged me not to forget to mention this in my book. Others again referred to history to demonstrate the tradition of peaceful inter-ethnic co-existence between local Serbs and Croats. Generally, I came across very ambivalent and contradictory 'historical' explanations for ethnic conflict, social organisation and property claims during my research. In these explanations, historical facts were often plucked out of their historical context to serve specific group interests, including current territorial and property claims.

However, it made me realise that history mattered very much in the investigation of property relations and ethnic conflict. It was evident in the public face of Knin as well as in the narrative interviews with informants. In the years following the war, the town of Knin had become a symbol of the Croatian 'liberation' of the Serbian-occupied territories and was declared 'the cradle of the Croatian nation' itself. Reference was made to the medieval Croatian king Zvonimir, who had his seat in Knin – a fact proudly proclaimed by a sign at the entrance to the town: '*Hrvatski kraljevski grad Knin*' (Croatian Royal Town of Knin).

The importance of Knin in the 1991–95 war and the significance given to its history was based on the town's geostrategical position. For

centuries, Knin lay on the border of two or even three empires. Present-day Croatia is shaped like a boomerang, with Knin now connecting the two wings of the republic: the long Dalmatian coast and its hinterland, and the Pannonian Plain and the Croatian capital, Zagreb. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Knin has been situated at the intersection of rail routes that lead in all four directions.[7] During the 1990s war, the establishment of the 'Republic of Serbian Krajina', with Knin as its capital, had severe consequences for transport and communication in Croatia.[8]

In order to build an understanding of the dynamics of property relations and ethnic conflict in the Knin region today, this chapter discusses continuities and discontinuities in the history of property and ethnic relations in the Knin region up to the end of World War II. The first two sections offer historical background information on the issues of settlement, household and inheritance structure, as well as economic and demographic development. The third section focuses on the changing meaning of religion and the establishment of a Serbian and Croatian national identity. Changing political allegiances and the experiences of violence in World War II receive special attention in the final section, since they represent a highly important and emotionalised topic of discourse in the present.

Generally, it is important to note that the historical developments in the Knin region did not occur in isolation but were always part of larger developments centred elsewhere. Thus, the people of Knin were not the driving force of this development, but were forced to react to larger dynamics originating from the centres of power. It is against this broader background that I shall examine the motives and values underlying the decisions and actions of people in the region of Knin.[9]

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[7] Until the outbreak of war in 1991, it was possible to travel from Knin to Zadar in the northwest of the country, to Split and Dubrovnik in the southwest, to Zagreb in the northeast and to Bosansko Grahovo in the southeast.

[8] In 2003, a motorway was constructed that runs from the coast to Zagreb, bypassing Knin. It is therefore likely that Knin will lose the historical advantages of its geostrategical position.

[9] This historical chapter relies partly on archival sources (e.g. births, deaths and marriages registers, cadastre maps and land registers of Biskupija and Knin) to illuminate the history of property transmission, as well as the use of land. However, while archival sources are important for a full understanding of the cultural and social history of the region, they are not directly pertinent to the topic of this book. That is why this chapter mostly relies on secondary sources relating to Knin and Biskupija, written mainly in Croatian by historians and people who often had some personal attachment to the region. For example, I discovered the autobiography of a former teacher from Biskupija (who taught there until 1936) (Ješaić 1999), the chronicle of the Franciscan monastery of Knin between 1912 and 1968 (Bezina

2.2 The establishment of a regional society

The town of Knin is first mentioned as *Tenen* in the year 950, its name later becoming *Knin* (Paić 1998: 11). In 1040, at the time of the Croatian king Krešimir IV, a diocese was founded in Knin, thereby increasing its status. During the reign of King Zvonimir (1074–88), Knin became – for the first and only time in Croatian history – the seat of a Croatian king (Crkvenčić 1991: 191; Paić 1998: 12, 13).[10]

The village of Biskupija, at that time most likely called *Kosovo* – named after the flocks of birds in this area (Kosovo means 'black bird') – occupied a special position in early medieval times. This was due to the five churches that were built by the Croatian rulers (*vladari*) on village territory between the ninth and the eleventh centuries. After having been transformed into a religious site, the village of Kosovo was renamed *Biskupija* ('seat of the Bishop') (see Jelovina 1986; Gunjaca, 1991: 155–89).

When Croatia lost its independent status in 1102, the influence of the town of Knin and the village of Biskupija declined. In the following centuries, kings of Hungary ruled the lands of the Croatian crown until, in 1522, after a long period of war, the Ottomans succeeded in conquering the town and the region was integrated into the Ottoman Empire (Paić 1998: 13–17).

Under Ottoman rule, a new population moved into the empty and devastated region. These were Vlach shepherds from the neighbouring Ottoman territories, mainly of Orthodox belief with a Catholic minority (Crkvenčić 1991: 194, 195). Although under Ottoman rule Knin became an

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1998) and a collection of biographies of the regional partisan 'war heros' of World War II (Medić and Đujić 1980). In publications edited in the war years of the 1990s, Croats mostly wrote about 'Croatian' cultural heritage and history (Crkvenčić 1991, 1993; Paić 1998), while Serbs wrote about their 'Serbian' history and affairs (see Nakicenović 1999). In this way, two or more different historical and cultural perspectives were created that often contradict each other. Some, however, also indicate the similarities in the history and culture of local Serbs and Croats. Recently published studies about the socio-economic situation of the region in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries (Ganza-Aras 1986; Peričić 1993) have also contributed to my survey of the historical literature.

[10] Zvonimir was able to unite the two lands of Croatia, the Pannonian and Dalmatian territories. Because of the geostrategical position of Knin, bridging the two lands, he chose Knin as his seat. After Tomislav and Krešimir, Zvonimir was the last king who ruled a state-like kingdom of Croatia.

Islamic town with a Muslim garrison,[11] the population in the countryside was allowed to keep its Christian beliefs (Soldo 1993: 146).[12] The Christian population, both Orthodox and Catholic, were called Vlachs or *morlaks* by the Ottomans, a designation also later applied by the Venetians (cf. Soldo 1993: 146; Wolff 2000). In the village of Biskupija, public wells and a *kula* (fortified tower) serve as a reminder of the settlement of the area in Ottoman times.

Frequent battles between the Ottomans and Venetians, especially in the second half of the seventeenth century, repeatedly devastated the frontier region. After Venetian and Habsburg troops finally conquered the fortress of Knin,[13] the Venetians established the region of Knin as part of the Military Border. The town of Knin once again assumed an important strategic position on the borders of the Venetian Republic with the Ottoman Empire and became one of its centres of defence. In order to attract people to settle in the devastated and abandoned territories, the people of the Knin region initially enjoyed a number of privileges. The Venetian regime granted them ownership rights over the land they cultivated, as well as over any abandoned dwellings.

In the framework of this settlement policy a new Orthodox population of Vlachs arrived,[14] including returnees who had earlier fled the region during war. A Catholic population from the northwestern 'Croatian' lands settled the area, led by a number of Franciscan priests (Paić1998: 20). They found themselves in an empty land save for a small number of native inhabitants.

In the village of Biskupija only one Orthodox family – that of Nikola Bukorović – stayed after the Ottomans left the area. Most of the other

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[11] The Catholic church and the Franciscan monastery in Knin, first mentioned in the mid-fifteenth century, were destroyed by the Ottomans, and a Muslim mosque was built on the site (Paić 1998: 18).

[12] The Franciscan monks of the nearby Dalmatian monastery of Visovac, which was not destroyed by the Ottomans, sustained the Catholic believers. The Orthodox population was assisted by the monastery of Archangel on the river Krka near Knin until 1674, when Ottoman soldiers looted the monastery.

[13] After struggles with the Habsburg and Venetian forces, the Ottomans were defeated by the Habsburg troops at Vienna in 1683. With the signing of the peace treaty in Karlovac in 1699, large parts of Dalmatia came under Venetian rule (Paić 1998: 17–18). Knin was occupied by *krajišnici* (soldiers) from Kotar (Soldo 1993: 147).

[14] For example, documents reveal that a group of 5,000 people of Orthodox belief arrived from Bjelaja (Bosanski Petrovac). They received land in the villages of Plavno, Mokro Polje, Otona and Pađene, not far from the town of Knin (Paić 1998: 20).

Orthodox family names found today can be traced back to families who arrived in 1689 from a region in Bosnia called *Glamoč*, about 60 kilometres from Knin across the Dinara mountains. Nineteen Orthodox families who settled in Biskupija were headed by Radovan Prijić (Čoralić 1993: 171), among them most likely the families of Nikola and Mihajlo Popović, and Simo Ikovać. About five Catholic families named Vidović also settled in Biskupija from the nearby village of Polača (Gunjaca 1991: 181; Nakičenović 1999: 93–5).[15] The surnames Bukorović, Prijić, Popović, Ikovać and Vidović can still be found today in the village of Biskupija.

However, in the *acquisto nuovo*, the newly acquired territories of the Venetian Republic, of which the Knin region was a part, access to land was free only for a limited time. By the eighteenth century, when the Venetians had stabilised the borders, land was formally put under state ownership and distributed to the peasants on condition that they rendered a *decima*, a tenth, of their harvest to the state (Paić 1998: 20–1). As well as paying a land tax, the peasants also had to serve the *providur*, the chief of the regional and military administration, and his executive based in the fortress, the *serdari* (officers). Labour included the provision of wood, the building and repairing of bridges and the transportation of military supplies (Novello 2000: 64, 65). Furthermore, every second or third adult male was obliged to serve as a soldier in securing the borders of the Venetian provinces of Dalmatia in times of emergency or war (Soldo 1993: 164). Arrangements were similar in other areas of the Krajina, e.g. the Habsburg parts of the border region with the Ottoman Empire (Kaser 1997: 378–83). But the status of peasants living under the military order of the direct border regions differed from those living under the *kolonat* regulation common in the older parts (*acquisto vecchio*) of Venetian Dalmatia. Under the *kolonat* pact, landowners, who mostly lived in the towns, handed over property to a *kolon* who had the right to use the land based on a private agreement (lasting between one and 60 years, but often also inherited over generations) in exchange for a part of the yield (Clewing 2001: 60).

To better control land possessions and tax yields, the Venetians ordered the creation of cadastre maps and land registers. The policy of fixing land ownership through legal treaties between the household head and the state was aimed at controlling and disciplining the incoming Orthodox Vlachs who had been mostly semi-pastoral (Wolff 2000: 54). With the distribution of land they were expected to begin a settled existence and learn new ways of working the land (Soldo 1993: 165).

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[15] In the Catholic church registry of 1712, eight families with the surname Vidovići were listed (Soldo 1993: 150–1). Other sources reveal that, in 1761, 58 Orthodox and 12 Catholic families were living in Biskupija (Soldo 1993: 153, 154).

The new land registers listed the buildings, the size and quality of land,[16] the household members and movable property in the form of livestock, as well as the owner's obligations towards the state.[17] According to a cadastral book of the village of Biskupija dated 1709, the village had 339 inhabitants, 12 riding horses and 63 cart-horses, as well as 185 oxen, 195 cows, and 234 sheep and goats (Čoralić 1993: 171). This listing reflects the vital importance of livestock, called *blago*, a term synonymous with 'wealth'. Communal land, mostly enclosed by a stone wall, is also mentioned in Biskupija's early cadastral books.

From the late 1750s, land in the Knin region was redistributed according to the status and the number of household members. Town citizens, and in particular families of the Venetian nobility, acquired much new land in this reform, while the *morlaks* received relatively little (see Novello 2000: 71).

Looking at the household and residence patterns in the rural areas, it can be seen that people with the same surname lived in hamlets (*bratstvo*) that were patrilinear and virilocal. The larger lineages in Biskupija were Popović, Bukorović, Dmitrović, Prijić, Milić, Sladić and Katić, in addition to several smaller ones. The family surname was transmitted according to a patrilinear principle, and the male children mostly carried the first name of the grandfather of the male line.

According to the cadastre list, some of the hamlet families lived in extended and complex family households in which parents shared a household together with their unmarried daughters, (married) sons, and the sons' wives and children. Such households in the earlier ethnographic/anthropological literature were termed *zadruga*; locally they were referred to as *zajednica.* Another distinctive feature of the *zajednica* was equal male inheritance and the exclusion of women from the ownership of land and houses. Theoretically, all adult men could request the division of property so that land would be divided equally. However, in practice, the type of ownership determined differences in the disposal of property and its management, i.e. decision-making authority in the family. The father often

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[16] Most of the landholdings were between 0.33 and 0.5 hectares (1–1.5 *kanap)* in size. The biggest landholding of about 8 hectares (24 *kanapa)* was in *Kninsko polje* and was owned by a citizen from Šibenik, Antonijo Semouić (Čoralić 1993: 172). Units of measurement of the size and quality of the land varied and included *gonjaj*, *pretica*, *dan oranja (fiornata)*, *vreteno*, *kanap*, *zdrijep*, *pas.*

[17] For some villages, the cadastre was created in 1709 by Cosme Foventinija with the name '*Rubriche delle ville del territorio di Knin*', and for other villages between 1735 and 1737 by Petar Cigani. The latter also drew up the cadastre map for Biskupija and the neighbouring villages of Polača and Orlić.

had the right to dispose of land as he wished during his lifetime and to bequeath it either by word of mouth or in writing to members of his family – or to withhold it from them. This right gave him great authority within the family and land was often not divided from one generation to the next.[18]

The existence of a *zajednica* not only had 'cultural' but also economic roots. With the obligation of the men of the household to serve the *providur* through labour and military duties, household size had to allow for sufficient family members to work on the farm in order to balance the obligations of the men who were in military service. Furthermore, the division of labour within the household was quite elaborate, as households relied almost exclusively on their own production. Shepherding (often in the mountains), agriculture (on defined plots) and household labour encouraged larger households that acted as a single production unit. Nevertheless, large households were often the ideal rather than the norm. The regular cycles of household division produced a 'mix' of larger and smaller households in the village (Tomasevich 1955: 182; Hammel 1972; Mosely 1976a; Grandits and Gruber 1996; Nakičenović 1999). Furthermore, common production units did not always mean that the family lived under one roof. The distribution of labour sometimes made it necessary for family members to live at a considerable distance from each other (Tomasevich 1955: 178). This was partly also the case in Biskupija where the village was composed of three parts: Biskupija itself, situated on the edge of the fertile plain of *Kosovo polje*, and then the settlements of Lopuse and Pliskovo, situated on the karst mountain slope. The three settlements were closely linked, as families often had members in each of them: one part of the household was based in the mountainous area tending cattle and sheep, while the other was engaged in agriculture in the valley. Both family subsets exchanged their products and acted as a single production unit. Houses belonging to particular families – Popović, Bukorović, and the like – can still be found in the plain and on the karst plateau today.

Turning again to the special property regulations of the *aquisto nuovo,* it is important to note that peasants held the right to buy and sell land. In practice, however, they refrained from selling land as it provided them with a living and was considered extremely valuable. It was usually only those

[18] The phenomenon of male inheritance and complex household patterns is abundantly described in scholarly literature. For the Balkan region see, for example, Halpern 1953; Filipović 1971; Halpern and Halpern-Kerewsky 1972; Mosely 1976; Todorova 1993; Kaser 1995, 2000. For Croatia, see Čapo 1991; Grandits and Kaser 1998; Grandits 2002. For Biskupija see Soldo 1993: 153.

peasants who were facing poverty who would sell off parts of their land.[19] They most often sold it to citizens (*građani*) of Knin to whom they owed money. Frequently, they then became fully dependent on the new landowners, with the peasant essentially now an agricultural labourer (*težak*) in the service of the new owner and having to work on the alienated plot and deliver perhaps as much as half of the harvest to the new owner. In this way, a kind of *kolonat* (feudal) relation was established in this part of Venetian Dalmatia, too. Some peasants had a close relationship with the owner of the land they worked, characterised by dependency and loyalty. They gave 'presents' to the owners, in the form of chicken, lamb, *pršut*, eggs, butter, sausages, hay or hardwood. This was seen as a kind of payment (*dar – honoranze*) at harvest-time or on church holidays such as Easter and Christmas. Čoralić (1993) also mentions another form of land transaction termed 'gifting' (*darivanje*). Sometimes, daughters received land and other gifts as a kind of dowry (especially if the family had no sons). However, there were other forms of gifting land outside the family, e.g. to neighbours and even newcomers, which often initiated a prolonged relationship based on giving gifts and returning obligations. A peasant who gifted land would expect the recipient to feed his family for the rest of his life (depending on the size of the gift). Often, the recipient even had the obligation to give special presents on festive days like Christmas and Easter and to provide wine for Carnival. The peasants who gifted their land were mostly people who had no children to care for them in old age. A third kind of land transaction was the *zakup*. This was a way of buying a piece of land by working it and delivering half of the harvest to the former owner (mostly for some four to five years, but sometimes even up to 10 years, depending on the size of the piece of land).

A further privilege of the peasants in the border region of the Venetian Republic was that they could follow their religious beliefs relatively freely (Paić 1999: 19). At the same time, however, the Venetian rulers used religion to reinforce their power. In the late seventeenth century, the Venetians established contact with the Franciscan and Orthodox parishes with the aim of accelerating the settlement of the region (Soldo 1993: 155). The Catholic and Orthodox priests and monks were requested to keep registers of all births, deaths and marriages and in this way aided the Venetian administration in controlling the population. But relations between the representatives of the Orthodox Church and the Venetian regime remained weak, in contrast to those between the Catholic representatives and

[19] As well as selling land, people in the Knin area also sold hay and cattle. Oxen were traded for ploughing, and people often paid in kind using cereals or sheep (Čoralić 1993: 173).

the Venetian regime which were much stronger (not least because the Venetians were Catholic) (Soldo 1993: 155–6).

This special relationship between the Venetian regime and the Catholic Church was apparent from the beginning when the Venetian *providur* granted the Franciscans 60 *kanapa* (20 hectares) of land in the village of Potkonje near the castle of Knin in 1689. In addition, they were allowed to build a small church and a hospice using stones from the walls of the destroyed mosque, which was situated beneath the castle. The hospice later became a Franciscan monastery (and it still is today), serving as a visible sign of the power of the Catholic Church in the Venetian Republic (Soldo 1993: 147). Official visits by the Catholic bishop of Šibenik to Knin and the surrounding village parishes and churches also helped to reinforce the position of the Catholic Church in both public and private arenas (Soldo 1993: 149).

By contrast, the Orthodox population was not allowed to receive a public visit from its bishop. Furthermore, unlike the Franciscans, only a few Orthodox priests could speak Italian, the language of the military officers and administrators (Soldo 1993: 150). The Orthodox peasants only rarely went to church (Soldo 1993: 158), and tended to be influenced by other forms of 'traditional' beliefs. The most important celebration was the *krsna slava*, the celebration of the patron saint of the male line of descent, in short called *slava*. Aspects of this festival date back to pre-Christian times. The male household head performed special ritual tasks during the festivities, such as lighting the *slava* candle to worship the (male) ancestry and breaking the *slava* bread. Everyone with the same surname living in the same village celebrated their *slava* on the same day. This symbolised the common ancestry of these families and underlined the corporate identity of the (perceived) lineage. Furthermore, *slava* festivals had an agrarian component, expressed in the symbolism of the grain and bread presented on the *slava* table, which was linked to the peasant way of life and the fertility of the ancestral lands (cf. Filipović 1928, 1930; Rheubottom 1976; Kaser 1993; Todorova 1993a). The maternal kin (mother's brothers [*ujak*] and the son-in-laws), neighbours and friends who were not celebrating their patron saint (*krsna slava*) on the same day would come to visit.

2.3 Everyday life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

When Knin came under Austrian rule at the end of the eighteenth century, and again after 1813,[20] the region retained its border character since it was

[20] Austrian rule in Knin was interrupted by a short period of French government. In 1805, Austria had handed over Dalmatia to Napoleon. The defeat of Napoleon's

situated on the boundary of the Habsburg territories and the Ottoman Empire. Neither the legal property system nor the social and economic organisation of the village changed fundamentally. The Knin region was still basically rural and poor, with most of the population living in the countryside and struggling to make a living from agriculture (Stojsavljević 1972). There was almost no industry, and agricultural technology remained underdeveloped even at the turn of the twentieth century and beyond, at least for the majority of the peasants (Jakir 1999: 130ff). Peasants still lived exclusively on a combination of cattle-rearing and agriculture. Many village houses built before World War II had only one room with an *ognjište* (hearth) (Ješaić 1999: 11–12).[21]



Plate 3. Stone house built at the end of the nineteenth century in the Popovic hamlet of Biskupija (summer 2000).

The area was one of the poorest regions of Croatia characterised by a stony, barren soil and heavily fragmented landholdings (Bićanić 1936). The region also suffered from droughts, especially in summer. In the village of

Great Army in Russia in 1812 and near Leipzig in October 1813 was followed by the collapse of French rule in Dalmatia, including Knin. This allowed Austria to regain power (Roksandić 1988; Paić 1998: 21–2).

[21] The term *ognjište* is generally used in the sense of 'belonging' and in the 1990s was often used synonymously with 'home' and 'homeland'.

Biskupija, for example, there were only a few springs and a few wells, and most of these were common property. Donkeys were used to transport the water from the well to the houses and if people did not own a donkey, women would carry the water in containers on their backs. Many individual households therefore sought to collect rainwater from the roofs of their homes and drain it into cisterns (Ješaić 1999: 16). Because there was so little water during the summer months, most people worked their gardens only in spring and autumn, when rain was more plentiful, planting onions, cabbages, lettuces, potatoes and beans.[22] However, the village of Biskupija enjoyed better conditions for agriculture than many of the other villages in the region because the land in the lower part of the village, which belonged to the *Kosovo polje* and extended to the Kosovičica river, was very fertile (Peričić 1998–99: 71).

The arable land (*oranica*) was worked with a wooden plough pulled by oxen, and sometimes with a hoe. Vineyards represent the most recent form of agricultural investment in the Knin area and these became increasingly widespread in the course of the nineteenth century.[23] From the grapes, peasants produced *rakija* (brandy) and wine. Peasants also raised sheep, goats, cattle, pigs and chickens. In general, however, the villagers did not intensify their livestock breeding until the later nineteenth century (Peričić 1998–99: 74).

Until World War II and even beyond, peasant food was very monotonous and of relatively modest quality. Villagers most often ate *pura*, a porridge made of maize, which was served with onions or garlic and with milk or sour milk. In winter, people would eat sour cabbage and potatoes. Only in the richer houses did people bake bread on Sundays and other festive days. Bread made from wheat was served as a kind of cake since it was very rare and sweeter than corn bread. A piece of meat or salty ham was added to the dish only on special days and for celebrations such as weddings and carnivals (e.g. on the final day of the Lenten fast) (Ješaić 1999: 17). Orthodox families served their best food of bread, meat and wine to celebrate the patron saint's day (*krsna slava*) (Ješaić 1999: 18). *Pršut* (salted and smoked ham) was seldom eaten by the family itself, but was sold or given to the merchants to whom a household owed money.

In general, there were deep social and economic disparities between the peripheral region of the Dalmatian hinterland and the towns on the Dalmatian coast, like Split and Šibenik, which were also the centres of

[22] Fruit trees were not widespread and the climate was too cold for olives (Peričić 1998–9: 72).

[23] In the 1890s, many vines died due to phylloxera. As a result, wine production decreased by as much as 90%.

political life (cf. Jakir 1999; Clewing 2001). However, even in the Knin region the social differences between town-dwellers and villagers were enormous and perhaps even more significant than any religious differences.[24] However, the great majority of the population still lived in a rural setting. In 1869, for example, the municipality of Knin had 30 villages with 23,800 people, with only 1,760 people living in the town of Knin itself (Peričić 1998–9: 67).

In the town of Knin, the majority of the population was made up of merchants, workers (mostly agricultural) and landowners who lived off the rent they received from peasants (Peričić 1998–99: 67). Italian remained the language of scholars and administrators, although in 1869 only 10% of the population (124 people out of 1,271) spoke Italian, while 1,048 persons – both Catholic and Orthodox – spoke only Serbo-Croatian (Maschek 1888: 53).

In the villages, almost all inhabitants were peasants, apart from the priest, the teacher and a number of merchants. While domestic handicrafts (such as weaving and wood carving) were quite developed, professional crafts were rare in the region of Knin even into the 1880s. Generally, few people beyond the priests and monks were literate, and in many cases the latter were only partially literate (Ješaić 1999: 102). This was most likely the case in Biskupija, although a village school was opened in 1871 on the initiative of the Orthodox parish priest. Throughout the nineteenth century, the priests of the Biskupija parish church came from the richest family of the Popović lineage. The male members of this family were literate, owned books and enjoyed the highest prestige in the village.

As in the times of the Venetian Republic, the village was headed by a *glavar* or *kapetan sela* (village leader, headman) and a *seoska ronda* (village board), which assisted the village headman, right up to the outbreak of World War II. The members of the village board, which consisted of eight to ten male villagers, were elected by a village assembly led by the *glavar*. Together with the village leader they were obliged to mediate in conflicts such as disputes over grazing land or boundary disputes with the neighbouring villages. The village assembly met two to three times a year in the village church and provided a forum for the men of the village to discuss local problems and concerns, e.g. permission to cut wood in the common forest, or complaints about damage to the fields. They also decided on collective work to build common roads, clean up public spaces and maintain wells and field boundaries (Ješaić 1999: 25–6).

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[24] In 1842, 27,762 people lived in the region of Knin of whom 20,507 were Orthodox, 7,194 were Catholic, 31 were Greek Catholic and 21 were priests (Peričić 1998–9: 66–7).

The rural community was not egalitarian and differences between households increased in the decades up to World War II. In Biskupija, some lineages were considered poorer than others, e.g. Bračić, Katić and Lukavčević were poorer than Popović and Bukorović. Moreover, differences also ran through the same lineage with some Popović households, for example, being wealthier than others. Land ownership also created social barriers: people from families who were not equally rich (or poor) in terms of the amount of land they owned would not marry each other (Ješaić 1999: 7), and those who owned more land enjoyed a higher social status in the village. An example of a wealthy and respected family in Biskupija is that of Onisim Popović at the beginning of the twentieth century. Popović was well known for being a 'rich peasant and municipal representative, as well as an intelligent villager' (Bezina 1998: 46). He had managed to buy land and cattle from other villagers in Biskupija and became the richest man in the village. He possessed 34 landholdings, altogether comprising between 30 and 40 hectares. Given that most households scarcely owned more than three or four hectares, this was indeed a large 'estate'.

Despite the introduction of the Austrian Civil Code in the second half of the nineteenth century, which theoretically granted inheritance rights to all (male and female) offspring, the practices of equal male inheritance and the existence of patrilocal, complex households did not disappear because they were sanctioned by customary law. According to Peričić (1998–9), in 1842 the average household in Biskupija had about eight members. During my fieldwork in 2000, several older people from Biskupija remembered that their parents had lived together with the father's parents and/or with the father's brothers in a complex, extended household. Most of these *zajednicas* were divided before World War II. For example, Jelića Popović, born in 1926, remembered stories about the division of the *zajednica* in the years 1923 and 1924. Her father and his brothers, who up to that time had lived together in a house with their families, divided the land and founded individual households. They divided the house, too, and built a new entrance door for the separated household.

With the equal division of property between all male offspring, land tended to become even more fragmented. When there were several sons, each received an equivalent share of the land. Most often the father died without writing a will and the siblings followed customary inheritance practices.[25] However, the division of property was not necessarily reported to

[25] Sometimes, brothers who inherited the same shares of land devised practices to prevent extreme fragmentation of the plots. An informant from Biskupija reported a practice at the end of the 1940s in which the existing plots were grouped into more or less even shares by bundling them together after the death of the father. Thus,

the regional court. By not registering the property, people avoided administrative costs and taxes. At the village level, formal administrative confirmation was not needed to prove ownership since people simply relied on customary law.

The growing social differences between the villagers and the residents of Knin, as well as among the villagers themselves, were intensified by the increasing monetarisation that set in during the second half of the nineteenth century. At this time, large annual markets were held in Knin at which many different products were offered, especially livestock. In addition, there was a market (*bazar*) every Sunday, to which people from the local Krajina region, as well as from the neighbouring regions of Lika and Bosnia, would bring agricultural products including livestock, wool and wood (Ješaić 1999: 98). However, during the whole of the nineteenth century and up to World War II, the financial income of the peasants, who mainly practised subsistence farming, remained minimal (Jakir 1999: 136–7, Clewing 2001: 66). As soon as a peasant was in debt to a trader, it was very difficult for him to free himself of his obligations. While many peasants lost their land, traders increased their landholdings through money-lending. As described above during Venetian rule, the new landowners often administered the land by employing poor peasant families (*težak*) on a daily basis (often also women and children) or by giving land to leaseholders who were compelled to deliver various quotas in goods, depending on the kind of land, its quality and type of cultivation. Leaseholders generally had to cede a quarter of the harvest, but sometimes a third or even a half (Čoralić 1993: 173–7).[26] The landowners were either citizens of Knin (many of Italian origin), priests or wealthy peasants (*seljak*) (Čoralić 1993: 173). In Biskupija, two families of Italian origin owned larger landholdings on which peasants worked as tenants: the trader family Bulat, which was based in the village itself (in the Bukorović hamlet), and the lawyer family Monti, which lived in Knin. Other peasants with only small landholdings worked as day-labourers on land in *Kosovo polje*. This land belonged to a wealthy landowner from the nearby town of Drniś who produced hay for the horses belonging to a military academy in the vicinity of Biskupija. However, individual citizens of Knin and Drniš owned only medium-size landholdings compared to the estates in the regions where a *kolonat* or feudal system was common.

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four brothers divided the land into four numbered bundles. The brothers then placed the numbers in a hat and each drew a lot. Each brother was then entitled to the plots in accordance with the number he had drawn.

[26] The latter was especially true for the cultivation of maize. In addition, it was common for the leaseholder to plough the land of the *gospodar* with his oxen.

The difficult economic situation of the peasants was further aggravated by the demographic transition. In the last decades before 1900 the fertility rate in the Croatian lands was very high at about 40 births per thousand (in Croatia-Slavonia between 40.86 and 45.01 in the period between 1850 and 1900 and in Dalmatia between 33.74 and 40.06). However, many children as well as adults died due to poor nutrition and disease (malaria, typhus and tuberculosis). This resulted in a gradual but steady population increase. From the 1880s onwards the mortality rates began to fall markedly, which sparked a massive population increase (Gelo 1987; Peričić 1998–99: 66; Ješaić 1999: 109). Many people were forced to leave the villages *trbuhom za kruhom*, 'with an empty belly for bread' since their small plots could not feed them (cf. Medić and Đujić 1980: 5).[27] Sometimes, migrating family members received a little money from relatives to establish a new household elsewhere, but in general parents and brothers were unable to buy the land share of those who had migrated. Instead, according to customary law, the latter still received an equal share of land even when they did not intend to return. In the property registers, many migrants were recorded as owners of a piece of land, and they would even transmit those rights to their sons, although in practice they no longer lived there, let alone worked the land. The continuing co-ownership of land by brothers who had migrated from the village had strong emotional and social significance. To own land in the locality confirmed that they still belonged to the community and to that patrilinear group of descent. In most cases, the migrants' share of land was worked by the brothers who had remained in the village, paid the taxes and raised crops, or used the land for hay or grazing. However, there were also cases in which land remained uncultivated because a co-owner who had left the village did not want his brother at home to work his land.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, and with the increasing predominance of small household sizes, the property relations of women changed too, and it became more important for a woman to receive a marriage dowry beyond the usual items of clothing and household goods (e.g. bed linen and tablecloths). Instead, the new dowry often included livestock and land (Čapo-Žmegač 2000: 502). The size of the potential dowry would be indicated by a *gendar*, a necklace of *ducats*, which a young unmarried woman would wear at *sajams* (local church festivals). At *sajams*, the local boys as well as their parents and other family members could tell how wealthy a girl's family was from her *gendar,* and what size of dowry could be expected (cf. Medić and Đujić 1980: 177).

[27] Concerning overall population growth, the rate of natural increase due to the high birthrate was therefore effectively offset by the rate of outmigration.

However, despite new laws introduced in the late nineteenth century that granted women equal inheritance rights, and despite the growing pressure for women to receive a dowry, women's rights were often ignored, even up to World War II and to some extent even under socialism (Čapo-Žmegač 2000: 502). In general, a daughter would receive land only if she was the only child, or if her father was wealthy. The majority of women received their share only symbolically, as they were expected to refuse and donate it to their brothers upon marriage, which was generally the case. Other women received a share of the mother's inheritance, which she had brought into the household by marriage and this piece of land was held apart from the family property and handed over to the daughter upon her marriage.

One of the first signs of economic development in the Knin region was the construction of the railway in 1912, which linked Knin to Split and Šibenik on the coast.[28] There were other economic modernisation projects, such as a private factory making concrete walls and staircases, which opened in Knin in 1902 (Peričić 1998–9: 79), but these economic innovations were not aimed at providing goods or labour for the villagers but functioned in the interest of the urban market (Ganza-Aras 1986: 137–9).

Nevertheless, as in other parts of Dalmatia, the growing inclusion of peasants into the market economy began in the early twentieth century with the foundation of financial institutions. These institutions lent the peasants funds under favourable terms, thus freeing them from the exorbitant rates of moneylenders. Priests and teachers played an important role in the establishment of savings associations (Ganza-Aras 1986: 150–66). In Knin, a *seoska blagajna*, a rural credit union, opened in 1902 and after eight years had about 40 members. It supplied small loans for the purchase of agricultural tools (Peričić 1998–9: 86). The Serbian Credit Union in Knin was especially active, with 490 members in 1907, and became associated with the Serbian *Središna Banka* in Primorje (Ganza-Aras 1986: 161; Peričić 1998–99: 86). However, these credit cooperatives did not have the capacity to help the peasants out of poverty (Ganza-Aras 1986: 177–8). The 1920s and 1930s were a time of recurrent economic crises, with low prices for agricultural products and low wages for unskilled labour, while industrial products were expensive (Bićanić 1936: 39–42; Ješaić 1999: 98).[29] The debts of the peasantry increased. Furthermore, a land reform planned for the

[28] A connection to Zagreb via Ogulin was opened in 1925, and in 1948 the link between Knin, Bihać and Zagreb. In 1967, the line between Knin and Zadar was completed, and Knin was thus connected to a third harbour on the Adriatic Sea (Paić 1998: 24).

[29] For example, a Singer sewing machine cost approx. 5,800 Dinara, the price of five to six good oxen. Even the richest farmer could not afford one (Ješaić 1999: 98).

1920s, which should have freed the peasants from their lease contracts with landowners, was not fully implemented (Erlich 1966; Tomasevich 1975: 365; Jakir 1999: 148ff.).

2.4 The nationalisation of social life

The social organisation of the lives of Catholic and Orthodox peasants were very similar up to World War II (and in the subsequent socialist period). After religious belief, it was the village community that formed a person's main frame of identity. However, as I deduced from the marriages registers of the Orthodox parish church in Biskupija from the nineteenth century, marriages between members of Catholic and Orthodox families were quite rare.[30] In the few cases of inter-confessional marriage, the bride was expected to convert to the husband's religion before the marriage ceremony. Because of the patrilocal marriage pattern, hamlets were mostly, but not always, inhabited by discrete Catholic or Orthodox populations.

Orthodox and Catholic villagers were connected more by godfatherhood than by marriage. Godfatherhood was seen as the union of two families rather than of two persons, and was often passed down from generation to generation (Hammel 1968: 88). Such relations were mainly motivated by friendship and neighbourliness between social equals who helped each other in agricultural tasks as well as in the organisation of life-cycle festivals such as funerals and weddings, and regularly exchanged news. The nineteenth-century births and marriages registers of the Orthodox parish church in Biskupija showed that the Catholic Bračić family had a godfather relationship with the children of the Orthodox Katić family who lived close by. The same applied to one of the Vidović families, which acted as collective godfather to the children of an Orthodox Sladić family. Other families belonging to the Catholic Vidović and Bračić lineages were godfathers to Orthodox families of the Tatomir, Kukoj and Milić lineages who lived in the neighbourhood. The choice of godparents was also partly based on clientelistic arrangements with socially more powerful groups such as landowners and city dwellers for whom peasants worked or to whom they were in debt.[31] For example, in the mid-nineteenth century, the landowner Sinobad who lived in Knin was godfather to several children in Biskupija. Social prestige and personal relations motivated Catholic and Orthodox families to invite and visit each other for religious festivals, such as

[30] In this region, the bride's place of origin together with her surname can be seen as a significant marker of religious affiliation.
[31] For a wider discussion of clientelistic relations in the Balkans, see Hammel 1968.

Christmas, Easter or the Orthodox patron saint's day (*krsna slava*), as well as for weddings and funerals.

In order to understand the changing social relations and the growing importance of religion as a marker of social and (increasingly) of national differentiation between the Catholic and Orthodox populations in the region of Knin from the end of the nineteenth century, it is necessary to turn to the wider political stage. In the course of the nineteenth century, a Serbian state came into being and gradually gained independence from Ottoman rule. As elsewhere throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the 'national question' became a highly charged political issue. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Serbian foreign policy, with its 'historical aspiration' for territorial expansion, came into strategic conflict with Austro-Hungarian ambitions. When Austria-Hungary occupied and later annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, this strategic conflict became even more marked. In the urban centres of Belgrade and Zagreb, and especially among the educated elites in Vienna (the centre of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), national awareness was growing. The emerging Serbian state oriented itself towards creating a Greater Serbian Empire. This plan had been formulated as the policy of *Načertanje* (outline, draft) by Serbia's powerful politician Ilija Garašanin, the Minister of Interior to the Serbian dynasty of Karađorđević, in the 1840s. This policy sought to re-establish the medieval empire of Tsar Dušan, which included a large part of Dalmatia, Croatia and Bosnia (Sundhaussen 1993: 22–3). For Croats, the process of nation-building constituted part of the national question within Austro-Hungary. Croatian territory was divided into three parts at this time: civil Croatia and Slavonia were possessions of the Hungarian crown, the Croatian–Slavonian military border was administered as a separate militarised region, and Dalmatia (including the region of Knin) belonged to the Austrian crown.

Knin, as the seat of the early medieval King Zvonimir, was accorded great significance in the national representation of Croatian history. The archaeological remains from the rule of King Zvonimir were interpreted as a sign of the existence of an early Croatian state, serving to legitimise the founding of a contemporary Croatian state. National aspirations were boosted when, in the late nineteenth century, during the construction of the railway, workers discovered the remains of a medieval Christian basilica on *Kosovo polje* (the Kosovo plain) near Knin. This find sparked systematic archaeological excavations throughout the late nineteenth century which uncovered the ruins of five medieval churches, as well as a pediment portraying the Virgin Mary, in Biskupija, all of which were classified as originating from the rule of King Zvonimir. This spectacular discovery led to the foundation of the Croatian Archaeological Society in Knin, led by the

Franciscan Lujo Marun. For Croatian historiography, as well as for the Croatian Catholic Church, the archaeological discoveries established the importance of Knin both as a Croatian royal centre and as the heart of the Christian religion for the Croatian people in medieval times (Žanić 1996: 56–8; Paić 1998: 26). The remains of the medieval churches and monuments were seen as key evidence that the territory of Knin was Croatian, and that the Croatian people could look back on a long state history (Žanić 1996).

At about the same time, competition between Croatian and Serbian nationalists began. Besides territorial claims, the issue of whether Knin was a Croatian or a Serbian city was at stake. Because Serbs and Croats possessed very similar languages, religion received increased meaning as a national marker (Sundhaussen 1993: 24, 25). In 1866, the Orthodox church in Knin, situated close to the Catholic church, was rebuilt on a larger scale. Some time later, between 1874 and 1889, Serb religious leaders from Belgrade erected an Orthodox church dedicated to Saint Lazar on a small hill on the *Kosovo polje* near Knin, only some 300 metres from the Catholic church of Sveta Ana. The decision to build the Sveti Lazar church on *Kosovo polje* was very deliberate. The name '*Kosovo polje*' held an important place in Serbian national historiography. It was reminiscent of the territory of Kosovo (presently under UN administration), which had once been the centre of the medieval Serbian state. The name was even better known due to the legendary medieval battle between Serb-led forces and Ottomans in 1389. According to the legend, King Lazar, to whom the church was dedicated, died as a hero during the battle on 28 June 1389 – the day known as Vidovdan. The battle was followed by the destruction of the Serbian kingdom and the establishment of Ottoman rule throughout the region. However, the legend also held the divine promise that an eternal Serbian state would come into being (Gunjaca 1991: 187).

Following the construction of the church of Sveti Lazar on Knin's Kosovo plain in the 1880s, the celebration of Vidovdan each year in the region became one of the most important Serbian national holidays. With the new church, the area of Knin assumed new significance (Gunjaca 1991: 155–88). The incipient 'national' interests of intellectuals and church representatives, the majority of them from outside the region, however only slowly penetrated the life of the peasants.

During World War I, few people in the Knin region fought for a national idea. The people of Knin, Croats as well as Serbs, were mobilised by the Austro-Hungarian forces against the kingdom of Serbia.[32] World War I created much hardship for the peasants in the region of Knin, regardless of

[32] Of the 70,000 soldiers from the Croatian lands mobilised in the war against Serbia in 1914–15, around 15,000 were of Serbian ethnicity (Roksandić 1991: 119).

their religious or national affiliations (Plenča 1986: 70).[33] At the same time, however, the Catholic and Orthodox population groups were still influenced by national ideologies.

During the war, the Catholic holidays, such as the celebration of *Sveti Ante* in the Catholic church at Knin, as well as the festival for the church of Sveta Ana near Biskupija, were especially popular and were visited by Catholics from across the whole region (Bezina 1998: 50). By contrast, Serbian Orthodox celebrations such as the Vidovdan festival were observed only on a small scale or did not take place at all, since local Serbs did not dare celebrate a festival associated with Serb national symbolism while the Habsburg monarchy was at war with Serbia (Bezina 1998: 51, 72). Participation in such festivals sometimes had adverse consequences, as can be seen in the case of an incident linked to Onisim Popović, the richest peasant in Biskupija. Onisim Popović was well known in the region for his charisma, his ability to settle land conflicts between the villages, as well as for his interest in Serbia and Serbian writers. In contrast to most of the villagers, he was literate and owned several books. Like other men in the region of Knin, he was mobilised for service in the Austrian army at the beginning of World War I, but returned to Biskupija soon afterwards. In 1914, he took part in a celebration for Dositej Obradović, a Serbian writer and political activist who had lived from 1743 to 1811 and had contributed to the foundation of a semi-independent Serbian state in the early nineteenth century. A soldier from the nearby village of Žagrović consequently accused Onisim of being a traitor and of provoking hostilities against the Austro-Hungarian forces. He was imprisoned and shortly afterwards sentenced to death. After his execution, it was verified that his sentence had been based on perjury (Plenča 1986: 70–1; Bezina 1998: 46; Ješaić 1999: 91). Still, it can be assumed that this event stirred the emotions of many people in the Knin region and contributed to the creation of a 'national consciousness' of Catholic and Orthodox peasants and their transformation into Croats and Serbs.

Following World War I, the foundation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 under a Serbian dynasty based in Belgrade, the former capital of Serbia, left many Croatian political activists dissatisfied. This was hardly surprising, as according to Tomasevich (1955: 236–7), 'not only the Serbian political parties, but also the two other Serbian controlled political factors, the Crown and the Military, tended toward the establishment and perpetuation of Serbian hegemony in the new state'.

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[33] During World War I, livestock fell by 30% (horses, for example, were requisitioned for the army), contributing to the distress (Peričić 1998–99: 75).

In this political atmosphere, the 'Croatian question' became the principal internal issue until the break-up of inter-war Yugoslavia in 1941. It was intensified after the assassination of the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Stjepan Radić, in a session of parliament in 1928 (Tomasevich 1955: 237; Sundhaussen 1982: 26–7). In 1929, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the parliament was dissolved and a dictatorship was installed.

The lack of solutions for the pressing national questions, in conjunction with the discrimination of the Croatian nation by the ruling bodies, inadequate legitimacy for the kingdom, corruption and clientelism in the political sector and the catastrophic social and economic situation, all led to a major political crisis and increased the national tensions between the Serbs and Croats in the region of Knin and elsewhere in the mid-1930s. At the same time, the Yugoslav Communist Party (KPJ), which was operating underground, enjoyed increasing popularity.

In the 1930s, religious activities by both the Catholic and Orthodox churches in the Yugoslav kingdom took on a new importance. Church festivals became increasingly nationalised, and the army played a significant role by staging military parades in the towns. This was also the case in Knin. In the village of Biskupija, the Catholic church of Sveta Maria was erected next to the ruins of the medieval basilica in the second half of the 1930s. The renowned artist Ivan Mestrović designed the sculpture of the Virgin Mary, which was placed behind the altar. Mary is depicted in clothing similar to the traditional costume of the village women, with a scarf over her head. The artist Jozo Kljaković was contracted to paint a fresco of the coronation of King Zvonimir on the walls of the church, while the newly built chapel was to commemorate and symbolise the 'ancient' union between the Croatian people, their state and Catholicism, and to serve as a symbol for the future of the Croatian nation (Soldo 1988: 5, 31, 39; Žanić 1996: 58). When the church was completed in 1938, many Croatian priests and some 8,000 visitors came from all over Croatia to attend the opening (Soldo 1988: 40, 53–5, 115; Bezina 1998: 56, 115–22).

This was the first time that national ideas found active support among the rural population in Biskupija. The committee responsible for the building of the church consisted of Franciscan monks and Catholic traders from Knin and was supported by the Catholic peasants of Biskupija. Andrija and Jure Vidović, as well as Jozo Jelovina, were members of the committee, and nearly every Catholic peasant from Biskupija signed a contract to work on the church for ten days without payment (Soldo 1988: 31, 46). Given the political tensions of the time, it would seem that the creation of the Zvonimir memorial church increased national antagonisms between local Serbs and

Croats. It is, however, unclear if the local Serbian community was split on these matters. Documents from 1938 suggest that many participants in the church opening procession were of Orthodox belief, most likely people who lived in the neighbourhood of the church and the wider region of Knin (Soldo 1988: 6). At the same time, the Franciscan Petar Bezina noted that on the evening of the festival, around 90 Serbian *Četnik*s, i.e. Serbian royalists supporting the rule of the Serbian crown, arrived to provoke the crowd. However, the situation did not escalate (Bezina 1998: 122).

It was not only the opening of the Catholic church of Sveta Maria but public celebrations generally that became increasingly politicised and were frequently transformed into military events. For example, on 6 September 1938 – the birthday of King Petar II – the Orthodox inhabitants of Knin flew state (Yugoslav) flags, while the Catholic population hoisted Croatian flags. On 6 January 1939 (Orthodox Christmas Eve), soldiers carrying the Orthodox *badnjak* (yule log) were accompanied by military music and Orthodox people shouted: '*Dole Maček, dole papa, dole fratri!*' ('Down with Maček [the leader of the Peasant Party], down with the Pope and down with the Catholic priests!') (Bezina 1998: 127). At the same time, there were a number of violent clashes between Serbs and Croats in the region of Knin. The politicisation of public events and the experience of violence divided the various groups along national lines and increased the national awareness of the people in the Knin region.

2.5 The violent disruption of regional society in World War II

In April 1941, German troops began to bomb Belgrade and crossed the borders of Yugoslavia with their Italian, Bulgarian and Hungarian allies. Within a matter of days, the Yugoslav army had capitulated. Serbia proper became a protectorate of the Germans and was administered in collaboration with the Serbian quisling regime of the officer Milan Nedić. Soon afterwards, the Serbian royalist and nationalist *Četnik* movement began a guerrilla war against the occupiers and those they considered 'enemies' of the Serbian kingdom or Serbian people. Before long, they had expanded their activities to other parts of the destroyed Serbian kingdom inhabited by Serbs, which included the region of Knin (Manoschek 1993).

The fascist Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatske –NDH), supported by Hitler's Germany, was proclaimed on 10 April 1941 in the territory of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was led by the previously rather marginal Croatian nationalist *Ustaša* movement with Ante Pavelić as its *Poglavnik* (leader) and followed the ideas of Italian fascism and German national-socialism. This was expressed in anti-Serb, anti-Semitic and anti-communist ideology together with aspirations for a Greater Croatian state.

Ustaša troops were extremely brutal and persecuted Serbs and members of other nations within the territory of the NDH. 'Spontaneous' pogroms were organised on a large scale. Many people were also systematically expelled or deported to concentration camps. The most prominent concentration camp, in which perhaps as many as 600,000 to 700,000 people were killed, mainly Serbs but also Jews and Roma, was situated in Jasenovac not far from Knin. In addition, around 300 Orthodox churches and monasteries in the NDH were looted and devastated (Sundhaussen 1995a, 1995b).

Given the tense atmosphere in Knin in the late 1930s, it was not surprising that many Croats welcomed the declaration of the Independent State of Croatia (Bezina 1998: 178). Many Croatian army officers who had served in the Royal Yugoslav Army immediately joined the army of the new Croatian state, the *Domobrani*. At the same time, the *Četnik* movement caught hold among the Serb population in several villages in the region of Knin. This led to violent clashes among the local population, which was increasingly divided between people in the NDH army, the *Domobrani* or even the *Ustaša* (later all of these were subsumed within *Ustaša*) and the *Četnik* fighters. For example in Polača, a Serbian village neighbouring Biskupija, members of the *Ustaša* killed the Orthodox priest Dušan Popović, who was one of the three sons of Onisim Popović from the village of Biskupija who had been sentenced to death in World War I. Soon afterwards, Onisim Popović's second son, Pajo Popović, established a *Četnik* group, which he named after his father. Thus Onisim Popović suddenly became an iconic hero of the local *Četnik* movement. There was also violent confrontation between neighbouring Catholic and Orthodox villages. For example on 9 April 1942, *Četnik*s from Biskupija started firing shots at the neighbouring Catholic village of Potkonje, whose population had joined the *Domobrani*. A four-year-old child was killed (Bezina 1998: 186).

In the Knin region, the ongoing fighting between the *Domobrani* and *Ustaša* on the one side and the *Četnik*s on the other was accompanied by a massive movement of the civil population as they sought to flee the hostilities. Since parts of the rural area were controlled by the *Četnik* movement, Catholic families as well as the Catholic priests were forced to seek safety in *Ustaša*-controlled villages and in the towns of Knin and Drniš. Often their houses were destroyed, and some refugees even lost their lives. Likewise, many villages in *Kosovo polje* were under *Četnik* leadership, forcing the Catholic population to flee. However, Serbs were ousted in areas controlled by the *Domobran* and *Ustaša* (Medić and Đujić 1980; Bezina 1998: 185, 187).

As the war progressed along national lines, the churches and historic cultural monuments took on new meaning as symbols of national and

territorial belonging. This often resulted in the destruction of sacred monuments of the other national group (Bezina 1998: 184). For example, in March 1942 the *Četnik*s desecrated and partially destroyed the Catholic Zvonimir memorial church in Biskupija by breaking down the doors and windows, destroying the Mestrović sculpture and the Zvonimir fresco, and removing the church bells (Bezina 1998: 185).[34]

However, the confrontation between the *Četnik*s and *Ustaša* was by no means typical of other regions in the former Yugoslavia. Whereas the Knin region can be seen as a *Četnik* stronghold, in many other regions of the NDH the situation was different. Here the majority of Serbs joined the multinational Partisan movement under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, who also drew in an increasing number of Croats opposed to the *Ustaša*. The Partisan movement was derived from the Communist Party and called for a 'war of liberation' against the foreign invaders and occupiers, as well as against the Serbian nationalist *Četnik* forces and the Croatian nationalist NDH regime. Its aim was to found a federal Yugoslavia based on acceptance of the multinational character of the state (Sundhaussen 1993: 88–90).[35]

A local section of the Tito Partisans was founded in Knin in the spring of 1942. With the entry of a third party into the conflict, political allegiances changed several times and enemies were not always easy to detect. Until the summer of 1942, *Četnik*s and Partisans were often lumped together as *četničko-komunističko bandita* (*Četnik*-communist criminals) by the local *Ustaša*.[36] This changed on 16 June 1942 when Partisans killed the *Četnik* leader Pajo Popović, the second son of Onisim Popović, in his house in Biskupija, leading to a deep rift between Partisans and *Četnik*s. Indeed, for a short time after this event, *Ustaša* and *Četnik* troops fought together against the Partisans. However, one month later, on 28 July 1942, *Četnik*s damaged and then destroyed the houses of Catholics in Biskupija, resulting in a rift between *Četnik*s and *Ustaša*.

In this chaotic situation, political allegiances divided single villages, irrespective of national group membership. In the Serb-Orthodox village of Plavno, for example, the upper part of the village supported the *Četnik*s, while the lower part supported the Partisans. In some cases, political

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[34] Furthermore, in the summer of 1942 the Catholic church of Saint Ana, situated close by, was damaged by *Četnik*s. The Catholic population living in the neighbouring hamlet fled.

[35] The aim of introducing a socialist order which would overcome national identities and which would nationalise and collectivise private property was kept secret until the end of the war.

[36] A military collaboration between *Četnik*s and Partisans was widespread in other parts of the former Yugoslavia too until the end of 1941 (Džaja 2002: 84).

allegiances even divided families. Often it was not ideological loyalty that moved people to opt for one side or the other, but a pragmatic view of politics. Pressure from powerful local leaders or simply the wish to survive and come out on the winning side were important motivations (see also Sundhaussen 1993: 89). Dušan, a Serb of about 60 years of age from Biskupija, explained his father's attitude in the following way:

> My father did not want to join Tito, he told me. He had said: 'I don't want to join. Take the gun and try to catch me.' He was a peasant, he worked here on the land, in the vineyard, the same as I do now. But then the *Četnik*s called him up and he had to go. He went and returned. He was undiplomatic enough to state that *Četnik*s had burned some houses in Bukovica and had said: 'This is for the state and for the king.' The houses burned and my father had scolded them: 'The houses are burning, the flag is flying, but with what will you await the king once you have burnt everything, once you have destroyed everything?'
>
> My father was a wonderful man but he never showed any interest in politics. For him the land was the source of his life – that is what he thought about and worked for.

In the course of 1944, the Partisans came closer to victory and more and more peasants converted to the Partisan cause. One of these latecomers to the Partisan ranks was the third son of Onisim Popović, Dušan Popović. He, together with many other peasants from the Knin region, took part in the decisive battle near Knin on 12 December 1944, when the Partisans finally brought the region under their control.

Given that Dušan's older brother Pajo had been killed by Partisans, Dušan's allegiance appears at first sight to be a betrayal. However, it illustrates that peasants acted for very pragmatic reasons, i.e. to ensure they placed themselves on the winning side. It is likely that Dušan wanted to secure his family's strong position in Biskupija (as well as in the wider region of Knin) and therefore decided to join the dominant political organisation despite its involvement in the death of his brother.

2.6 Conclusions

For a considerable period of its history the region of Knin was a border territory with a defensive role. As a result, it had a specific social organisation on which the property system was predicated. One feature of this property system was that peasants in principle held property rights to the land they worked in exchange for the obligation to defend the border. Patrilocally organised households represented the central production unit and land was kept as the common property of all (male) household members.

The privately owned land had primarily economic functions, as it served to secure the peasants' livelihoods. The rural population, however, also had strong social and emotional relations to the land – it was the basis of the symbolic relationship to the male descent group and the village community, and ownership of land was a marker of social differences within the village. Private ownership of certain pieces of land was therefore inseparably linked to certain families and such ownership bestowed high status.

Another feature of the property system was the increasing fragmentation of land from the nineteenth century onwards, which derived from equal male inheritance in combination with the demographic transition and the monetarisation of the economy through which an increasing number of peasants lost their land titles and became dependent on landowners based in the urban centres. At this time, social differences within the villages were growing and townspeople, as well as the state authorities in general, gained increasing influence on village life.

However, social organisation was also dependent on the relations between the Orthodox and Catholic peasantry. Up to the nineteenth century, Catholic and Orthodox peasants – who together made up more than 90% of the population – in many respects represented a common social group, while state authorities, often in the form of townspeople who collected taxes and enforced military service and labour for communal projects, were perceived as 'foreign' powers. But the rise of the process of nation-building in the course of the nineteenth and in the first half of the twentieth century increasingly underlined religious affiliation as a marker of nationality, and religious festivals and historic monuments became closely linked to 'national' identities. As well as its social and economic functions, land increasingly took on the meaning of a national territory and 'homeland', over which a certain national group had exclusive rights. During World War II, national identities in many ways defined the front lines along which violent clashes between the civil populations took place.

Nevertheless, the communist Partisan movement that emerged as the 'winning' group did not define itself on a national basis. It established itself as a leading power in the region of Knin, as well as the decisive power for the new Yugoslav state. The victory against nationalism and fascism served to legitimise the extensive transformation of local social organisation and property regimes from 1945 onwards. The next chapter discusses the structures of this new social organisation, and examines which changes – and also which continuities – were introduced during the socialist era, especially with regard to property and nationality.

Chapter 3
Property, Social Organisation and Nationality under Socialism and during the 1990s War

3.1 Introduction

Socialism unquestionably changed the region of Knin. Under socialism, the region experienced industrialisation and urbanisation, with social housing projects and vigorous private house-building activities that transformed the towns and villages. Streets were (re-)named in honour of important events or outstanding figures linked to the 'socialist revolution', and monuments were erected in central public places to emphasise the new socialist identity.

By 2000, most of the monuments in the region had been destroyed and replaced by new ones recalling the Croatian victory over the local Serb insurgents in 1995. Streets were renamed according to the Croatian version of recent history. However, not everything could be eradicated or modified. Socialist housing complexes, as well as the factories built during socialism, still structure the town of Knin. Less visible but all the more perceptible, the socialist past appears in the dialogue of people in and around Knin. Nearly all my informants used socialism as a frame of reference against which to evaluate their present situation – and to legitimise their claims. This is understandable because most informants grew up during the socialist era, and indeed some elderly people had lived through its entirety (some 45 years). During this time, socialism refashioned their value system and they adjusted their lives accordingly. In this way, they had developed specific relations with regard to private and so-called 'socially owned' property (a form of property which had been introduced by the socialist regime), and also with their neighbours and the community in general.

However, in 2000, in my conversations with Serbs and Croats, it became clear that they had different memories of their lives under socialism. While Serbs described this time mostly in positive terms, Croats were more critical and sometimes pointed out that they had suffered discrimination. In particular, memories about the Partisans and Communists were discussed with quite contradictory emotions. While some people, especially Croats,

remembered Partisans and Communists as being hostile towards their own nation, many Serbs respected them for having overcome the extreme nationalism of World War II and for having treated everyone as equal. But Serbs and Croats also evaluated access to socially owned housing differently. Here it became obvious that formal property relations – as expressed in the official state ideology and in laws – differed from the actual property relations on the ground. This gap between ideology on the one hand and practice on the other led to ethnic antagonism and a re-evaluation of property rights that reshaped the actual property relations of the 1990s and created a new legitimation for property claims.[37] To understand current property relations and ethnic conflict, it is therefore necessary to look back at the processes occurring under socialism (1945–1990).

By looking closely at property relations during the socialist era, I intend to widen the scope of the study by including collectivised land as well as private land, private housing and socially owned housing. The right to socially owned housing can be called a 'resource right' or a 'social entitlement', as it had a similar status to other entitlements introduced by the socialist system, such as the right to education and employment. By including socially owned housing, the definition of property as including only private property is widened. Thus, I deal with property forms that were fundamental to the population of the Knin region during the socialist period (Hann 1998a: 7; F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann 2001).

The analysis in this chapter focuses on the political, social and economic contexts of the emerging property relations. For example, the socialist property regime is linked to economic changes, such as agricultural reforms and the process of industrialisation. In the same way, social transformation as a consequence of socialist policy – for example, changing household structures, gender relations, kinship networks, and so on – are described for the Knin region, and the ways in which property relations were already based on or linked to political and/or national affiliations during socialism are also explored. The final section of this chapter will introduce a discussion of the social and political changes that affected property relations in the recent war period (1991–5). However, thorough explanations for the reasons behind the war in the Knin region and a detailed reconstruction of the (military and political) developments of the war are beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, a basic understanding of the general background is needed to be able to follow the analysis of the postwar situation presented in the following chapters. Thus I present a brief outline of the development of the violent events that took place from 1990 to 1995 and the major

[37] For theoretical considerations of this phenomenon, see K. von Benda-Beckmann 2001.

developments in property relations that took place at the same time. Special attention is paid to those topics that cropped up frequently during discussions with my fieldwork informants in 2000–1 and which appear to have great relevance to decisions made today regarding property.

Here it is essential to note that two different stories of suffering and war emerge from discussions with informants – and they are essentially incompatible. The suffering of one group was created by the other; the (military) victory of one side was the defeat of the other, and so on. While Croats called the war *Domovinski rat* ('homeland war'), symbolising Serbian aggression against their Croatian homeland, Serbs generally denied this and saw the war instead as a civil war based on the diminished rights of Serbs in Croatia. Furthermore, Croats spoke openly about their experiences in war while Serbs were much more reticent. This might be explained by the fact that the Croatian military regained the territory in 1995 and the Croatian version of the war became the official one in Croatia, while the Serbian insurgents were defeated and the Serbian war narratives were not publicly aired. Several topics presented in this section will be discussed in more length in the following chapters.

3.2 The establishment of the socialist state

When the Partisans under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito took control of the whole of Yugoslavia in 1945, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Komunistička Partija Jugoslavije – KPJ)[38] came to govern the newly established Federal Peoples Republic (Federalna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija – FNRJ).[39] The region of Knin was part of the Croatian republic. The legitimacy of the new state was based on overturning the nationalist and fascist policies implemented in World War II. The Partisan-led 'peoples liberation war' against the German and Italian occupiers, as well as against the *Ustaša* and *Četnik*s, built the foundation for the Communist Party's takeover of power in the 'liberated' state. The new ideology of *Bratstvo i Jedinstvo* ('brotherhood and unity'), which was aimed at overcoming national differences and creating a socialist nation of 'Yugoslavs', represented one side of the new regime (Sundhaussen 1993: 102; Denich 1994: 375-6). This ideology became especially powerful on account of the many victims of war among the population in general; Yugoslavia had one of the highest numbers of war victims in World War II with more than 1

[38] From 1952 the party was known as *Savez Komunista Jugoslavije* (SKJ), The League of Communists of Yugoslavia.
[39] Later *Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija* (SFRJ).

million people killed, either in the struggle against occupation or in the fighting between the domestic militias (Sundhaussen 1993: 94, 95).

The beginning of communist rule was accompanied by massive persecution. Based on their political orientation during the war, more than 65,000 people were declared to be 'enemies of the people' or 'war criminals' (Džaja 2002: 93). Both actual and perceived political enemies – primarily *Ustaša*, but also *Četnik*s and others – were imprisoned and in some cases killed shortly after the Partisans took control. The most prominent of these events took place in the last days of the war when Partisans killed tens of thousands of fleeing soldiers and adherents of the Croatian *Ustaša* regime near Bleiburg, a town situated on the Austrian–Slovene border. (Sundhaussen 1993: 93).

In the early years following the communist takeover, violence and persecution were also experienced by people in the region of Knin. For example, a Croat from Biskupija told me: 'My father's brother was imprisoned by Partisans in 1945. No-one knew anything about him, he was in Varaždin [a town in Croatia near the Slovenian border].' Croatian informants from the village of Potkonje near Knin recalled that some of their relatives had been killed in Bleiburg. Others who had been involved in political agitation against the Partisans fled abroad to avoid punishment or simply to save their own lives after the Partisan victory. Many people – mainly men – from the former *Četnik* bases on the Kosovo plain, such as the villages of Markovac and Riđane in the vicinity of Biskupija, left the country, going mostly to Great Britain or Canada.

In the eyes of the communists, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches were seen both as a vehicle of national sentiment and as an institution that exploited the people – not least because they had owned significant estates before socialism. Consequently, the power of the churches was radically reduced from the outset of socialist rule in Yugoslavia and priests were prosecuted (Sundhaussen 1993: 103). The Orthodox and Catholic Churches had already been hit hard during World War II, with hundreds of Serbian Orthodox clergy killed and hundreds of monasteries and churches destroyed (Ramet 1992: 150). According to a letter issued by Catholic bishops in Yugoslavia and sent to Tito in September 1945, some 243 Catholic priests and four nuns were killed over a period of four years, 169 Catholic priests were still in prison and 89 unaccounted for (Ramet 1992: 126). This very difficult situation for the Catholic and Orthodox Churches continued until 1953 and did not improve significantly until 1966.

While I was unable to find out much about the position of the Orthodox Church in the region of Knin after World War II, the chronicle of

the Franciscan monastery notes that the Franciscan monastery of Knin was also affected by the new policy of the socialist state:

> In 1946, the new priest was sentenced to a year of forced labour. In 1947, a number of Catholics were jailed, one was even sentenced to death. In 1948, the government seized all church registers (*matične knjige*) and in 1951, the abbot of the monastery was sentenced to two years of forced labour because he demanded taxes from a peasant who was working on church land (Bezina 1998: 209, 210).

Another wave of penalties and political persecution surged across the country after Tito's break with Stalin in 1948, when Yugoslavia was excluded from the Communist International (*Comintern*). At this time, more than 8,000 political activists who were accused of collaboration with the Soviet Union or of being sympathisers of Stalin were imprisoned on the Adriatic island of Goli Otok (Sundhaussen 1993: 108; Džaja 2002: 123). Again, this wave of political violence also reached the region of Knin, with three people from Biskupija being sent to Goli Otok (according to local informants).

During the socialist era, public debate on the political cleansing conducted by the Partisans and KPJ, as well talk of the 'other' victims of World War II, was banned (Denich 1994; Džaja 2002: 72, 123). This silence was imposed to avoid open conflict on these matters and to reinforce the legitimising strategies of the Communist Party and the ideology of 'brotherhood and unity' (Sundhaussen 1993: 94). At the same time, the Partisan victims of war were celebrated as war heroes, and former Partisans as well as members of the Yugoslav Peoples Army wielded enormous influence in public life.

But force and the silencing of crimes were not the only means of supporting the power of the socialist Yugoslav state. The new government propagated the general restructuring of a socialist society and the overthrow of traditional values. Social and economic progress and the overall modernisation of society, including the establishment of a new property regime, became very important in the legitimising discourse of the Communist Party and the ruling elite in Yugoslavia over the next decades (cf. Djilas 1962).

From the very first years of the new state, the far-reaching reconstruction of the economic order supported the reconstruction of the war-torn regions, as well as progress generally. This included the nationalisation of the entire economy (except the agrarian sector) by 1948 and the Five Year Plans for economic development that were first introduced in 1947, initially using the Soviet model (Sundhaussen 1993: 103–4). Young people were mobilised as (unpaid) labour, and in the Knin region, villagers

remembered being involved in the reconstruction of houses destroyed during the war, and the building of roads and railways.

There were also major improvements in education. In the region of Knin, the Partisans had introduced literacy campaigns even before the end of war (Ješaić 1999: 169–71). The strict rule that women and girls must participate in these courses was seen as revolutionary in the eyes of the peasants. Until then, many girls had only irregularly attended school despite some compulsory years of schooling, and peasants often preferred to see their sons work on the land than extend their education. An elderly woman, who was a school teacher at that time, told me:

> I always listened when my older brother helped my younger one with his homework so that he would get through school. My father was always against studying: he said it was better for a son to stay on the land, not to mention me as a girl. However, I finished six years of schooling before World War II and I was the best pupil. That is why everybody told me that I was made to become a teacher. I therefore went to Šibenik to finish a one-year course and then another year to become a teacher. After the war, I worked three shifts in the literacy campaign, as there were many illiterate people. I also had evening classes, which my parents did not like as I was still unmarried.

Under socialism, villagers' attitudes to education changed. Education became a marker of social prestige, and higher education was recognised as a vehicle for raising one's social and economic status (Halpern 1967: 294). Young people from the villages around Knin and from the town of Knin itself were sent to Zagreb and to towns on the Croatian coast for their further education. They also went to other republics of the Yugoslav state, such as Serbia and Slovenia, often staying on there to take up jobs. This rapidly increased the mobility not only of young men but increasingly of young women too (cf. Simić 1973a).

This path to the cities changed the prospects of young people by introducing them to the opportunities offered by urban life, opportunities that were unknown to their parents' generation. A transformation of traditional family values, which affected gender relations and relations with the land, was set in motion and caused varying degrees of conflict within the family (cf. Halpern 1965). At the same time, the new educational opportunities positively influenced the image of the socialist system. Dušan, a Serb of about 60 years of age from Biskupija, explained these changes as follows:

> There is a change in mankind which everyone must create for himself: I call that the revolution in and for yourself. I feel normal being on the street, in a town, in a theatre, at a dance and during

> discussions. This cannot be [the case] for someone who has not seen the world, who is not educated. This was achieved during socialism, because 70 to 75% of the population in the old Yugoslavia were illiterate before. The Partisans taught them to read and write.

In 2000, people in Biskupija all agreed that the village of Biskupija had made general progress during the socialist era. They also stressed that many young people from Biskupija achieved a remarkable level of education during this time. The former teacher expressed it this way:

> There are many intellectuals in Biskupija. Two scientific doctors, two with a master's degree. Furthermore, there are about 80 who completed university, about 30 who have higher education and many with a solid education … But in general this was a village that was very developed, very advanced. Biskupija had a far higher standard than other nearby villages.

These comments raise the question as to why the village of Biskupija had reached a higher standard than other villages in the vicinity. Generally, the socialist system did not offer entirely equal social entitlements to everyone, but based them partly on political attitudes. Although the KPJ granted gifted pupils a scholarship to attend high school, the children of Partisan fighters had special access to scholarships and could generally find a job more easily or reach a good position in the socialist system. The same applied for children whose parents were in the KPJ. This suggests that Biskupija was a village that stood out due to its communist commitment. Before turning to this issue in more detail, I will briefly describe the general processes of development that Biskupija as well as other villages in the Knin region underwent during socialism.

Electricity came to Biskupija in 1968. In the 1970s, a *dom kulture* (cultural centre), a new school and a new store were built in the hamlet of Popovići. In 1978 the roads were (partly) paved, phone lines were installed in 1987 and in 1989 construction began on a water pipeline that was to provide every household with running water. However, because of disruption caused by the war of the 1990s, the pipeline remained unfinished and even today is not operational. Still, Biskupija was seen as a relatively prosperous and developed village compared to other villages in the vicinity of Knin.

Under socialism, the development of villages was partly regulated by the *mesni odbor* (also called *mesna zajednica*, *lokalna samouprava*, or *seoska vlast*), a village board of about 6–10 people elected by the villagers, who decided on improvements to their village and hamlet and who collected the *samodoprinos* (financial contribution of the households for communal affairs). The development of villages was furthermore partly regulated by the

municipality, which also gave financial support. The bridge between village and municipality was the local village leader, who was elected by the socialist council (*socijalistički savez*) and represented the village on the municipal council (*općinski savez*).

The relatively successful development of Biskupija's infrastructure was linked, first and foremost, to the popularity and political influence of the village leader, Dušan Popović, who managed to generate funds for the village from the communist municipal council. Dušan was fully committed to communist ideology, which even encouraged him to 'reinterpret' village history. For example, under Dušan's leadership a Partisan monument was erected in the middle of the village square close to the Orthodox church, the *dom kulture*, the village shop and the school. In a way there was nothing special about this, as most villages boasted a Partisan monument in the village centre,[40] and indeed a *dom kulture*.[41] However, in Biskupija the monument listed the names of some 70 local Partisans, despite the fact that Biskupija was famous for having been a *Četnik* stronghold during World War II (most of the *Četnik*s joined the Partisans at a very late stage of the war). Even the grave of Dušan's brother Pajo, who had been a *Četnik* leader during World War II and was killed by Partisans, was adorned with a communist red star. To give oneself a communist identity was a common strategy for gaining power in the communist system, even if it was clear that other, and partly opposed, identities had been and partly were still dominant in the life of the villagers. However, no-one dared to look closely at these obvious contradictions. At the village level (as well as the state level), there was no democratic culture within which to address these issues openly. Instead, political leadership followed authoritarian rules. Furthermore, Dušan was said to have been very patriarchal and authoritarian, which again supported this practice. Dušan's power was never contested, and he led the village from the end of World War II until his retirement in 1986.

3.3 Changes in the agrarian sector

The social and political reordering and modernisation that began with the establishment of the new socialist system in 1945 had far-reaching impacts on landed property and agriculture. Property re-evaluation and redistribution took place, followed by the introduction of new agricultural concepts and a

[40] This was typical throughout socialist Yugoslavia. In the region of Knin, only the village of Paćene, which had been a *Četnik* stronghold during World War II, did not have a Partisan monument.

[41] However, in the region of Knin few villages had a *dom kulture*, and it was considered a sign of prosperity and socialist commitment to have one.

systematic industrialisation plan for the region. This had a large impact on the value and meaning of land, agriculture and houses at the local level.

3.3.1 Expropriations

The expropriation of land began in 1945. Initially it was based on the land reform carried out across the whole of Yugoslavia in 1945, in which private land of more than 25–35 hectares (depending on its quality) was expropriated without any compensation. After a second agrarian reform in 1953, private land in excess of 10 hectares (again depending on its quality) or property encompassing more than four apartments or several houses was expropriated without any compensation and became the 'common property of the people' (*opća narodna imovina*) (Borić 1996: 38–9). Private landed property of less than 25 hectares (and later 10 hectares) remained in private ownership –and the great majority of village households did not own anywhere near this amount of land. Here, the Yugoslav form of expropriation differed greatly from the policies of most other socialist countries in the Eastern bloc where expropriations reached far greater heights. In Yugoslavia the strategy was based on the Communist Party's commitment to peasants with small and medium-sized landholdings, who had been the main supporters of the Partisans during World War II and for whom private land was the basis of their livelihood and status. The Party hoped to encourage further support from the peasants for its socialist ideas instead of having to fight them (Džaja 2002: 105; Grandits 2002: 333). Only the land belonging to large landholders was expropriated and given (in part) to the landless. In this way an equalising of social differences took place, with poor people becoming richer, and rich people poorer.

The expropriation of land was also used for a political 'restructuring' of power relations in society. Based on the agrarian laws, the expropriation process across the whole of the former Yugoslavia was also directed against the landed estates of the churches whose power was significantly reduced by this policy. The land of individuals who had been declared 'enemies of the people' or 'war-criminals', including about 500,000 Yugoslav citizens of German nationality, was expropriated without regard to the amount of land they owned. Additionally, resettlement of some of the population took place, which can be seen as a political means of controlling people (Sundhaussen 1993: 103–4; Džaja 2002: 103).

This new socialist property regime was also applied in the region of Knin. Many of the families from Knin with large landholdings, like the Bulat, Sarov and Petkusić families, had already left the country during or immediately after World War II and had partly sold their land before leaving. Other land belonging to larger landholding families was

expropriated and put under state administration. In 1946, landed property owned by the Franciscan monastery situated in the centre of Knin, a big parcel of land reaching from the railway station up to the village of Desnice, as well as some houses and land in the village of Potkonje, were expropriated. Part of the former church land was given to Serbs from the nearby Serbian village of Golubić. The Yugoslav army had built a base on land belonging to the village of Golubić, and had moved some of the population of Golubić from the village and resettled them in the Croatian village of Potkonje.

Generally, however, the changes in land ownership and land usage in the villages around Knin were less severe than in other regions and towns, and social differences based on the amount of land owned by individual households remained relatively stable. Almost all farmers, even the richer ones, owned fewer than 10 hectares and did not lose any land during the expropriation process. While some families lost a house or apartment in the town of Knin, other previously landless families who had worked on the land of others (*kmetovi*) received some land from the state. But this was often not enough to live on.

3.3.2 The foundation of cooperatives

From the late 1940s a further reform changed the people's relationships to their land: while the old types of agricultural cooperatives were largely dissolved, new types of cooperatives were systematically established. People were obliged to hand over their private land to the *seljačka radna zadruga*, although they still retained their legal ownership titles (Mataga 1995: 141–56; Borić 1996; Džaja 2002: 118; Grandits 2002).

According to the socialist ideology of Yugoslavia, as well as of the other socialist states of Eastern Europe, agriculture was to be modernised and social differences eradicated with the foundation of cooperatives. Private property would thereby automatically lose its meaning. However, in practice this policy was not as successful as planned. As shown in table 3.1, in 1951 at the end of the first Five Year Plan, 18.6% of the agricultural land in Yugoslavia and 23.4% of the arable land was cultivated by cooperatives. The state cultivated 17.5% of the agricultural land and 4.9% of the arable land. This means that in 1951, the largest area of arable and agricultural land was still under private management – 64% of the agricultural land and 71.8% of the arable land. In Croatia, in 1951, about 25.3% of the agricultural land and 6.2% of the arable land was cultivated by the state, with the cooperatives cultivating 10.3% of the agricultural land and 16.2% of the arable land. The percentage of privately managed arable and agricultural land was the highest

and similar to the percentage of privately managed arable and agricultural land for the whole of Yugoslavia.

Table 3.1. State, collective and private land management in Yugoslavia and Croatia, 1949–1951

Management	Year	Yugoslavia		Croatia	
		Agricultural land (%)	Arable land (%)	Agricultural land (%)	Arable land (%)
State	1949	15.0	3.7	22.4	4.7
	1950	15.9	4.6	23.4	5.7
	1951	17.5	4.9	25.3	6.2
Cooperative	1949	9.1	12.1	5.2	6.9
	1950	17.8	22.1	10.5	16.2
	1951	18.6	23.4	10.3	16.2
Private	1949	75.9	84.2	72.6	88.6
	1950	66.3	73.3	66.1	78.1
	1951	64.0	71.8	64.4	77.6

Source: Günzel 1954: 231.

However, whereas the first years of socialism in Croatia had seen a rise in the number of cooperatives, the number of members and the amount of land worked by them, this began to decline from the early 1950s, a trend which was to continue for the years to come and which could also be observed in the region of Knin.

Table 3.2. Agricultural cooperatives in Croatia, 1947–1952

Year	Number of cooperatives	Number of member households	Land worked in the cooperative (ha.)
1947	156	3,524	15,203
1948	320	7,737	34,708
1949	1,580	59,800	212,785
1950	1,560	68,102	238,490
1951	1,541	67,281	247,075
1952	967	47,689	204,465

Source: Mataga 1995: 151.

From the late 1940s onwards, agricultural cooperatives were founded in many villages in the region of Knin, one of them in Biskupija. The reactions of the people to the founding of cooperatives were diverse and depended very much on their political position as well as on the size of their landholding. In Biskupija, a number of people told me that joining the cooperative had been more or less voluntary, while others stressed that there had been enormous pressure to join 'voluntarily'. However, the cooperative was not successful. For the most part, it was those peasants with only small plots of land, or poor quality land, who offered it to the cooperative. Very few villagers were convinced of the benefits of a cooperative, but people who held good positions in the socialist system were placed under political pressure to join. In Biskupija for example, the richest peasant and village leader, Dušan Popović (the son of Onisim Popović), acted very pragmatically and joined the cooperative. Although this flew in the face of his family tradition, as land had always been *the* principle marker of social status before socialism, he was forced to adapt his values to the new social and political realities created by the socialist state to secure his leading position in the village. In other families, joining the cooperative led to heated discussion and conflict and, on occasion, even resulted in the break-up of households and separation of relatives.[42] Mira, a 70-year-old woman from Biskupija, told me that her household (at that time consisting of her mother-in-law, her husband's brother with his wife and their four children, as well as her own child and husband – a total of 10 people) had separated following differences between her husband and his brother about joining the cooperative. While her husband, a respected communist, had wanted to join, his brother who was less politically active chose not to.

The fact that the cooperative proved to be unproductive and could not even supply its members with a basic quota of bread was especially humiliating for peasants who had entrusted a relatively large amount of land to it and who had been better off in pre-socialist times. A former teacher from Biskupija described the failure of the cooperatives:

> Everyone had to give his land to the cooperative, everything. But it fell apart very soon, you know. Because they [the members] did not work the land as they had to … They did not do the work as they should have. And because of that there was no success, they did not harvest enough. Nothing.

Like most of the other cooperatives in the region, the cooperative in Biskupija was dissolved soon afterwards in 1953 and the land was restored to its private owners. Despite the ideological notion of communal or socially

[42] This has also been described for socialist Bulgaria by Creed 1998: 132.

owned property as the basis of social equality and justice, in practice these aims could not be achieved. As in many other parts of socialist Croatia, most of the agricultural land remained in private ownership throughout the socialist era. The legal status of private property, as well as the emotional attachments of the people to land that had been in the same family for generations, was therefore not contested. Only forests and barren lands were predominantly owned by the state.

However, some agricultural cooperatives in the region of Knin were run with greater success. They tended to concentrate their activities on a form of cooperative similar to the pre-war ones (see Chapter 2) that focused on the buying and selling of products among peasants. Such a cooperative was also founded in the Serbian village of Orlić close to Biskupija (Rašeta and Pajić 1986: 52–3). In 1954, after most of the cooperatives in the region had been dissolved, the cooperative of Orlić was one of the few to survive. Later, other neighbouring (mainly Serbian) villages situated throughout the Kosovo plain joined this cooperative. The first to join was Markovac, then Riđane, Zverinac and Kaldrma. Biskupija, however, did not join and remained without a cooperative. At that time, the cooperative in Orlić was renamed *Poljoprivredna zadruga Orlić-Markovac* (agricultural cooperative of Orlić-Markovac).

It is useful here to describe the functioning and organisation of the Orlić-Markovac cooperative in more detail since it took on an increasingly important position in the social and economic life of many of the households in the villages around Knin. The cooperative continued to concentrate its activities on marketing by purchasing privately produced agricultural goods from villagers, such as grapes, wine, *janjetina* (lamb) and sheep's cheese, and selling them to restaurants and shops in Knin, Belgrade, Zagreb and other towns (the cooperative even owned shares in some of these restaurants and shops). At the same time, it supplied the village households with fodder for their animals, fertiliser and even with non-agricultural goods such as construction materials for building work. In most cases, goods were exchanged between the cooperative and private farmers rather than paid for with money, but most of the goods could also be purchased in the cooperative shops. After receiving about 50 hectares of especially fertile land (in one plot) situated in the middle of the Kosovo plain from the municipality,[43] the cooperative also engaged directly in agriculture (Rašeta and Pajić 1986: 52; Đorđević 1989: 41). It had a fish farm, a dairy and

[43] This land had belonged to a wealthy landowner from the nearby town of Drniš and was expropriated after World War II. It subsequently became state property (*državna imovina*) and later socially owned property (*društveno vlasništvo*) allocated to the cooperative.

vineyards, and produced wine, the famous local *pršut* (ham) and trout. In the course of its history, the *zadruga* had over 400 members,[44] and in the late 1980s it employed over 200 villagers.[45]

From the 1970s, the cooperative was in a position, both financially and logistically, to help village households buy agricultural machinery, especially tractors, for private agricultural production. Buying and selling from and to the cooperative was possible for all villagers, regardless of membership of the cooperative. Through these activities, the agricultural cooperative supported private farming in a symbiotic relationship (Grandits 2002: 331–51).[46] But the cooperative did not only support the village in the sphere of agriculture: through its success, streets were paved and electricity was installed in the village. The cooperative also provided its members with low-interest loans for building new homes. As informants described very vividly, the cooperative became the main agent of development in these villages.

3.3.3 Private agriculture

Because of the limited expropriation of private land and the difficulties in establishing cooperatives, private households remained the main suppliers of agricultural products (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry 1994: 9; Borić 1996). However, the productivity of private agriculture remained relatively low. Despite some modernisation, most often achieved with the help of the agricultural cooperatives, agricultural methods and the farming way of life had scarcely changed at all from pre-war times. The large majority of family farms were not specialised. In Biskupija in the 1980s, many households (which on average comprised 3.7 persons in 1981) had a pig, one or two cows, a few sheep and a few hens. Some households owned a horse, and as before World War II, most still cultivated maize, wheat and grapes. One reason for this was that, according to socialist ideologies, private agriculture was interpreted as a relict from capitalist times. In consequence, high taxation of private land and the products produced on it did not inspire people to expand their private agricultural activities.

Another reason lay in the ownership pattern which worked against more intensive private agriculture. Owing to the inheritance pattern,

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[44] Peasants paid a fee to become a member of the cooperative.

[45] Every employee was a member of the *zadruga*, but not every member was an employee.

[46] The symbiotic relationship between private agriculture and socialist cooperatives has also been described for other formerly socialist countries, such as Hungary (Hann 1980).

individual private land areas in the Knin region rarely exceeded one or two hectares, divided into as many as 20 small parcels situated some distance from each other. The exchange of land was very difficult, since its quality varied widely. The conditions of land ownership here were definitely more difficult than in other parts of Croatia. Still, the average farming household in Croatia owned only 2.7 hectares of land in fragmented parcels and there was no state policy to support land clearance (Denich 1978: 30; Žimbrek, Žutinić and Par 2000).Because of this, in the region of Knin – like in many other parts of Yugoslavia – the percentage of households which were engaged in full-time farming diminished steadily during socialism. By 1981, it was already usual for one and sometimes even several members of the households in Biskupija to work outside the village, predominantly in the factories in the town of Knin.

Table 3.3. The percentage of agricultural and non-agricultural households in the municipality of Knin, 1961–1981

	1961	**1971**	**1981**
Non-agricultural households[a]	24.8	50.8	32.0
Mixed households[a]	38.3	26.0	59.8
Agricultural households	36.9	23.2	8.2

Note: The substantial changes indicated between 1971 and 1981 in the proportion of non-agricultural and mixed households are rather surprising, and may owe something to changes in the definitions used to compile the data.
Source: Rašeta and Pajić 1986: 34.

As Table 3.3 shows, only 8.2% of households in 1981 relied on agriculture as their sole source of income whereas nearly 60% of the population of the municipality of Knin earned a second income from private agriculture. A salary from employment in the cooperative or a state job represented a 'secure' monthly income, while private agriculture was a source of second income (Brkić and Žutinić 1993; Žimbrek, Žutinić and Par 2000).

Agricultural work was predominantly undertaken by the older generation not in employment, as well as by those women who stayed at home. In fact, until the 1960s it was considered shameful for a married village woman to take up wage labour. Instead, women were expected to be occupied at home, caring for the children, the household and also doing a lot

of the farmwork.[47] This started to change in the 1960s when women were able to gain an education and when socialist values became popular. The result was an increasing number of young women being employed in the industrial sector.

Nevertheless, family farming retained an important place in many households under socialism. After work (usually after 3 p.m.) and on weekends and holidays (or even partly during lunch-breaks) employees of the cooperative or other companies and institutions would do some agricultural work (Simić 1973a, 1973b, Nyström 1987: 35; Olsen 1989: 151, 159). People frequently told me that the work they did in their agricultural 'second job' was sometimes more exhausting than their 'first' main job. Because salaries in the state sector or in the socially owned sector in the Knin region were rather small, family farming was the main means of raising a family's standard of living. The money saved or earned from family farming was used for the construction of private homes, for the education of children or for holidays (Sundhaussen 1993: 120; Denich 1994: 371). Dara, an unmarried woman from Biskupija aged about 60 years, explained:

> When we worked on the house in Knin we gave grapes to the Orlić-Markovac agricultural cooperative and the cooperative gave us construction materials. This was done to avoid cash transfers, because money was limited. It was normal that we bartered.

Mirko, the former director of a communal firm in Knin, related his experience:

> We had good jobs and also good salaries. This was one reason we could afford a nice house, holidays at the seaside, in the mountains, the cars. The second reason lies in the fact that we worked on our land as much as possible. We used our land to produce food. We produced everything for our own needs, like potatoes, tomatoes, onions, grapes, wine, cheese, meat. Our food was domestically produced, of the best quality. I mobilised my two sons to work, as they often did not like to help. But I told them: 'As soon as we work in agriculture today, as soon as we have a nice vegetable garden, and as soon as we keep one or two pigs and a cow, we will have milk, cheese and other food, and then we can use the money which other people use to buy food for something else. That way we can have a nice life.' Every summer we spent days at the seaside and every

[47] In narrative interviews conducted in 2000, women explained this as the men's wish to control their lives. Mira expressed it this way: 'Here men care for their women. They want them for themselves and do not want anyone to touch them. This is why they did not want them to take up wage labour.'

> winter in the mountains. And it was possible to buy Dragan a car for his twentieth birthday.

With the introduction of agricultural machinery – by the 1980s nearly every household in Biskupija had a tractor – villagers increased their production and could sell more agricultural produce. In Biskupija, villagers sold their produce to the cooperative, to the milk collection unit in Knin, or privately. Often, the best prices were reached at the private market in Knin, but villagers had to rely on a collective family strategy. As described by Gudeman (2001: 1), the realm of the market economy was very much linked to the realm of the community – which, in the Yugoslav context, meant the solidarity among family and household members and relatives. Nevenka, a woman of about 60 years who had worked in a factory before fleeing the region in 1995, described this as follows:

> My husband and I worked in a firm and yet all the land we owned was worked. As soon as we returned home from our jobs we went out to the fields, sometimes we did not have time to have lunch but we hurried to get to the field. We had everything and we also had a full house. At harvest time we took my mother-in-law to town to sell our produce at the market when we went to work. We took her to the market, and when we finished work we picked her up and took her home. The same every day. Sometimes she earned even more money than we did from our jobs in the firm. As soon as we came home from work we prepared food, then we went out to do the harvesting. In the evening, we cleaned the house and did the housework. You clean and cook and the next day you have to do the same ... Sometimes we cooked in the evening to prepare for the next day. Sometimes we had so much work that we had no time to prepare. We had everything, sheep, lambs, sows, piglets, cows, calves, a horse and we made our own cheese.

In addition to its economic function, family farming was also a marker of identity for the villagers and a means of maintaining kinship relations and the solidarity of village community (cf. Halpern 1968: 294). In this way it recreated what Gudeman would call 'the base' of the community, that is, the inherent locally defined values and customs which are 'embodied in goods, services, and ideologies' (2001: 7–8) and which shape social relationships and social commitments (for example, to one's kin-group or one's nation). Even with the division of extended family-households (*zajednica*s) and the division of property between siblings, close relatives helped each other in cultivating the land and acted in many ways as a communal working unit (although to a lesser degree than before the household division). Relatives came regularly from the town to the village to help with the agricultural

work and in exchange they would receive a share of the produce (cf. Halpern 1968: 304–5).[48] Generally, homemade agricultural products had high social value. Offering homemade *pršut, wine* and *rakija* was a sign of hospitality and increased the social prestige of the giver. As a villager said: 'A house without homemade wine is a house without a soul.'

3.4 Industrialisation and changing property relations

3.4.1 Housing policies and housing strategies

In Knin, a rail and screw factory called *Tvornica Vijaka Knin*, or TVIK for short, opened in 1955 and expanded over the following decades, employing an increasing number of workers who had previously been peasants (Rašeta and Pajić 1986: 120). Many people in the region of Knin, who still lived in the rural areas and worked the land they owned, became unskilled workers in these factories. However, an increasing number of people in the region trained as specialised workers. In 1985, the TVIK factory had over 3,000 employees (Rašeta and Pajić 1986: 120). Other smaller factories and firms opened in Knin, like 'Mladost' (1950), 'Kningips' (1953) and 'Kninjanka' (1962) (Rašeta and Pajić 1986; Đorđević 1989; Paić 1998: 30). The fact that an increasing number of people were employed in industry altered the pattern of social status in the community. As 60-year-old Nevenka described:

> Before socialism no-one was employed and all worked in the fields. There were big differences between people: there were rich people and very poor people. The poor ones worked in the fields for those who had land. But when the new state was founded after the war, all were employed in the same way and some of the poor people even became rich.

Closely connected with industrialisation was the establishment of the system of workers' self-management *(radna samouprava*) from 1950 onwards,[49] and in the 1960s the introduction of a new housing policy. Under workers' self-management, housing funds were set up within local factories (Rašeta

[48] As described by Halpern (1968: 304) and Denich (1978: 34) for socialist Yugoslavia, and by Konstantinov for Bulgaria (2001), villagers' provision of food to relatives in towns was a widespread phenomenon, which was not necessarily bound to shared agricultural work, but to wider notions of kinship reciprocity.

[49] Yugoslav self-management can be traced back to 1949 when workers' councils were founded in about 200 companies. In the following year, such councils were set up in another 6,000 companies and factories on the basis of a law that transferred the right to participate in the management of the factories to the workers (Sundhaussen 1993: 111).

and Pajić 1986: 122). Workers paid a certain percentage of their monthly salary into the fund (*samodoprinos*), and socially owned apartments were built with part of the money. The rest of the money was used to provide workers with low-interest loans for the building of individual family houses. The rights to the socially owned apartments did not resemble full ownership rights, but they came very close to private property rights, as people could inherit use rights, exchange properties, and even profit by renting out the apartment, but they were not allowed to sell it (see Mandić 1992: 297–9; Borić 1996; OSCE Zagreb 1997).

Unlike the capitalist system, where people need a guarantee to be eligible for a loan, 'social' and 'political' criteria proved to be the most decisive determinants of a successful loan application in socialist Yugoslavia. Apartments and loans for houses were allocated to workers and their families based on a distribution scheme that took account of their years in employment (*radni staž*), their payments into the housing fund, their family and property status, the family's housing situation, and, of course, political criteria such as membership of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (the former Communist Party of Yugoslavia) or commitment to the Partisans during World War II (cf. Nord 1992: 292).[50] In general, loan instalments were deducted directly from the salary of each worker.

According to socialist policy, families in need could acquire either a tenancy right to an apartment or a loan for a family house. The ideology concerning the distribution of housing property was therefore in line with the notion of supporting the weak in society and creating social justice (for theoretical considerations of this, see also F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann 2001). Loans for the construction of a house, for example, could not be granted if the applicants had already received tenancy rights to an apartment. They also had to return the apartment as soon as they had a family house to move into. The possibility of either building a private house or receiving a socially owned apartment can therefore be seen as a social entitlement.

By 1985, 235 apartments had been built by the TVIK factory in Knin and 426 workers had received loans for their individual housing projects (Pajić and Rašeta 1986: 122). Other factories and firms built additional apartments and granted housing loans. However, the criteria for granting a loan or receiving the use rights for an apartment differed from firm to firm. Since the allocated loan was not paid out in cash but mostly in kind, people received building materials, such as bricks, doors or windows, which varied in number and quality. Allocation depended on the size of the factory or company, and some institutions, such as schools or other public bodies,

[50] The rights to an apartment were bound to the workplace, which thereby excluded unemployed people as well as many women.

would not give loans at all. People working for these institutions therefore had much greater difficulty in constructing a house or acquiring an apartment (cf. Nord 1992: 292). Because of this, the ideological aim of creating equal opportunities for everyone according to their needs was not met in practice.



Plate 4. Former socially owned apartment blocks in Knin built during socialism (winter 2000).

Furthermore, people in positions of power were much more likely to receive a socially owned apartment or a loan compared with skilled or unskilled workers. This was largely due to the fact that most people in leadership positions were members of the League of Communists. Thus people from different social strata were treated differently when it came to housing allocations. Instead of balancing out social differences in accordance with the official aim of the socialist housing policy, social differences were reinforced by granting powerful people better access to better equipped and larger housing units. This was particularly true in urban localities where accommodation had always been in short supply and where socialist housing policies could not cope with the increasing demand driven by growing urbanisation.[51]

[51] This, however, was not specific to the Knin region but more generally to socialist Yugoslavia (Sekulić 1986; Čaldarović 1987; Allock 2000: 193). It was also

People reacted to this gap between the ideology and practice of housing rights in different ways. Some nurtured feelings of bitterness and injustice while others employed a range of strategies to cope with the situation as best they could. According to several informants in Biskupija in 2000, various tactics, particularly political ones, were adopted in a bid to secure access to an apartment or the means to build a house. Almost all working people there were members of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Yugoslavia, an organisation subordinate to the League of Communists,[52] even if their parents and relatives had fought for the other side in the war, i.e. had been members of the *Ustaša* or *Četnik*s. The high number of people in the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Yugoslavia corresponds to the membership figures for the whole of socialist Yugoslavia. In 1960, the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Yugoslavia had 6.5 million members. The economically active population was 8.3 million (Singleton 1976: 141). In 1984, membership had grown to about 17 million (Beckmann-Petey 1990: 90). Rajko, a 30-year-old Croat from Biskupija, told me:

> Just about everyone was in the Socialist Alliance, Serbs as well as Croats. People joined the Socialist Alliance in their masses, otherwise they would not have had the chance to achieve anything. They would not have been able to finish school.

Those families who had lost a family member fighting for the Partisans in World War II received housing plots in a new district of Knin, and so some people went to extraordinary lengths to declare themselves, retrospectively, as Partisans even if they had fought on the opposite side. As many people told me, it was often enough to have good contacts with someone in a powerful position to be successfully declared a Partisan. People switched their political allegiances to their own advantage since those who cultivated good connections with influential persons received a larger loan or a better located apartment than others.

Other strategies for acquiring a socially owned apartment and/or a loan for a private house were based on bypassing and manipulating administrative rules and regulations. Most families tried to bypass the official ruling that required them to choose between applying for an apartment or applying for a building loan. When people wanted a loan to

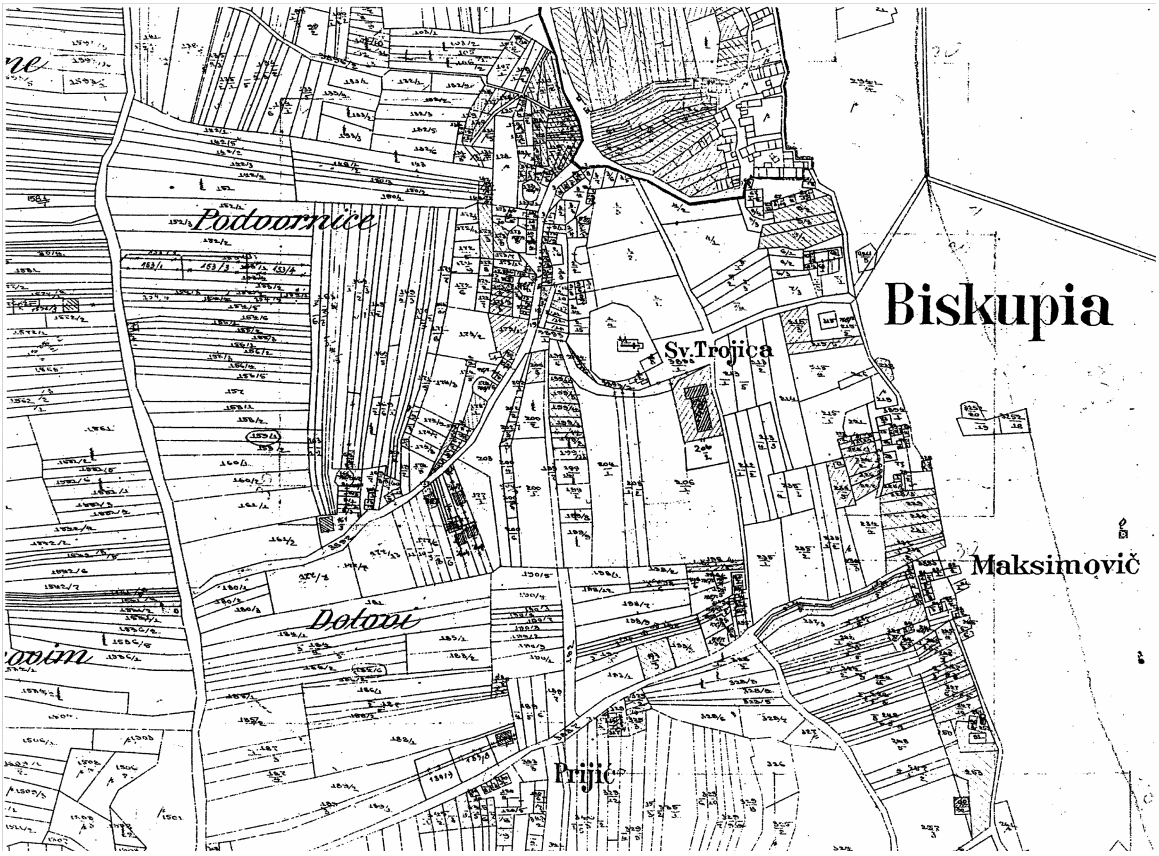
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observed in other socialist countries. Bodnar and Böröcz (1998), for example, have analysed the case of Hungary.

[52] However, according to the same information, only about 10% of the population of Biskupija were members of the Communist Party in the 1980s. In socialist Yugoslavia as a whole in 1981, the number of members in the League of Communists was over 2 million (Kumer 1999: 192).

construct a family house, they often declared that they needed the loan to put up a stable (or another building) instead of a house. In other cases, when two generations of the same household worked in the same factory, one would apply for a building loan and the other would apply for an apartment.

Many house-owners neglected to register their new home in the land register in order to avoid paying the necessary fee and because property in the form of a house would exclude them from receiving other social entitlements. Of course, the vigorous house-building activities that began in the 1960s and ran full tilt through the 1970s and 1980s – often in parallel with the granting of an apartment – did not remain undiscovered in these small rural communities. By that time, however, the local socialist administration had become lenient in controlling and punishing unauthorised building in rural areas, and indeed even in urban centres. There was general agreement that buildings that did not exist on paper should not be taken into further consideration. The construction of private family houses belonged to the citizen's private realm, despite the fact that building was partly financed by institutions acting in the public realm. However, there was also another reason why informal house building was tolerated by the state: it helped to ease the housing problem in general, especially in the urban areas. It thus contributed to the legitimacy of the socialist system, which promised housing as a social entitlement to every citizen. Similar symbiotic relations between the informal and the formal sector have been described by Creed for Bulgaria (1998: 213–15).



Map 3.1. Cadastre map showing the Orthodox church, the surrounding settlements and the string fragmentation of land in the village of Biskupija. Many houses built during socialism are not marked on the map as they were not registered. (Source: Knin Cadastre Office, spring 2001).

The non-registration of houses was also connected to the 'traditional' practice of patrilinear inheritance and to personal relations in the village.[53] People 'knew' what they owned and did not need to rely on bureaucratic records to tell them. In some cases, the plots selected for a new house were too small and neighbouring land was purchased from relatives, neighbours or friends. Again, the purchase was often not recorded in the land register. The buyer and seller made and kept only an informal contract since the reporting of such transactions to the administration was assumed to have negative effects. People would have been required to register the land in the cadastre office (involving a relatively high fee), construction may have been

[53] The customary inheritance practices of male partible inheritance as opposed to unilineal inheritance did not change much in socialist times. Although females were formally entitled to inheritance, they frequently withdrew their formal inheritance rights. Anton (born in 1940) described the inheritance rules in the following way: 'When my father died, it went according to the law. My mother received one half, and my three sisters and I together got the other half. However, my mother together with the three sisters decided to leave their parts to me.'

forbidden in the area in which they had wanted to build, and property transfer taxes would have had to be paid (normally 5–10% of the value of the property). For these reasons, even houses built in the 1970s and 1980s were often not registered. In fact, while the cadastral map of the 1980s showed even the tiniest stables built in the nineteenth century under Austro-Hungarian rule, many modern houses built during the socialist era were not documented at all. The property records under the cadastral system of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy were clearly far more accurate than those drawn up under socialism. From 1995 onwards, the lack of registration made it difficult to reclaim occupied or destroyed property (see chapter 5).

Regardless of the various strategies used to obtain a loan for a private house or a socially owned apartment, the value attached to land ownership diminished under socialism while the value of housing increased. Industrialisation and the precarious situation of agriculture strengthened this trend. In the rural areas from the 1950s, people stopped investing in land and began to invest in private houses. In the 1970s, larger and more modern houses were built which soon became status symbols within the village community. In the socialist Yugoslavia of the 1980s, investment in private housing created large houses which were often only partly used, especially in the rural areas. The diminishing value of land and the increasing value of houses was not, however, a phenomenon unique to the former Yugoslavia but was observable in many countries in which a shift from agriculture to industrialisation took place. Scott, for example, writes of Cyprus:

> The appearance in the villages of large, urban-style houses alongside rural dwellings showed the growing importance of income derived outside agriculture. Traditional priorities, as expressed in the saying 'a house as small as it can accommodate you, and land as much as you can see' were rapidly modified in this period' (1998: 145).

In socialist Yugoslavia, town residents who lived in socially owned apartments also invested in holiday homes either in their home villages or along the coast. In the village of Biskupija, a handful of holiday homes were built by families who had moved to live in apartments in Knin or other towns. A few villagers even owned holiday houses at the seaside or in other regions of the former Yugoslavia. However, this kind of prosperity was rather exceptional in the Knin region and a number of families still lived in cramped conditions (cf. Nord 1992 for general developments in Yugoslavia).

3.4.2 Housing relations and changing family and household patterns

Directly after World War II, most families in the region of Knin had several children. However, since then the birth rate has steadily declined (Wertheim-Baletić 1980) so that, in the 1980s, even many rural households had no more than two children. Under socialism, village population sizes remained stable or diminished, while the population of the town of Knin grew, mainly through rural–urban migration (see table 3.4).

Table 3.4. Population change in the town of Knin and the villages of Potkonje and Biskupija, 1900–1981

	1948	1953	1961	1971	1981	1991
Biskupija	1299	1353	1360	1210	1008	953
Potkonje	276	272	276	260	220	198
Knin[a]	2763	3543	5116	7300	9588	12331
Kninsko Polje	925	960	958	970	1107	408
Kovačić	968	1138	1486	1310	1516	1185
Vrpolje	711	727	688	607	512	536

Note: [a] Until World War II, Kninsko Polje, Kovačić and Vrpolje had been villages in the immediate vicinity of the town of Knin, but owing to urbanisation and the growth of Knin under socialism, the three villages were incorporated into the town.
Source: Korenčić 1979, RZZS 1981, Republica Hrvatska Republički Zavod za Statistiku, Popis stanovništva 1991.

Nevertheless, with Biskupija being close to the town of Knin, at least one child per family remained in the village and commuted to town. The reason for people continuing to live in the countryside was that socially owned apartments were very limited into the 1980s and not available to everyone. Renting an apartment privately was very expensive and tended to be treated with disdain. In fact, 'no-one would want to live as a sub-tenant (*podstanar*)' was a comment I heard in many of my interviews. By staying in the village and not moving into town, people could avoid paying high rents and save the money for the construction of a private house of their own (cf. Olsen 1989: 159–60).

New social values and economic realities encouraged people to consider the construction of a privately owned house as the better choice compared to moving into a socially owned apartment. As in pre-socialist times, people preferred to live 'on their own property' (*na svojem*) and

'among their own' rather than 'among strangers' in a socially owned apartment building (cf. Halpern 1967: 331). To be a *gazda* (house owner) or a *glavar kuće* (head of the house or household) and to have a garden and/or land with the possibility of working a garden plot served not only to bring in supplementary income but was also highly valued and a mark of social standing. Furthermore, building a house in one's own village saved spending on a housing plot, which otherwise would have had to be purchased elsewhere. Few families owned land in the town of Knin and so would have had to buy a housing plot if they wanted to build in town.



Plate 5. Bukorović hamlet in the village of Biskupija (spring 2001).

Because of their limited financial resources and cash flow, and because building loans were often paid in kind, families looked to their relatives, neighbours and friends to help with the main construction work (e.g. the laying of foundations, building walls and adding the roof) (cf. for Bosnia, Bringa 1995: 70, 71). Building a house in the town, where neighbours were still unknown and friends and relatives some distance away, was therefore much more difficult. Nevertheless, building in ones' own rural community was not without cost, particularly as volunteers expected to be invited for meals which generally included an abundance of meat and wine, and sometimes even a barbecue with a grilled lamb. Occasionally, work on the house was also 'paid' in kind with wheat, grapes, wine or other agricultural produce (cf. for Bulgaria, Creed 1998: 200–1).

People who were unable to benefit from a state loan often funded the construction of a new house from their private savings.[54] Since people were self-sufficient in agricultural products and did not pay for water or heating, living expenses were kept relatively low and a good part of their salary could be saved. Most rural households still collected water in a cistern and used wood, gathered from their own forested land, for heating. The relatively low living costs in the countryside compared with the towns thus contributed to the decision to build the house in the 'home' rural community.

House construction was a project that often took years and was sometimes even a life-long project, especially among the older generation. Houses remained half-finished until the family had saved enough money to buy the additional materials necessary to continue the construction, or until they had received another loan. Many families saved as much as they could in order to finish or extend the house, but in so doing saw their standard of living badly affected in many other respects. Again because of cost, architects were not involved in the building process, which explains why the houses built during the socialist era tend to look very similar: large and modern but of a simple, basic shape.

For the younger generation, owning or taking out lease rights on a property had its own logic. Most newly married couples did not have the opportunity of moving into a new house and instead were faced with staying in the village, often within the common household of the husband's parents, which had implications for gender and inter-generational roles. Saving up for a new house and building was still a family enterprise, often organised by the husband's father. A 60-year-old male informant told me:

> The men were expected to provide a house or an apartment for the future wife, as in the traditional patrilocal system. In most cases, the young wife would still first of all move into the household of her parents-in-law. This was only a problem if the mother-in-law did not get on with the wife. But when the *zajednica* failed, it was regarded as a disgrace.

His wife added: 'I cooked for 37 years for my parents-in-law, and it was never difficult for me.'

However, relations between the daughter and the mother-in-law, and generally between the younger and the older generation, were not without

[54] A further means of funding construction was created by a loans system introduced in the late 1980s, where people were offered the chance to take on a high loan from Serbia. However, not many people from the Knin region made use of this since the loan had to be repaid over a short period of time. Those who took the loan were lucky since, due to the inflation that set in shortly afterwards, only a small part of the loan in effect had to be repaid.

conflict in some families. Various tensions developed, for example with regard to agricultural labour. The parental couple often expected the young people to do farmwork under their direction. Women in particular did not want to work in agriculture, a fourth burden added to wage labour, housework and childcare. For this reason, young couples often applied for tenancy rights to socially owned apartments in Knin. Living in town allowed them to escape at least some of the village obligations, and allowed them the freedom to live independently of their parents (cf. Halpern, for central Serbia in the 1960s, 1968: 296–7).

Many families, however, did not receive a socially owned apartment and were either forced to – or preferred to – solve domestic tensions between parents and adult children in another way. In such cases, the family built a house comprising two household units with separate kitchens and living rooms for each couple (Olsen 1989: 159–60). Some made new additions to the house as soon as it became necessary or as soon as enough money was available. Nevenka from Biskupija, who was an only child, described this in the following way:

> My parents first lived in the old Popović hamlet. I am the youngest in the family and when I was about three or four, we moved to this house [in 1931], which was built by my father. Then in 1941 and 1961 we added some extensions to the house, so that it is quite big now. We have another two rooms upstairs and another complete apartment with a kitchen, living room, bathroom and storage room, so that we were not bound to one room. We lived in this house together with my husband and daughter and my parents. My daughter now has two daughters herself and we bought her an apartment. At least she was never a sub-tenant (*podstanar*) – and that means a lot.

These comments indicate the degree to which parents felt responsible for providing homes for their children. Generally, parents would rather provide their sons with housing than their daughters, but this was not a strict rule. The comments also clearly show that many people in the villages preferred to own their own house to an apartment – even if the apartment was privately owned. Having one's own house was seen as the highest achievement of all.

Most people in Biskupija chose the sites for their new houses in locations that were a few hundred metres away from the old settlement and closer to the main road, which runs along the lower part of the valley. Previously, only stables had been situated on this fertile strip and most of the land had been used for agriculture (Ješaić 1999: 97–8). Its use for building was indicative of the changing patterns of land use from the late 1970s to the

present. Even in the new location, however, families would try to build houses 'on their own land' (*na svojem*), and brothers still tended to build their houses close to one another, particularly if they held joint ownership rights to a piece of land on an attractive site. In Biskupija, there were several examples of brothers who built their houses in the immediate neighbourhood.

However, many people who had left the Knin region to go to school or university were unable to return owing to the lack of suitable employment.[55] They still maintained close emotional bonds to the family, the home and the land, and visited their parents and family each year for summer vacation. This again was not only typical for the Knin region, but also for the whole of socialist Yugoslavia. (cf. Halpern 1967: 333). A number of the men who had moved away to further their education would have married a girl from the village, and she would follow her spouse to settle in town. Mirko, a 50-year-old Serb from Biskupija, told me:

> Not too many people from this area left for foreign countries. But people left for education or went to other cities, and often they remained there. My two sisters and my brother went to Belgrade and stayed there. They came back every year in the holidays. They came as soon as their school-age children and the husband had their holidays. Mostly the sons left for education, and then returned in the summer during the holidays, and then they often fell in love with a girl here, whom they had known previously, and then they married here and left together for Belgrade. This is how my sister also left.

Of those who left, many planned to return to the village one day, especially if both husband and wife came from the same village. Some even started to build a house in their native village, despite having a permanent job in town or having received a socially owned apartment. Because salaries earned outside Knin were often higher than the salaries of people employed in Knin, these houses were often the biggest and most modern in the village. A good example of this pattern were my hosts, Milica and Pešo. Both were born in Biskupija in the same hamlet. In the 1960s, after they married, Pešo left the village to train as police officer. He then got a job in a Croatian town close to the Slovenian border. His wife Milica joined him a little later and they lived

[55] Compared with the period before World War II, however, the economic situation in the Knin region was much better, and many more young people could stay or return to the region than before. In other areas close to Knin, however, like the Bukovica or Kijevo regions, many people left after the war as migrant workers to Germany and other countries. However, especially in the 1980s, work migration from Knin increased and became a political issue, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

there for nearly 30 years in a socially owned apartment linked to his place of employment. Despite having a place to live, the couple saved as much money as they could and decided to build a house in their native village of Biskupija. They returned to Biskupija every summer, and started to build their house in the 1980s. In 1989, when the house was finally completed and after Pešo had retired, they moved back to the village. Their house had two storeys, three bedrooms and two living rooms. In fact, it was designed specifically to allow their children, a boy and a girl, to join them in the village. However, by 1989 their children had grown up and chose not to live there. Instead, the son stayed in the socially owned apartment belonging to his parents in the small Croatian border town and married a Croatian woman. The daughter had moved to Zagreb for higher education, started work in a research institute and later married one of her colleagues. It was therefore likely that the house would be left abandoned or sold by the children when the couple died. Still, Milica and Pešo were very happy in their house. They furnished it throughout and they enjoyed a high reputation in the village.

People who had moved out of the village also pursued the strategy of building a house as a combined project with their parents. The parents would move to the new house as soon as it was ready, while the children continued to live and work outside the village and would return only at weekends or, if the village was far away, only for holidays. Anton, a Croat of about 55 from the village of Potkonje, told me:

> I built the house in 1978, together with my parents, because the old house, in which we all lived when I was small, was not suitable anymore. I was very close to my parents and liked to work on the land, so I came every week from Split to the village and worked here. I am the only son. I have three sisters, one in Slovenia, one in Šibenik and one in America.

As this narrative makes clear, building a house in one's native village was also connected to values of patrilocality and male inheritance.[56] While Anton's sisters all left for other towns and countries without keeping strong ties to the village, Anton even built a house there and thus maintained close connections with his home region. The building of a house in one's home region can thus be seen as an expression of the wish to continue the descent group and to contribute to patrilineal kinship and family solidarity.

People who decided not to return and who built a house in their new place of residence often wished at least to be buried at home. To be linked to a place by being buried there again had a strong spiritual meaning for the continuation of the descent group and for family solidarity. However, it was

[56] Cf. Čapo-Žmegač (2003: 185–90) who describes the relationship of Croatian work migrants in Germany to their home regions in Croatia.

not always possible to transport the dead body home, especially if that person had emigrated for political reasons in the socialist era. An alternative way of coping with this situation was to set up tombstones in the home villages near Knin which listed the names of family members who were not actually buried in the grave but in the countries to which they had emigrated and where they had died. This symbolic relationship to the ancestral family and 'homeland' was clearly indicated by the tombstone, regardless of whether the family had been able to transport the body home or not. 'Empty' graves with monumental tombstones are therefore quite common, particularly in communities such as Markovac and Ridane from which many people had emigrated abroad after World War II for political reasons.[57]

3.5 Religious and national affiliations and their effect on property relations

3.5.1 The position of the church and religion

Immediately after World War II relations between Croats and Serbs in the region of Knin remained tense. This had been a war not only against foreign occupying forces but also involving civil and ideological differences often defined along national lines. However, relations improved with time. In the Croatian village of Potkonje, for example, where several Serbian families from the Serbian village of Golubić (about 5 kilometres away) were settled by the government after World War II, local Croats remembered that relations with their Serbian neighbours had been friendly and had grown into one of neighbourhood solidarity, regardless of nationality. A story told by a Croat from Potkonje shows this clearly:

> When the household head of a Serbian family with six children died due to an accident, all the people in Potkonje brought food as well as wood to the now widowed mother so that they [the family] could survive. The family was well appreciated and very much liked by people. They had no money to buy food and people gave them

[57] I also discovered the strong significance of the family in a photomontage of a couple with their three sons. Two of the sons had emigrated to England after World War II because of their political allegiance to the *Četnik*s during the war. Marked down as 'enemies of the people', there was no way they could safely return home and visit their parents. A photomontage made in England showed them united with their parents and their brother, thereby simulating a proper 'family photograph' and symbolising family unity. The photo was exhibited in the parents' house in Markovac.

> whatever they needed. They gave them all this to enable the mother to bring up the children the right way.

At the same time, the role of religion diminished. The Communist Party declared religion to be incompatible with communist ideology, and church attendance by working people, especially party members, was strongly disapproved of. Religious instruction was eliminated from the curriculum of the state elementary schools (Ramet 1992: 125). New socialist holidays, like the First of May, Tito's Birthday, the Day of the Victims of Fascism (*Dan žrtve fašizma*) and Women's Day (*Dan žene*), began to structure yearly observances and partly replaced religious ones. The religious holidays were no longer occasions when young people would meet their future spouses, but instead they met in school or at the workplace, and marriages took place in the municipal hall instead of in church.

As the influence of the church waned and propagation of the powerful ideology of 'brotherhood and unity' grew, an increasing number of ethnically mixed marriages were recorded in the Knin region (Botev 1993).[58] For example, Croats from Potkonje – a Croatian village of 66 households in 1981 (Hrženjak 1983: 436) – remembered that 16 young Orthodox women from Biskupija had married men from their village.[59]

But despite official socialist policy, religion was not entirely abandoned. From the 1960s, socialist policies towards the Church were gradually relaxed. At the same time, however, church services in the villages were held rather infrequently. In Biskupija, for example, Orthodox and Catholic masses were only celebrated once or twice a month. Mass was mainly attended by women not engaged in wage labour and by the elderly. Religious festivals like Christmas and Easter were still celebrated in the private sphere by most families, although with less attention to tradition than in pre-socialist times (cf. Prijić 1991: 258). Many people attended church only on these special occasions – and some never attended at all. At the same time, religious services and festivals sometimes crossed ethnic lines. Anton, the Croat from Potkonje, mentioned that Serbs used to attend midnight mass on Catholic Christmas Eve:

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[58] These couples mainly married in the municipal hall only. Inter-ethnic religious marriages held in church, in which both partners could keep their religious affiliation, were only legalised in 1968. However, couples of the same religion also often married in municipal halls only.

[59] Interestingly, Croats from Potkonje used 'Orthodox' as much as 'Serbian' to describe their neighbours from the village of Biskupija. It seems that both Serbian as well as Orthodox identity was equally prominent. The topic of religious and national identity and its dynamics, however, suggests that further research is required here.

> We young ones who knew how to sing went up to the choir, next to the organ, and there we sang Christmas songs. We have very nice Christmas songs. Serbs also came, those who liked to sing, those who knew how to sing.

The interviews I conducted in 2000 revealed that local Serbs often felt touched as much by the Catholic Christmas as by their own Christmas celebration, which, according to the old Julian calendar, took place two weeks after the Catholic holiday. Several local Serbs told me that they used to put up a Christmas tree for Catholic Christmas, which they kept until the Orthodox celebration although by then it had often become a little dry and shabby. For their own celebration, many decorated their homes with a traditional Serbian Orthodox Christmas tree consisting of oak twigs with dried, brown leaves. In fact, many people from Biskupja, Serbs as well as Croats, stressed that there were not many differences in the local traditions and habits of Serbs and Croats in the region.

The Orthodox *krsna slava*, the feast day of the family's patron saint and patrilineage, was still celebrated by the majority of Serbian families, expressing as it did the connection of the people to their houses, family and community. Most, but not all, welcomed the priest who visited those houses where a *slava* was held. In deference to socialist ideology, which in principle was opposed to religious festivals, some people shaded their windows when they celebrated their *slava* so that the event remained private. Like other religious festivals under socialism, the *krsna slava* belonged mainly to the private realm. Still, the celebration of *slava* festivals was increasingly approved at the political level. Several Serbs told me that in the 1980s it had been quite easy for them to take a day off work for their family *slava*, and their colleagues had even expected them to bring in the leftovers (cake, *pršut*, etc.) from the *slava* the next day.

In cases where sons had built their own house, father and sons did not necessarily celebrate a joint *slava* but did so individually, and the house would be blessed by the priest. This was especially important as soon as a new house was built. The individual *slava* symbolised the creation of the son's own household and the father's diminished patriarchal authority (cf. Prijić 199: 259). Generally, all friends and relatives who were not also celebrating their *slava* on the same day were invited, regardless of their religious (and ethnic) affiliation. Often, they were invited with the words '*Slava mi je, nemoj da mi slučajno ne dođeš, čekam te*'. (It is my *slava*, don't you come by chance, I am expecting you.) Next to the priest's visit, eating, drinking, singing and socialising with family and friends were at the centre of the *slava* celebration.

As with the celebration of the *krsna slava*, people also made different decisions about christening their children. Not all children were christened, especially not those who were the children of party members. Sometimes, conflicts even arose within a family about how to observe religious traditions. In some cases, women decided to get their children christened without the knowledge of their husbands. As Jovica, a Serb born in the early 1960s, related, his mother asked the priest to come one night to christen him while his father worked the night shift, since his father was opposed to the ceremony.

Particular religious festivals, Orthodox as well as Catholic, were publicly celebrated from the 1960s onwards, and not necessarily with lower attendance than before socialism. Large numbers of Serbs took part in the four annual festivals at the Orthodox monastery of Krka, which for centuries had been the spiritual pillar of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Dalmatia and hosted a large theological school even during the socialist era (Mileusnić 1994: 36–9). Those attending included prominent guests as well as Serbs from across the region. Again, members of other national groups, for example local Croats from the neighbouring village of Promina, also took part in the festivities (Krneta 2002: 32). At the annual Catholic festival of *Sveti Ante* in Knin, Serbs also donated money to the Catholic Church on this day for the well-being of their animals and the health of their families. However, at these festivals the role of religious observance was somewhat diminished.[60] Although the festivals opened with a church service, this was mainly attended only by the elderly and women, while the men and young people – who found it difficult to reconcile the mass with Communist party policy – preferred to socialise outside the church. What attracted people was the festive socialising with their kin, neighbours and friends rather than the religious component of the festival.

In some cases, religious festivals took on a strong national character. This was the case with the festival of the Catholic church of Sveta Maria in the village of Biskupija, which was destroyed during World War II but rebuilt from 1957 to 1966 during the socialist era. In 1966, the festival of *Naša gospa* (Our Lady) was celebrated for the first time since World War II. According to the Croatian historian Josip Ante Soldo (1988: 75), the festival

[60] Compare the Orthodox *săbor*s in Bulgaria, which were religious festivals for the worshipping of the village or town saint. Under socialism they became socialist village or town festivals in which the religious dimension was reduced. Instead, they were used for socialist propaganda or remained largely disregarded by public authorities and lost their public character (Pimpireva 2001). The communist leadership in Bulgaria, however, was much more extreme in its negative attitude towards religion than was the case in socialist Yugoslavia.

was attended by between 2,500 and 3,000 people from the local region as well as from Zagreb and other Croatian towns. In 1978, the small church of Sveta Marija received even more attention for the 900th anniversary celebration of the original church, with the festivities extending over three days. On the day of the main celebration in front of the Zvonimir memorial church, some 10,000 believers, predominantly from outside Knin, took part in the church procession (Soldo 1988: 6, 82). According to Soldo (1988: 75–6) this can be explained in terms of the people's wish to revitalise Catholic belief and Croatian national consciousness (see also Žanić 1996: 58).[61] In this sense, religion never lost its 'problematic' character in the socialist period but existed as an essential marker of Croatian and Serbian national identity (Allock 2000: 374; Grandits and Promitzer 2000).

Interestingly, people who had migrated abroad for political reasons often adopted a much more patriotic and national view of religious festivals than their families at home. By sending pictures of religious festivals celebrated in exile, they influenced their relatives, reminding them of religious and national components of the festivals which were now missing at home because they did not conform to socialist policy. Still, under socialism, religious festivals can be assumed to have had various and even inconsistent meanings, which also differed at a national level and at the community and household level, and which partially changed through the socialist period.

3.5.2 The rise of nationalism and crisis of the socialist system

Although religious festivals still took place and the Catholic and Orthodox churches were able to continue their activities albeit in a limited way under socialism, the memory of religious suppression was still fresh in 2000, Croats, and also many Serbs, complained that they had not been allowed to openly express their religious beliefs. This was directly connected to the state's suppression of possibly conflicting aspects of national identity and culture. Rajko, a 35-year-old Croat from Biskupija, remembers:

> At that time it was difficult for a Croat to say that he was a Croat, and to go to church mass on Christmas Eve. When you returned to your job the next day, everyone would know that you had been there.

[61] None of the numerous invited Orthodox priests took part in the main church service, nor did the representatives of the socialist government in Zagreb or the local city council of Knin (Soldo 1988: 87).

Croats from Biskupija tended to connect the suppression of their religious activities to the fact that they had been a minority in the region. Teresija from Biskupija, aged about 60, related the following incident:

> In school there were often only one or two Croats in the classroom. Because the majority is the majority, you know. When my daughter finished high school in Knin, they came to congratulate her for Christmas. But she was Catholic, and she said to them: my Christmas is already over. The others left directly, saying that she was an *Ustaša*. And from that time on she was always an *Ustaša*.

Teresija's story shows that religious affiliation was still connected to nationality and, more precisely, to the conflict and atrocities that had been committed along national lines during World War II. Even under socialism Serbs sometimes called Croats '*Ustaša*' and Croats would label Serbs as '*Četnik*s'.

However, the suppression of religious practices was not always linked to pressure from the other national group, at least not in the case of the Serbs who formed the majority in Knin. A Serbian woman born in the mid-1970s did not blame Croats for her negative experience concerning religious practices but rather her Serbian fellows who adhered to Communist Party policy and condemned religion:

> I never went to church, although my parents, at least my mother, went to church regularly. Croats were allowed to go to church, but Serbs were not. Only Tito was important. The Orthodox Church was neglected after World War II. My teacher told me over and over again that it is not good to go to church. I went to church for the first time when I was ten years old. There was a big festival at that time. When I went to school the day after the festival, my teacher scolded me.
>
> The difference between Serbs and Croats was not only one of different religions. It was the treatment of religion and its consequences. The Croats protected each other. They practised their religion but in secret, while Serbs spied on each other. We lost our jobs as soon as we went to church.

From this description, it appears that Serbs and Croats handled religion differently and that Serbs appeared to have been the 'better' communists who readily abandoned religion under pressure from their own group. The sharper decline in religious observance among Serbs is also reflected in a survey conducted in the 1960s among young people in socialist Yugoslavia. The survey of all religious groups in the country showed that the greatest proportion of believers were Croats, while Serbs took second-last place. A survey conducted in 1985–6 showed similar results: 62.3% of Croatian

families said that they were religious as against only 26.2% of Serbian families. Party members were especially critical or negative towards religion (Ramet 1992: 140–1).

That nationalist feelings could not be overcome was also linked to the authoritarian character of the policies of the League of Communists, which banned any objective investigation of World War II war crimes. People who had been directly exposed to violence and whose family members had been killed or deported during or soon after World War II were not permitted to voice their traumatic experiences in public. However, they also could not easily forget them and so talked of them in private. Such experiences often negatively influenced relations within the local community and towards the state authorities, although they were largely kept hidden beneath the surface (Denich 1994; Sundhaussen 1994).

To some extent, this was also the case in Biskupija. Although informants told me that inter-ethnic relationships between Croats and Serbs in Biskupija had been largely without conflict throughout the socialist period, in some families the experience of violence at the hands of neighbours was not forgotten. A 35-year-old Croat from Biskupija noted:

> I heard from my father and my grandfather all about my neighbours who joined the *Četnik*s and what they did. They came and pushed the Croats out and destroyed their houses. Not Serbs from outside – who would come here? – but Serbs from Biskupija.

In the 1970s, the League of Communists headed by Tito reacted to newly developing nationalist tendencies with force and suppression on the one hand, and with constitutional changes on the other, giving more power to the republics and resulting in the strong federalisation of Yugoslavia (Sundhaussen 1993: 118–19; Grandits/Promitzer 1997: viii). The national quarrels again largely disappeared from public life. But after the death of Tito in 1980, and in the face of growing economic and political crises, nationalism came to the fore once more. At this time, the first public investigation of the crimes of World War II had a marked effect on the population and became a powerful tool for national mobilisation in the late 1980s. Various intellectuals and politicians throughout Yugoslavia tried to stir up national hatred and conflict, hatred which was generally seen as originating in the country's long history of religious/ethnic crimes and culminating in the massacres of World War II (Denich 1994; Grandits 1998). This again stirred up inter-ethnic fears among Croats and Serbs on the local level. Consequently, national identities became increasingly important. In this context it is interesting to note that the number of people who declared

themselves to be Yugoslavs in the Knin region was just over 10% in 1981,[62] but had fallen to 1% by 1991 (Crkvenčić 1993: 29; see table 3.6 below).[63] The socialist regime had gradually managed to build up a Yugoslav identity in the multinational Knin region, but this identity was strongly shaken in the 1980s. This development obviously put pressure on people living in mixed marriages.[64]

In the 1980s, those ideologies that were aimed at escalating the conflict used religion as a marker of Croatian and Serbian nationhood, and thereby forced religion back into the limelight.[65] Political activists used religious events as nationalist platforms, fuelling the conflict between the two national groups. Various groups of political activists even travelled from one place to another in order to spread their views on nationalism and incite further conflict. This was what happened in the region of Knin. The most spectacular celebration was the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo Battle in the small Orthodox church on Knin's *Kosovo polje* in 1989. The festival was attended by tens of thousands of Serbs from Serbia, many of whom supported Slobodan Milošević, who was formally the head of the Yugoslav state, but who had endorsed, developed and supported extreme Serbian positions. The nationalist Serbs from Serbia gave the festival's cultural and entertainment programme an openly Serbian nationalist flavour, helping to

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[62] Yugoslav identity was declared by people who did not want to register themselves by national affiliation but on the basis of socialist identity as well as party affiliation. However, from the late 1980s the Party took a nationalistic turn, as exemplified by the career of the later president of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman.

[63] The percentage of people who declared themselves as Yugoslav in the region of Knin – 10.2% in 1981 – was nearly double the average for Yugoslavia (5.4%). In Croatia as a whole, the average was 8.2% (Sundhaussen 1993: 101).

[64] In the 1980s the proportion of mixed marriages in Croatia was about 17%. In the ethnically mixed (Serbian/Croatian) towns of Pakrac and Vukovar in Croatia, where the population share of Croats and Serbs was similar, the percentage was as high as 35%. For Knin, such statistics are not available, but it is likely that the percentage was more than 17% but less than 35%, as the Croats made up only a small percentage of the population in the region, while Serbs were overwhelmingly in the majority. Furthermore, we have to consider that mixed marriages were largely a phenomenon which occurred in the urban population and which was linked to socialism and modernisation. In pre-World War II times, mixed marriages were rare (Bougarel 1986; Allock 2000: 376).

[65] Religious affiliation as a national marker is also found among Poles (Roman Catholic) and the Ukrainian minority (Greek Catholic) in today's Poland. Competition for religious rights and fear of religious dominance in Poland is the most obvious conflict between these groups. This includes – next to assimilation and outmigration – a struggle for territory and property rights (see Hann 1998).

create a tense atmosphere between Serbs and Croats in the region of Knin (Radulović 1989; Krneta 2002a: 194, 197).[66] The festival near Knin was further influenced by the Vidovdan celebrations in *Kosovo polje* in the Serbian province of Kosovo, where Yugoslav president Slobodan Milošević gave a fiery speech in support of national territorial claims (Meier 1995: 173).

The national conflict was exacerbated by the growing economic crisis in the 1980s throughout Yugoslavia. At that time Knin found itself one of the centres of economic regression and unemployment. This situation forced many people to migrate in search of work, either abroad or to more prosperous regions. As we can see in table 3.5, the population decreased steadily in the municipality of Knin during the socialist era, while the overall population of Croatia grew. This demonstrates that despite the strenuous attempts to industrialise the region, it could not keep pace with other areas.

Table 3.5. Population change in Knin and Croatia, 1948–1991

	1948	**1981**	**1991**
Croatia	3,779,858	4,601,469	4,784,265
Municipality of Knin	45,143	43,731	42,954

Source: Zemljopisni Atlas Republike Hrvatske, 1992: 88–9.

It is uncertain whether the population loss reflected in table 3.5 was mainly due to the outmigration of Croats and/or Serbs into economically more prosperous regions, or to lowered fertility or a combination of both.[67] A tentative answer can be found by comparing the changing figures for the national groups in the Knin region (table 3.6).

[66] The connections between folklore and politics, and their use as a means of conflict escalation, have been analysed by Čolović (1994) who also described the political meetings on Vidovdan in Kosovo in 1989.

[67] See Akrap (1998) for general tendencies in population development in Croatia.

Table 3.6. Serbian and Croatian populations in the municipality of Knin, 1953–1991

	1953	1961	1971	1981	1991
Population total	47,867	49,017	46,679	43,731	42,337 100%
Croats	5,509 11.5%	5,878 12%	5,374 11.5%	4,150 9.5%	3,886 9.2%
Serbs	41,064 87.9%	42,523 86.7%	40,113 85. 9%	34,486 78.9%	37,888 89.5%
Yugoslavs	-	134 0.3%	688 1.5%	4470 10.2%	508 1.2%

Source: Crkvenčić 1993: 29.

Table 3.6 suggests that the number of Croats in the Knin region diminished in a higher proportion than the number of Serbs.[68] Given this, it is most likely that the outmigration of Croats was greater than the outmigration of Serbs.[69] This also mirrors my interviews with Croats in the Knin region, who felt themselves becoming increasingly economically disadvantaged by Serbs. Although no direct system of discrimination concerning employment policies and the distribution of social entitlements and other assets existed in the public services, factories and sales jobs (Nyström 1987), indirect discrimination based on favouritism by officials favouring their own kin and, by extension, their own ethnic group seems to have occurred. The development of ethnic discrimination and nationalism has also been described by Verdery (1996) for an ethnically mixed area in Romania under socialism. According to her analysis, ethnic discrimination and nationalism resulted from the weakness of the socialist economy which was characterised by an 'organized shortage' (Verdery 1996: 86). Social actors had to compete for scarce resources which again created the shortage-alleviating devices such as the use of personal connections and corruption, as well as what Verdery called 'ethnic preference: the tightening of ethnic boundaries, or the use of ethnicity as a basis for personal connections' (Verdery 1996: 86). Verdery writes that 'in its most exclusive form, this

[68] Comparing the Serbian, Croatian and Yugoslav populations from 1961 to 1991, it seems most likely that the majority of people who declared themselves to be Yugoslavs in 1981 had declared themselves to be Serbs in 1971 and 1991.

[69] How far this difference might be related to the different birth rates of Serbs and Croats needs further investigation.

expels competitors from the networks that supply a shortage economy, giving members of one group an edge over claimants from "other" groups'. Referring to ethnic discrimination based on the shortage economy in Romania, she elaborates that 'ethnicity excludes "naturally", as one restricts one's services to one's closest associates; and it is a commonplace that in situations of ethnic antagonism, such as that between Transylvania's Romanians and Hungarians, it is very likely that special friends will be of one's own ethnic group' (Verdery 1996: 86–7).

According to Croats from Knin, Serbs frequently dominated higher positions in Knin and it had been much more difficult for Croats to find a job than for their Serbian compatriots. For example, it had been impossible for a Croat to become the mayor of Knin. Croats were therefore convinced that an increasing number of Croats had been forced to leave the area. A Croat from Potkonje told me:

> None of us received a scholarship, even though in communist times it was generally easy to receive a scholarship. My father was unemployed, so he worked privately. My parents had to work very hard to get us an education. After we finished our studies, we could not be employed in Knin for various reasons because at that time people who had been born in Knin and were of Orthodox belief had advantages in receiving a job. That is why most educated people from Potkonje had to look for work outside the region. Many of them went to Zagreb, or Pula, Zadar, Šibenik, Split, Rijeka, one of the larger Croatian towns. Because we had no prospects here.

Even if this man had exaggerated the negative situation of Croats relative to Serbs in Knin, there was indeed an over-representation of Serbs within federal structures in Croatia especially in the 1970s (Cohen 1989; Allock 2000: 197). In towns like Knin, this over-representation was even more severe.

However, there were certainly also economic reasons behind the outmigration of better-educated Croats from the Knin region. Because Knin was basically an industrial town, few people with higher training were required to manage the factories. The overwhelming number of factory employees were workers who had a mid-level school education or no qualifications at all. In the largest factory, TVIK, for example, the percentage of workers with a higher qualification was only 6.6% while 55% of them had a basic qualification, and 36.7% of them had no qualifications at all (Rašeta and Paić 1986: 120). The over-supply of trained people encouraged many of the better educated to find work in the larger towns where there were wider opportunities.

A sense of economic discrimination also existed on the Serbian side, though this followed a different logic. Instead of perceiving themselves as being discriminated against by local Croats, Serbs believed themselves to be disadvantaged in comparison to their Croatian compatriots in other parts of Croatia. They argued that those regions of Croatia where Serbs were in the majority were those which were the most underdeveloped, and that this indicated that the political leadership in Croatia did not care about the well-being of the Serb-inhabited regions of the republic (cf. Jajčinović 1989). The fact that these regions had the highest rate of outmigration was perceived to be a consequence of (politically motivated) underdevelopment.

The economic and political crisis that led to increasing unemployment rates in the 1980s, however, did not always foster national conflict in the Knin region, nor was it always interpreted in this way. In some cases, companies considered new solutions to the economic problems, while in other cases employees accused the leaders of local firms, as well as the wider political system, of mismanagement. In both cases, however, innovation was difficult to achieve and solutions to the problems were difficult to find.

According to former employees of the Orlić-Markovac agricultural cooperative, for example, the cooperative leadership reacted constructively to increases in the unemployment rate in the 1980s. Not only did they increase the number of employees to meet the demands of the community but they also invested a high percentage of the cooperative's income in order to provide a basis for further development. One of these projects was a dairy farm built in the 1980s. Instead of buying a milking machine, ten people were employed to milk the cows by hand, thereby creating more jobs but making it difficult to make a profit.[70]

Another example is the biggest factory (TVIK) in Knin, where a workers' strike in 1983 attracted media interest for months throughout Yugoslavia (see Miladinović 1984: 17–18). The workers protested against the mismanagement of the factory, which, in their view, was the reason for the economic crisis and the growing unemployment rates in Knin. The factory director had ruled the factory in an autocratic manner for years without creating a strong economic environment, while the institution of workers' self-management had had no influence on the process. Remarkably, the strike was led by a group of Serbs and Croats who were punished for their 'misbehaviour' by being suspended for a year. The solidarity of the

[70] Given this labour-intensive employment policy, salaries were low. However, employees often received material compensation, such as construction materials for house-building, as well as health and pension benefits. (The latter are lacking in the postsocialist system.)

other workers, who stood squarely behind their rebellious colleagues, is evident from the fact that they gave a certain percentage of their monthly salary to the suspended workers.

Like these workers, many inhabitants of the Knin region saw the main reason for the economic crisis not in terms of national favouritism but in other difficulties inherent in the system. One Serbian informant (aged about 60) vividly described the connection between economic stagnation and the socialist system by emphasising the bureaucratic nature of workers' self-management:

> When my generation achieved status in the Yugoslav system, they became bureaucrats. They elected people who were obedient, but not honest and hard-working. Those who were good, who wanted to work, would not be elected, but only those who were obedient. That is why things stagnated. That is why a large proportion of my colleagues, who were very good and wanted to work, could not achieve or develop anything.
>
> Then there were the problems with communal property and self-management. There was a common understanding that as soon as everything became socially owned and did not belong to an individual, anyone could profit from it. As soon as everything belongs to the state, and not to yourself, you can give a part of it to someone else, so that he will support you and work for you.

The system of social entitlements and of socially owned property under workers' self-management declined and was replaced by a heavy bureaucracy and political clientelism, which increasingly blocked the system. The workers' self-management had no power to decide the use of any factory surpluses. Rather, management was controlled by the League of Communists who made the final decisions. This, however, was not only typical for the Knin region but throughout socialist Yugoslavia (Sundhaussen 1993: 111; Allock 2000: 187; Džaja 2002: 151–2). In a way, the system of workers' self-management did not differ very much from the bureaucracy and autocracy of other socialist states. With the increasingly impenetrable bureaucracy, the importance of the informal sector, patronage (*veze*) and locality increased (cf. for Bulgaria, Creed 1998: 184–218). As Verdery (1996: 25) states for Romania, it was not a company's profit that was important for the success of a factory or firm but its distributable resources; power lay with the leadership in deciding who received more resources and social benefits and who received less. Nowhere however, did bureaucracy and autocracy increase ethnic tensions as much as in socialist Yugoslavia.

3.6 The war, 1990–1995

The growing influence of nationalism on the political scene across Yugoslavia was expressed in the Croatian context by the establishment of nationalist parties. This took place in an increasingly emotional atmosphere in the run-up to the first free multi-party elections after almost five decades of socialism. The HDZ (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica), founded in 1989 and led by Franjo Tuđman, a former Partisan officer and companion of Tito, became the most popular 'national' Croatian party. With the founding of the nationalist SDS party (Srpska Demokraska Stranka) in 1990, the Croatian Serbs were also represented by a nationalist party. It soon became clear that, in reaction to the escalating nationalist agitation sponsored by Slobodan Milošević in Belgrade and in Croatia, the transition from socialism to democracy in the first free multi-party elections (1990) was not the key issue but rather the national question (Weckbecker and Hoffmeister 1997: 143–5).

After the nationalist HDZ won the first independent elections in Croatia, the open intervention of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) in support of the Serbian nationalist policy of Slobodan Milošević seemed probable.[71] This spurred those popular movements within Croatia that sought secession from the Yugoslav Federation. The HDZ aimed to create a new constitution for an independent, democratic Croatia. In contrast to the Yugoslav constitution, in which Croats as well as Serbs had been constitutional nations in Croatia, Serbs, who at that time made up 12.2% of the population of Croatia, would be given minority status. At the same time, the new HDZ-led Croatian government reintroduced the use of symbols and icons which Serbs interpreted as being linked to the Croatian fascist *Ustaša* state – for example, the new Croatian flag included the checkerboard pattern (*Šahovica*). In fact, the flag of the Croatian fascist *Ustaša* state, the Croatian flag of the first Yugoslavia and the flag of the socialist Yugoslavia all included the *Šahovica.* But due to the mushrooming of public debate on the wartime crimes following the death of Tito in 1980 and in the generally nationally tense atmosphere, for some Serbs, these symbols constituted a sign of disempowerment, and for some this was even interpreted as a threat of violence.

In a further development, the Serbian nationalist SDS, which had been only partly successful in the parliamentary elections in spring 1990 but had been heavily supported by Milošević in Belgrade, began to establish an independent and autonomous Serbian region in the ethnically mixed areas of

[71] Still, the former League of Communists also remained important during the elections. They became the strongest opposition party to the HDZ and received proportionally strong support from the Serbian part of the population.

Croatia. At that time, Knin was one of the centres of the SDS. When the police force in Croatia was renamed with a title reminiscent of the *Ustaša* state, the Serbian police force in Knin went on strike and disobeyed instructions from Zagreb. Again, they interpreted the use of symbols from the Croatian *Ustaša* state in World War II as indicative of the disempowerment of Serbs. On 17 August 1990, Serbs from Knin barricaded roads leading to Croatian villages (in the direction of Split and Šibenik on the coast) in order to demarcate the area, and took up arms to 'defend' themselves against Croats, in the so-called 'log revolution'. This was subsequently followed by the proclamation of the 'Serbian Krajina' by the Serbian mayor of Knin, Milan Babić, who later became the president of the 'Serbian Krajina' (Denich 1994; Grandits and Leutloff 2003: 25).

In this atmosphere, conflicts bubbled to the surface between Serbian and Croatian neighbours in Knin and the surrounding villages. Croats argued that the proclamation of the 'Serbian Krajina' was not justified since the region had always been part of Croatia. In an interview during my fieldwork, a Croat from Biskupija referred to this historic right but also to the discourses of 'legitimacy' inherent in local everyday life in the following way:

> In 1990, we were often joking around … to whom would this Knin belong? … and after Babić proclaimed the State of Krajina, a friend of my father's came to him and said, 'Ante, this is now Serbia. We now belong to Serbia.' And my father said, 'Would you allow me to build my house on your land?' The Serb said, 'No.' And my father said, 'This is why Croats do not allow Serbs to say that this is Serbia. What you are looking for is not yours. This land has always belonged to Croatia.'

This comment indicates the degree to which nationality became the dominant form of identity. Taking this further, access to land and houses were at this point no longer bound to citizen rights but to national rights.

When Croatia adopted a new constitution on 22 December 1990, representatives of Serbs living in Krajina declared the region they occupied an autonomous province. After Slovenia and Croatia declared their goal for independence from Yugoslavia in February 1991, various Serb politicians in several parts of Croatia called for secession of the newly proclaimed Serb autonomous province in Croatia (Vetter 1999: 545–6). After that, tensions began to escalate (Livada and Hudelist 1995). The leaders of the Serbian 'liberation operations' were partly paramilitary fighters from Serbia, who together with the increasingly pro-Serbian Yugoslav People's Army fought on the side of the local Serbs in Krajina. From April 1991, following several violent incidents in the ethnically mixed regions of Croatia, the conflict

developed into territorial war (Grandits and Leutloff 2003). With the support of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), Serb paramilitaries advanced, bringing even more areas of Croatia under their control, and so began the first 'ethnic cleansing'. Vukovar and Dubrovnik became symbols of the brutal destruction of cities by the JNA which had, in the meantime, joined the Serbian side. Across almost the whole of Croatia, violence and war dramatically overshadowed everyday life. According to figures cited by Franjo Tuđman (1998: 51), some 13,500 people were killed in Croatia from 1991 to 1995 and another 35,000 wounded. In the years of war, some 220,000–300,000 Croats fled or were violently expelled from the Serb-held territories. Serbs from other parts of the Croatian republic, in which they were a minority, left their homes owing to ethnic discrimination, harassment and assault. Some fled to Serbia or the Serb-held territories of Croatia. At this point it becomes clear that violence had become a means of structuring group boundaries and creating a new social order. Violence also had a strong impact on property relations and property disputes (Elwert 1999a: 14).

Some Croats and Serbs who found themselves living on the 'wrong' side of the front line exchanged their apartments or houses with families from the 'other side'. Thus Croats moved into the houses of Serbs in the Croat-controlled territories, and Serbs moved into Croatian houses in the Serb-controlled regions. Many people drew up written contracts documenting the exchange of their houses. Others, Serbs as well as Croats, had no time to undertake these exchanges in such an ordered way, being forced to leave their homes or expelled from their jobs. In such situations, Serbs found shelter in the Serb-controlled areas, while Croats found refuge in the Croat-controlled territories. They either moved into houses or apartments which had been abandoned by members of the 'other' ethnic group, or, in the worst case, forced members of the 'other' ethnic group out of their homes. Massive numbers of houses in both territories were destroyed.

The policy of occupying and destroying property belonging to the other national group was implemented as a strategy of 'ethnic cleansing' from the outset. In Croatia, as well as in Bosnia in 1991, laws were passed allowing the municipalities to allocate empty housing to members of their 'own' national group. Privately and socially owned apartments and houses were declared abandoned and then granted to refugees or displaced persons for temporary use. The pre-war occupants of apartments were required to return to their homes within one week after the law was passed, an almost impossible undertaking due to the circumstances of war. In this way, practices concerning property which supported ethnic cleansing were cemented by legal regulations. Furthermore, Serbian extremists destroyed

more than three-quarters of the Catholic churches and monasteries in the Serbian occupied areas. This practice made it obvious that the meaning and function of churches had shifted from religious sites to markers of territoriality and national belonging.

In Knin, the church of Sveti Ante was destroyed together with other Catholic churches in the region, among them the church of Sveta Ana in the vicinity of the Orthodox church of Sv. Lazarica in *Kosovo polje* and the Zvonimir memorial church in Biskupija. The replica of the famous medieval pediment portraying the Virgin Mary was stolen along with other Croatian cultural and historic treasures.[72] Even more alarming, however, was the fact that local Croats were harassed at work and Croatian men were ordered about or imprisoned by the Serbian police. As a result, most young Croatian men left the Serb-controlled region in spring 1991. Many went straight into the Croatian army as volunteers. A Croat aged about 55 from Potkonje recalled:

> In the 1990s there was a change. Provocation began on the part of the Serbs. It hit me when I came from Split to Knin, as I did every weekend. The army, which was stationed near Potkonje, impounded my car twice and took me to the police for an interview. They asked me what I wanted here. There was also the butcher who said to me, 'We do not have anything for Croats anymore …' They knew that I was a Croat and behaved like that because of it. Then, one Sunday, when we had started to play *balote*, there was a raid in the village. The police came and arrested all the young men, only because they were young enough to fight against the authorities here. When they were released from prison, after 26 days, the young people left because they saw they had no future here. They joined the Croatian army, like all other Croats who wanted to defend our homeland.

Those (mainly elderly) Croats who did not leave the region in 1991 but stayed in their homes in order to guard their property were often threatened and harassed. The perpetrators were not only strangers but also neighbours, former friends and sometimes even (Serbian) relatives. Such experiences (or the stories that circulated about them) turned relations of trust towards Serbs into relations of deep mistrust. Dragica, a 60-year-old woman from Potkonje, described her feelings in the following way:

> For years I brought milk to my [Serbian] neighbours and took care of their two kids. Then he [the neighbour] called me on the phone and asked me what I was still doing here. Why did I not leave? This hurts. We went every day together to work, met each other in the

[72] For similar losses in Bosnia, see Hayden 2002: 166.

> fields and came over for coffee or wine. And helped each other in the vineyards, and so forth … and one day you greet your neighbour and he does not answer.

This illustrates the degree to which the networks of neighbours and friends, which had hitherto been a very important part of daily life, had broken down and indicates that nationality then became the only force structuring social life. This also changed the relations of Croats to their houses and land.

Often, Croatian villagers did not even feel safe in their own houses, but took shelter in barns and stables before finally deciding to flee or being forcefully expelled from the Serb-controlled area. After they left, many houses belonging to Croats in the region of Knin were destroyed. Fortunately, however, in the Knin region the number of ethnically motivated murders of civilians was very low, though Croats as well as Serbs told me about the particularly brutal murder of a single Croatian family in the Knin region.

Of course, not all Croats shared the same experiences of violence and persecution, and not all Croatian houses were destroyed. In Biskupija, the situation was slightly better as there were few local Croats and many of them were bound to their Serb neighbours by strong family relationships. Croats and Serbs had inter-married, acted as godparents or had been good friends. Luckily, these relationships remained relatively stable at the beginning (and partly even during) the war and created a sense of solidarity among some local Serbs and their Croat relatives and neighbours. Individual Serbs attempted to protect Croats from harassment and assault by militant Serbian neighbours and outsiders. In this way, at least in some localities, alternative structures that rested on historically rooted foundations of kinship and friendship were kept alive alongside the national one.

However, the nationalist atmosphere made life particularly difficult for individuals in mixed marriages. They were forced to take sides by either staying in the 'Republic of Serbian Krajina' or by leaving (i.e. fleeing) the Serb-controlled areas. Wives tended to side with or were pressurised into siding with the national group of their husbands, although there were also exceptions where the opposite was the case. In making such choices, people became associated with a certain national group and faced the same discrimination or even violence, rather than being able to establish a common group powerful enough to build up an alternative category on the local level. Often, such individuals were especially targeted as they were seen as a potential threat to national homogeneity.

When, on 17 December 1991, the European Community announced the impending recognition of the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, followed two days later by Germany's definitive recognition of Croatia,

Serbs in the Krajina declared the '*Republika Srpska Krajina*' ('Republic of Serbian Krajina') to exist over an area covering about a third of the republic of Croatia. Knin became the capital and a Serbian 'Krajina' army was established. Soon after that, a truce was signed. UN troops were deployed in regions largely inhabited by Serbs or where violent events had already occurred, in order to monitor the situation, while the Yugoslav People's Army was withdrawn. In the following months the war proceeded on a 'low' level.

In 1993, the conflict continued to flare up in certain areas once more and the Croatian army succeeded in taking back some small but important areas: the Maslenica campaign in the vicinity of Zadar and the Medak pocket campaign in the vicinity of Gospic. This resulted in further ethnic cleansing and expulsions on both sides of the front. Serbian refugees flowed into the territory of Krajina, especially Knin and the surrounding villages. At this point, all Croats who had remained in Knin and the surrounding villages were forced to leave the region to make room (especially housing space) for the refugees. In Potkonje, Croats were expelled by Serbs from the village of Smoković near Zadar who themselves had had to leave their village. The Croats from Potkonje as well as many others from the entire region of Knin were gathered for three days in a collective centre before UNPROFOR buses transported them to refugee camps outside the Serb-occupied territory. They left everything behind them. It was no longer possible to arrange a 'regular' exchange of houses with people from the other national group. After the full outbreak of war, property transfers no longer followed legal rules, but were controlled by special groups of people who did not stop at using violence in order to appropriate property. This forced departure was a highly emotional event still vividly remembered by Croats in 2000. A Croatian woman from Potkonje remembered how she had been forced to abandon her home:

> First we were attacked. Our people were locked up. It was horrible. My husband and I slept for a whole month in a stranger's house. Then my husband went to Split to see the children. He could not return, not at all, so I stayed here [in this part of the village] alone, together with two neighbours. At that time I slept sometimes in their house and sometimes in the house of neighbours on the other side of the village. I did not dare to sleep in my own house. I feared my [Serbian] neighbours … They harassed me … It was very difficult for us. Then in 1993 they moved us out of the houses completely. They gathered us together. I left my house open and went away. Without anything.

The family home, which had long been associated with a sense of security and acceptance, thus became a place of insecurity and fear.[73] This transformation of housing relations through the threats from Serbian neighbours brought with it a radical change in the social relations between people. This reveals again that property relations are largely determined by social relations between society's members, which are themselves embedded in the political and social system.

A Croat from Potkonje described the expulsion from his home in these words:

> When Maslenica fell, the [Serbian] population living in the surroundings of Maslenica withdrew to Knin, and because there was no room for them any more, our [Croat] people had to leave so that the [Serbian] refugees from Bukovica could move into our houses. People [Serbs] from Smoković came to our village.

Based on the experience of violence, cultural norms about property, which had been accepted by society and which had been built up over long periods of time, thus became invalid.

Serbs who had tried to maintain good relations with friends of the opposing national group despite the turbulence and violent conflict remembered how they had watched powerlessly as their neighbours were expelled from their houses. Dušan, a Serb aged about 60 from Biskupija who had held a high position in a firm during the socialist period, told me:

> Tonči is my friend, he is a Croat and lived in Knin. During the Krajina period I always told him when I met him that I could not help him … But I asked him, 'But how are you, tell me?' And he told me, 'Miloše, I am well.' And when the people from Zadar came … they entered his house with machine-guns and told him to go.

Many Serbs, however, often referred to the suffering of their own people when speaking about what happened to their Croatian neighbours and compatriots. They compared their hardships with those of the Serbs who were expelled from the Maslenica area in 1993, with their own exodus from the region after the war in 1995, and with the people who had been brutally killed by Croats after the military operations in 1995. A 40-year-old Croat expressed his position in the following way:

> Here Croats had to leave? I have to tell you that the Croats from Knin were the last to go. And from Biskupija – in 1993. The nationalists went away in 1991, but the [other] people only went in

[73] Cf. the experiences of Greek Cypriots before exile in 1974 (Loizos 1981: 107 ff.). Compare also the experiences of citizens of the Croatian coastal city of Dubrovnik, which was heavily shelled by the Yugoslav Army at the beginning of the war (Povrzanović-Frykmann 1997: 153–62).

> 1993. Of course, it is not good that they left, but who expelled them? The Serbs from [the village of] Smiljčić near to Zadar expelled them, who themselves were expelled by [the Croatian army under the leadership of] Tuđman at that time.

From 1993, the situation in Serb-held Krajina deteriorated rapidly. The breakdown of the economy was fuelled by high inflation. Many Orthodox church festivals went uncelebrated. At the same time, power struggles between Serbian politicians developed and the Krajina population was pressured to obey their authoritarian leadership.

In spring 1995, the so-called 'Z4-Plan' was established as a result of negotiations between the Croatian government and the government of the Republic of Serbian Krajina, the UN and the EU. The plan aimed to bring about peaceful reintegration of Serbian Krajina into the Croatian state with autonomous rights for the mainly Serb-inhabited regions being maintained. However, the Serbian leadership in Krajina did not accept this plan. This refusal had disastrous consequences. After the failure of the diplomatic initiative, the Croatian army succeeded in reconquering Western Slavonia, part of the Republic of Serbian Krajina, in a military operation called *Blijesak* ('Flash') in May 1995. In August 1995, the Croatian army retook an even larger part of the Republic of Serbian Krajina, the 'Sector South' as it was designated by international organisations, including the city of Knin. This military operation was named *Oluja* ('Storm'). With the Croat advance, almost the whole civil population of the Serb-occupied regions as well as the Serbian army, totalling between 100,000 and 200,000 people, fled Krajina for Serbia, Vojvodina and other Serb-held territories in Bosnia.[74] In fact, the retaking of Knin lasted only one day because Serbian forces chose to flee rather than defend their positions (the Croatian *Oluja* operation began on 3 August). Only a small part of the former Republic of Serbian Krajina, the region of Eastern Slavonia, was not captured by force but was later peacefully reintegrated into the Croatian state.

Following the victory of the Croatian army, much controversy exists between Serbs and Croats over who was responsible for the flight of the Serbs. The popular Serb view that the Croatian military had planned to expel the Serbian population is in accordance with the conviction shared by many

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[74] Goldstein (2003: 420) provides a figure of 100,000 civilians, whom he says fled from the Republica Srpska Krajina after *Oluja*. According to his estimates, several tens of thousands of Serb civilians had already left the Krajina before the *Oluja* campaign began. The Helsinki Committee in Croatia talks of more than 150,000 persons who fled the Krajina in connection with operation Storm (see B92 special, 2005a). According to Serbian sources, the number of those who fled is around 250,000 (see B92 special, 2005b). This figure seems to be rather high, however.

Serbs that the political leadership in Serbia, above all the then-President Milošević, had reached an agreement with Croatian President Tuđman to give up the Krajina and therefore betrayed its own people. According to this view, the Serbian Krajina army had then organised the flight of the population and had abandoned its military positions (cf. Mappes-Niediek 1995). For Croats, however, this represented evidence that the Croatian army did not carry out ethnic cleansing, but that the Serbs themselves were solely responsible for the exodus. This interpretation bases itself, inter alia, on the fact that a declaration of President Tuđman was read over Croatian Radio on 4 August 2005, calling on Serb inhabitants to remain in the homeland.[75] Based on the Croatian view that Serbs had occupied the territory of Croatia illegally and had brutally attacked Croats and had driven them away, Serbs feared now that the Croats would take revenge on them. For Croats, the retaking of the territory became known as 'the liberation of the homeland' or simply 'the homeland war' – a term of course rejected by the Serbs.

3.7 Conclusions

In this chapter I have investigated the shift that took place during the socialist era whereby the meaning and value that had historically been assigned to land was instead given to (private) houses and (communal) housing. This shift occurred in parallel with a shift from agriculture to industry as the main source of income. Despite this, relations with the land and agriculture were not abandoned completely. Agriculture not only had economic functions but also social and emotional ones, as the pursuit of farming relied on a family network and recreated kinship and community ties.

Privately owned houses in particular were seen as a marker of social prestige and status. The building of a large, modern house raised the status of the family. For men, building a house in one's home village restored the special meaning of being rooted in a community and continuing the tradition of the patriline. At the same time, housing was seen – like access to medical care and education – as a social entitlement granted by the socialist state and directed at the masses. Such social entitlements were perceived as basic rights within the socialist system and can therefore be viewed as a kind of property right. The policy of social entitlements achieved greater equality in terms of the distribution of resources and property, and in combination with modernisation and industrialisation, the strong rural–urban differences

[75] Tuđman's statement was, however, not unambiguous. Croatian radio reported just a day later, as the mass flight reached its high point, that two 'corridors' would remain open for 'those who want to leave the country' (Mappes-Niediek 1995: 592).

typical of pre-war-Yugoslavia diminished. However, political loyalty, clientelism and kinship continued to play an important role in the procurement of socially owned housing and in the funding and provision of materials needed for building a house. In this way, property practices did not simply follow the state ideology of social equality. The impact of alternative institutions like kinship, friendship and clientelism partly circumvented, but partly also supported the aim of social equality.

What kind of standing did ethnicity and nationality have in terms of access to social entitlements and private property? The socialist policy of 'brotherhood and unity' emphasised the importance of socialist identity and gradually undermined the influence of ethnicity and religion in the public sphere until the 1980s. However, my interviews indicate that the Serbs in the Knin region had closer ties with the political apparatus and therefore enjoyed greater political power than their Croatian compatriots. This may have resulted in economic advantages and better access to social entitlements, including socially owned apartments. In this way, the allocation of socially owned housing is more likely to have been along ethnic lines.

When the Yugoslav state slid into economic and political crisis in the 1980s, ethnic, national and religious identities experienced a renaissance. Exclusive claims on national territory and the revival of national symbols created an atmosphere of fear. This finally led to full-scale war in the ethnically mixed regions of Croatia in the early 1990s.

Along with the violent demise of socialism and the creation of a Croatian state, as well as the one-sided proclamation of the Serbian Republic of Krajina, religious and especially national affiliation once again gained acute relevance at the private and public levels. Religious and national affiliation became central to the protection of and/or access to private and socially owned property, while property rights based on citizenship lost its legitimacy. During the 1990–5 war, population groups were expelled based on national criteria, their homes were destroyed and their property was redistributed along national lines. In the Croat-controlled regions, the status of the Croatian population improved at the expense of the Serbs. In the Serb-controlled territories, the opposite was the case. At the same time, the system of social entitlements collapsed.

Did the new atmosphere of nationalism make people forget the norms concerning property relations – relations that had been built up over generations? While there was a shift in values towards nationalist ideas, many people still had a positive memory of the socialist system and state benefits, including socially owned housing. After the demise of socialism, this system of benefits mostly disappeared, and nationalism could not fully replace it. How Serbs and Croats adapted to the new circumstances (or how

they did not), and how they made use of and evaluated the new system, will be discussed in the following chapters, which focus on the postsocialist, postwar period.

Chapter 4
Changing Housing Relations after Ethnic War

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the issues affecting housing and land after the Croatian *Oluja* military operation in 1995. As well as assessing the perspectives of local Serbs who remained at home during the Croatian military operation in 1995,[76] I also examine the perspective of the local Croats who had temporarily become refugees and returned home after the reintegration of the territory into the Croatian state.[77] Furthermore, I discuss the property relations of Croatian families from Bosnia and elsewhere who settled in the area on Serb lands and in Serb houses.[78] Finally, I describe the perspective of local Serbs who had fled after *Oluja* and who slowly returned home from 1996 onwards.[79] In order to incorporate the impact of mixed marriages, the following sections also refer to people who do not clearly belong to one group or another on the basis of having relatives or partners from one of the other groups.

Based on their experiences of war, I analyse people's changing relationships to their homes by concentrating on the multifunctionality of property relations. Housing relations are analysed not only in economic terms (e.g. as real estate with a measurable economic value), but also in emotional and social terms (e.g. as a means of providing a lasting link with the sense of 'homeland'). Economic, social and emotional aspects differ along national lines because of the differing war experiences of Serbs and Croats, the newly introduced housing laws and the nationalist political propaganda. However, it is important to consider, in addition, changing

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[76] In Croatia these people are referred to as *domicilni Srbi koji su ostali* or *starosjedioci Srbi*.

[77] In Croatia these people are known as *domicilni Hrvati koji su se vratili* or *starosjedioci Hrvati*, or just *Kninjani*.

[78] In Croatia they are named *doseljenici,* but also *Bosanci*.

[79] In Croatia they are called *domicilni Srbi koji su se vratili* or *starosjedioci Srbi*.

social relations between people linked to changing household compositions and family sizes and related changes in neighbourhoods and the local community. In this respect, housing relations may also depend on factors related to being 'at home' or returning to one's own property, as local Croats and local Serbs (partly) did, or to being a newcomer (new settler) in an area and occupying property, as many Croatian settlers did. By differentiating four 'groups' of people and their different relationships to housing property, I therefore pay attention to factors of nationality, as well as to factors of war and pre-war history. Furthermore, property relations are also examined in terms of age and gender.

Before turning to micro-level social issues, this chapter begins with a chronological overview of events and an analysis of the numbers of returning Croats, Croatian settlers and Serbian returnees in the former war region across the whole of Croatia, as well as in the Knin region in particular.

4.2 Chronological overview of remaining Serbs, returning Croats, Croatian settlers and Serbian returnees

When the Croatian military regained control over Serbian-held territory in Croatia, between 100,000 and 200,000 Serbs fled – mainly to Serbia, Vojvodina and a smaller number to the Republica Srpska in Bosnia (see chapter 3) – with only a few Serbs choosing to stay. In the Knin region, fewer than 600 Serbs remained.[80] In the village of Biskupija, 54 out of 906 Serbian inhabitants prior to 1991 stayed, i.e. more than 5% of the village inhabitants and thus a relatively high number in comparison to the Knin region as a whole (UNHCR 2000: 6).

Violence and the arbitrary use of power were rife in the former war zones, even months after the military operations had ended. Action was mainly directed against Serbian civilians and Serbian property. According to sources of the Croatian newspaper *Vijesnik* (4–5 August 2003: 5), 601 civilians, mainly Serbs, were killed or listed as missing in the former war zones during the first 100 days after *Oluja*. Most of the victims were elderly.[81] From August 1995 to the end of 1996, and in some places later

[80] According to figures published by UNHCR (2000: 9), in the municipality of Knin (i.e. within the borders redefined in 1998), 363 Serbs out of a pre-war Serbian population of 19,679 stayed. In the villages belonging to the municipality of Biskupija (newly founded in 1998), 200 Serbs stayed on after the Croatian *Oluja* military operation out of a pre-war Serbian population of 5,272.

[81] According to Serbian sources, the number of dead and missing is between 2,000 and 2,500 (B92 special: 2005c). The Helsinki Committee in Croatia estimates the

than this, some 73% of Serbian houses were set on fire or bombed in the former war region, along with public buildings and factories. The proportion of Serb houses which were plundered has been estimated to be even higher (Otvorene Oći 1998: 8). These estimates stand in contrast to the views of the Croatian media and to Croatian public opinion generally, which state that the Serbs fled voluntarily and that their lives and property would not have been endangered if they had 'stayed at home' (see e.g. Mappes-Niediek 1995).

Unlike the Catholic churches, which were damaged or demolished by Serbs during the war, Serbian (Orthodox) churches were protected by the Croatian army in the aftermath of *Oluja*. The Croatian army proudly highlighted its good work in safeguarding the churches and so morally elevated itself above the Serbian forces which had not protected Catholic (and Muslim) places of worship. This stance displayed a degree of cynicism since the army and police did not protect the civilians who had remained in the area, and violence against Serbs and their property seemed to go unpunished.

Whether these violent acts were 'accepted' by Croatian power-holders or even 'planned' by them, or were the uncontrolled result of chaotic circumstances in the wake of the military operation, remains controversial. Judges, politicians, academics and ordinary people in Croatia still continue to discuss these things today. According to statements by the retired chairman of the Military Police Administration, General Mate Laušić (Globus 5 August 2005), there were four crime waves in the Krajina after *Oluja*. First, the soldiers pocketed everything of value that they found in the course of their house searches. Then 'professional' plunderers came and took everything else that could be sold.[82] Later, the expelled local Croatian population returned, and because they often found themselves with just a bare roof over their heads, these returning Croats often helped themselves to household items in Serb houses, in order to replace what had been stolen from their own houses. Finally, it was the turn of the arsonists who simply set the houses on fire. At the same time, Laušić admitted that there had been brutal attacks on Serbian civilians. According to his assessment, the attacks were possible because of inadequate police and military control,[83] and

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number of dead in connection with *Oluja* at 700 (see B92 special: 2005a). See also the reports of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia at www.un.org.icty/

[82] On the motive of economic gain from violent (ethnic) conflict, see Elwert 2003.

[83] According to a charge of the ICTY against Ivan Čermak, the former commandant of the Croatian army during the *Oluja* military operation in the region of Knin, and Mladen Markać, commander of the Special Police of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia, they were held responsible for war crimes of the Croatian

because the newly liberated area had not been cordoned off by police. The result was that anyone could enter the area, even someone carrying a weapon. In this way, one can argue with Elwert (2003: 222) that 'an area open to violence, i.e. where there is no monopoly of violence', was created.

The lack of control by the police was certainly also related to the public conviction that the Serbs should be punished for the 1991–5 war. In 2000, I was often told that civilians had worn military dress to facilitate their looting, allowing them to confiscate cattle or other goods for the army. Serb claims against the perpetrators of looting and violence were not taken seriously by the courts and were not pursued until 2000. Thus the behaviour and response of the police and courts effectively gave state legitimisation to the attacks on Serbs.

Violence against Serb civilians and the destruction of their property were, however, not the only phenomena that defined the time after *Oluja*. Almost simultaneously, a huge wave of returning refugees and immigrants began to arrive. According to a statement of the International Crisis Group (2002), there were still about 220,000 people, mainly ethnic Croats, who had been driven out of Serbian-occupied areas in Croatia and were still waiting to return. In the first days and months after *Oluja*, a large number of them returned. By the end of 2002, nearly 90% of the approximately 220,000 Croats expelled from the former war regions were registered as having returned (ICG 2002: 3). In the municipality of Knin, about 2,000 local Croats allegedly came back to their homes. However, these figures must be treated with caution. In many cases, Croats simply registered in their former place of residence but did not actually settle there, or they moved elsewhere after a time. In the village of Biskupija, of 43Croats registered in 1991 only 16 returned permanently to their homes.

At least 20,000 abandoned (and plundered) homes belonging to Serbs, especially in the urban parts of the former Krajina territory except in Eastern Slavonia, were turned over to Croatian settlers for their use.[84] Moreover, up to 30,000 apartments, some lying outside the war zone, which had been classified as socially owned property in socialist times but over which Serbs had acquired extended use-rights, were also turned over to Croats. This distribution of abandoned Serb property on the basis of national and social criteria was given legal sanction through the introduction of new laws on

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army directed against Serbian civilians. According to this charge, this crime against humanity and the law of war was part of a criminal action with the aim of permanently expelling the Serbian population from Krajina (International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia Sept. 2003).

[84] Official data collected by ODPR (Office of Displaced Persons and Refugees of the Republic of Croatia) Zagreb, 6 June 2001.

property rights passed by the ruling nationalist HDZ.[85] In the Knin region, over 9,000 Croatian settlers moved into about 2,000 Serbian houses and a few hundred apartments. In the village of Biskupija, over 300 Croats had set up home in this way by 1997.

By contrast, the return of Serbs began very gradually from 1996 onwards, reaching a peak in 1998 with the introduction of the return programme. Of the approximately 250,000–300,000 Serbs who had fled to Serbia and other Serbian-held regions from the Serbian Republic of Krajina before and during *Oluja*, about 108,000 people were recorded as having returned by the end of 2003.[86] According to UNHCR Knin (9 May 2000), about 19% of the Serbian pre-war population in the municipality of Knin were registered as having returned in 2000. In the neighbouring rural municipality of Biskupija, the figure was about 34%. Most of the returnees faced devastated houses in the countryside, and many of their homes in rural areas as well as in the towns were occupied. In addition, Serbs had no means of regaining their property. Like their Croatian counterparts, many of the Serbian returnees did not return permanently but only applied for documents and went back to their existing places of residence (according to UNHCR Knin September 2000 and PULS 2001).[87]

In 2000, the Serbian population in the village of Biskupija increased to almost 400, while the number of Croats remained relatively stable or decreased from 2000 onwards (UNHCR 2000). According to the official census of 2001, the population of the municipality of Biskupija was 1,669

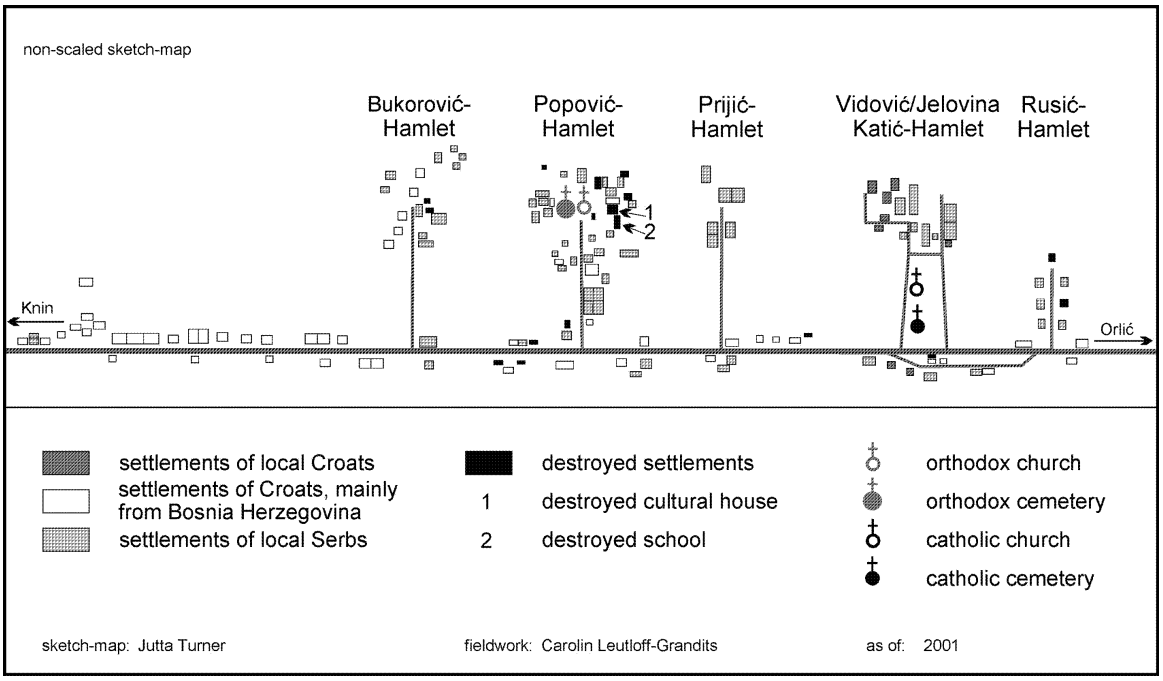
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[85] 'Law on the temporary takeover and administration of specified property', and 'Law on the lease of apartments in the liberated areas', *Nardone Novine*, the official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, 73/1995. These laws are described below in more detail in section 4.5 below.

[86] According to figures of the Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE), some 30,019 Serb refugees had returned to Croatia by the beginning of 1998. In that year an additional 24,922 returned; in 1999, 12,329; in 2000, 10,576; in 2001 10,572; in 2002 another 9,640; and in the first 11 months of 2003 some 8,826 Serbs returned. Altogether, according to this source, some 106,884 Serb refugees had returned by the end of November 2003. See OSCE Mission Status Report no. 13, 2003: 19.

[87] Being registered at a home address without permanently living there was a common practice in socialist times. People who had moved to town or even to a different republic remained registered in their home communities for long periods. In this way they retained feelings of identity and belonging. Censuses in socialist Yugoslavia included the category of 'residence outside the region'. In Knin, however, the number of people registered without permanent residence was low compared to other regions in the former Yugoslavia which had large numbers of migrants working in other parts of the country or in Western countries.

(Republika Hrvatska – Državni zavod za statistiku, popis 2001) and became predominantly Serbian again.



Map 4.1. The housing locations of Serbs, local Croats and Croatian settlers in the village of Biskupija (2001).

However, in the town of Knin itself, as in most other towns in the former war region, the Croat majority was not contested (except in Eastern Slavonia, the territory of Serbian Krajina that was not retaken by the Croatian army and therefore had remained predominantly Serbian). The official size of the population of the town of Knin in 2001 was 15,190 (Republika Hrvatska – Državni zavod za statistiku, popis 2001). Generally, the population numbers constantly changed and the various population figures produced by the Croatian authorities as well as international organisations like UNHCR and OSCE must be treated with caution. Some Croatian settlers were not registered because they were still registered in their former residences in Bosnia or in other Croatian towns and municipalities. Others were registered in Bosnia as well as in Knin but spent much of their time outside Knin. Thousands of Serbs had registered in Croatia as well as in Serbia, leaving their options open in both countries (ICG 2002: 3).

4.3 Changing housing relations of remaining Serbs

The few Serbs who remained in the aftermath of the Croatian military operation in August 1995 were mostly those who could not move, i.e. the elderly, the ill and the disabled. Many of them lived in single households.[88] The numbers of male and female Serbs who stayed were about the same.

When speaking about why Serbs stayed put in the face of the advancing Croatian army, many old people simply said that, being old, they had had no opportunity to flee and they had resigned themselves to dying at home. They preferred the prospect of being buried next to their ancestors than spending the rest of their lives in other places. In this context the findings of Verdery (1999: 105) are useful: in the former Yugoslavia notions of home and homeland were very much associated with the place where the ancestors were buried. Some of the younger women, however, explained that notions of home were not paramount in their decisions – they had stayed because they had not wanted to abandon elderly parents who were unable to travel. A few individuals, men as well as women, stayed because they had a Croatian spouse or close Croatian relatives and therefore believed themselves to be relatively safe, and because they did not feel guilty about the results of Serbian aggression. However, given their fear of the advancing Croatian army, their emotional attachment to their homes must have been especially strong.

As we have seen, 'staying at home' proved to be very dangerous indeed. Those who stayed suffered harassment for months and even years. According to those Serbs who remained, the advancing Croatian army carried out acts of intimidation and violence, searching the abandoned flats and houses for hidden soldiers and men, young and old, as well as for weapons and valuables. They arrested all able-bodied people and often stole any valuables they found.

During the military operations and in the following days and months, many Serbs witnessed the burning of houses in their neighbourhood and elsewhere in the community. According to local Serbs, these actions were carried out by the army, by paramilitary groups, and by armed individuals who 'visited' the liberated area from August 1995 onwards. Several Serbs told me confidentially that some of the destroyed houses had been the property of individuals who had been especially active in the war on the Serb side or had been part of the leadership of Serbian Krajina. Others pointed out

[88] This is also confirmed by the household survey that I conducted in Biskupija in 2001, in which 63% of all the Serbs who had remained (in total 19 people) were over 64 years old and 68% lived in single households. One person was under 35 years old. Six persons were between 35 and 64 years old.

that houses had been destroyed in an unsystematic manner, observing that many homes belonging to non-politically active or elderly people had also been wrecked and looted.

Many Serbs who remained told me in vivid terms how they had been forced to hand over their sheep and cattle and/or to deliver their televisions, cars or agricultural machinery. For example, a 75-year-old man in Biskupija said that he had been 'visited' by armed groups four times in 1996. On each occasion he had left his house convinced that if he did not obey he would be killed. The armed men then looted his property.



Plate 6. Destroyed house of a Serbian owner in a village near Knin (summer 2000).

Even months after *Oluja*, some Serbs who had stayed behind were forcefully expelled from their socially owned apartments and forced to move into dilapidated houses built a generation earlier and which held little attraction for the incoming Croats. The 'empty' apartments were then declared to have been abandoned and the Croatian Ministry of Development and Reconstruction legalised the occupation of the 'abandoned' property by Croats. The following case describes the situation of a Serb who lost his rights to his apartment at this time.

Dušan, an unmarried Serb aged about 60 years, had held a leading administrative position in Knin for the last 30 years and lived in the town in a socially owned apartment. During *Oluja*, he joined his mother who was then living in an old house in the village of Biskupija. Instead of fleeing like

most people, he decided to look after his mother who was ill and could not travel. What is more, he had always been opposed to the idea of a 'Greater Serbia' as propagated by the Serbian leaders of Krajina and had not joined the Serbian army during that time. At the end of September, nearly two months after the *Oluja* military operation, the police arrested Dušan. He was charged with holding a political position in the Republic of Serbian Krajina and faced a 12-year jail sentence. However, since he could prove that he had not occupied this post the charge was dropped and he was released after 84 days' imprisonment. Although he was lucky to be released, his mother had died under mysterious circumstances in the meantime. Furthermore, his flat in Knin had been sealed and he was told that he had lost his rights to the apartment.

Two people from the village of Biskupija lost their lives in the aftermath of *Oluja*, and a 45-year-old man disappeared.[89] For Serbs, the transformation of housing relations resembled the situation that had confronted the Croats before they left their houses between 1990 and 1993: The home that normally (in peacetime) represented a safe haven was transformed into a place of insecurity and fear. People lost trust in the police, who at that time seemed to protect only Croats and not Serbs. They felt so intimidated that they were afraid to report acts of violence. Instead, the remaining Serbs tried to protect themselves and their homes by hiding in their houses or – because houses became a target of violence and looting – by hiding out in remote barns or in the forest. When approached and threatened by armed men, they would vow that they had no connection with the Serbian Krajina government and had not been involved in any kind of (Serbian) politics. They stressed that they simply wished to remain in their homeland and would be loyal to the Croatian state.

Threatened with violence and with no institutions to protect them, the people lost faith in any notion of a Serbian 'national homeland', which had been paramount during the war. Some tried to protect themselves by aligning themselves with Croatian relatives. Some clearly attempted to conceal their national identity by marking their houses and those of their neighbours with the word *Hrvat* (Croat) to protect them from incoming settlers. In contrast to their affiliation during the war, when most had supported the Republic of Serbian Krajina,[90] Serbs now switched their political and national allegiance

[89] According to the information of local inhabitants and *Parochijesko Pismo* (2001), the local newsletter of the Orthodox church in Knin.

[90] In May 1991 99% of all voters from the Serbian autonomous region of Western Slavonia, the Serbian autonomous region of Krajina and the Serbian autonomous region of Slavonia, Baranja and Srem agreed with the founding of a Serbian

(see the discussion of 'switching' in Elwert 1997). Making a public display of connections with Croats and loyalty to the Croatian state became an important strategy for survival.

However, this loyalty was more superficial than genuine and the suppressed anger of Serbs towards the Croatian state was readily aired in private. Threats of violence, even years after the reintegration of the region into the Croatian state, made Serbs feel unwelcome in Croatia. This ambivalence of belonging to the region but not to the state was understandably accompanied by feelings of confusion.[91] Faced with such contradictions, an older Serb voiced the questions that were typical of so many:

> To whom does this region belong – and where do I belong? If this is a state for Croats only, then where is our state? We were at home here and need to be able to be at home somewhere, too.

In such interviews, Serbs often spoke of the Croats who had told them that this was their (the Croats) homeland and that they (the Serbs) should go to Serbia, which was their nation-state. In this way, Croats used the same notion of exclusive ownership rights as had been used by Serbs during the war from 1991 to 1995. Serbs who remained reacted to such experiences by retreating to the private realm and their local networks of relatives and friends. However, because younger family members and relatives had already fled, these networks were now breaking down. The remaining Serbs generally lived alone and often felt lonely.[92] Before *Oluja*, the child chosen to inherit the house had stayed at home and cared for the elderly parents. After the war, the few remaining old people mainly lived in single households and had to care for themselves and so struggled with getting food, cooking and collecting firewood for the winter. As a consequence of war, the link between (collective) ownership and inheritance rights and responsibility for the care of parents and maintenance of the house was often

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Republic of Krajina. Some 77% of the population eligible to vote took part in the election.

[91] For the people's relations with their 'home' see Povrzanović-Frykmann (2003). Povrzanović-Frykmann distinguishes 'home' in the local and the national sense. Discussing notions of home in war and postwar Dubrovnik, she stresses that during war notions of home change, as the formerly intimate place becomes a potentially dangerous place. However, people who have an emotional relationship to the place they inhabit – which often also includes the place they inhabit during war – tend to define this place in local terms rather than national terms. Povrzanović-Frykmann states that 'in the Croatian language, the concept of *zavičaj* (home) cannot be extended to the national territory (that is called *domovina* [homeland])' (2003: 86).

[92] See Mountcastle and Danon (2001: 114) for similar emotional and social processes in the former war region of Baranya in Croatia.

broken (cf. Elwert 1999a: 11). This situation was aggravated by the fact that livestock and agricultural machinery had been stolen, transport facilities were lacking and pension payments came late. For these reasons, many remaining Serbs became dependent on the international humanitarian organisations, which made concerted efforts to supply them with the basic foodstuffs. Often, the monthly visits by the humanitarian organisations were the only contacts these elderly Serbs had with the outside world. In the first months after *Oluja*, the few remaining Serbs who had stayed on in the village of Biskupija rarely even communicated with each other. Hiding in their houses or barns to protect themselves from attack, they often came together only when someone died. What I found to be most remarkable, however, was that there were not even enough people left in the village to bury the dead properly. With all forms of transport having been stolen, the elderly Serbs were forced to carry the deceased on their shoulders to the graveyard, which because of the scattered settlement structure was a considerable distance. It thus proved very difficult to lay the dead to rest properly at that time, and yet, ironically, being buried in their home village was the very reason that many of them had stayed on.

4.4 Changing housing relations of returning local Croats

While the Croatian *Oluja* operation and the reintegration of the formerly Serbian-held territory into the Croatian state was seen by Serbs as a catastrophe, for Croats it was treated as a joyful victory. The reintegration of their home region into the Croatian 'homeland' allowed people to return to their homes and take possession of their property once more. During the time of the Republic of Serbian Krajina, the resident Croats had gone through similar experiences of violence as those faced by their Serbian neighbours from August 1995 onwards. From 1991, local Croats had lived for months and even years in fear of violent attack after the territory was taken over by militant Serbs. Their only solution had been to flee.

In Biskupija, of the 16 Croats who returned after *Oluja*, nine returned immediately, two had returned by the end of 1995, while a family of four returned in 1997 and one man returned in 1999. Those who returned later had not spent their exile in Croatia.[93] Most of the Croats who returned to the

[93] In fact, the family that returned in 1997 comprised a couple in a mixed marriage with two children, and it is debatable whether they should be counted as being a 'Croatian' family at all. Although the husband was Catholic and the wife was Orthodox, they had stayed in Biskupija during the war. Their decision to stay was mainly based on the fact that the husband had worked in the Yugoslav army before the war and had not wanted to lose his job. In 1995, they had fled to Belgrade and

region of Knin in 1995 described the problems they had experienced in adapting to the circumstances of their exile in other regions of Croatia. In exile they had often been perceived as strangers or 'poor refugees' and so their home community and native region became an emotionalised and idealised landscape, – a 'projection site for the need to feel at home, rooted and at peace'.[94] Yet because of their experiences of war along ethno-national lines as well as their expulsion by Serbian forces, followed by three to four years of exile, the Croats' notions of home and 'homeland' also acquired a national connotation. In returning to Knin, or even by the simple act of watching the ongoing return of Croats to Knin on television, local Croats remembered the violence they had suffered from Serbian aggression. They felt protected by the presence of the Croatian police and were relieved to know that Knin had been reintegrated into Croatian state territory and was under the control of the Croatian government. This was symbolised by a huge Croatian flag, measuring 20 metres by 5 metres, which was flown from the castle of Knin. The flag had been raised by General Ivan Korade, the leader of the 7th Croatian army brigade, on 5 August 1995, the day of the unexpectedly rapid military success against the wartime Serbian bastion of Knin (Žanić 1996: 56). It replaced the flag of the Republic of Serbian Krajina, which had flown over Knin during wartime. The very next day, Croatian President Franjo Tuđman visited the town and climbed up to the castle of Knin in the presence of the Croatian army and state officials, and had kissed the flag in an emotional ceremony. For many Croats, it was a symbolic event that marked the end of war and the Croatian victory over Serbs. For many Croats from Knin, home was felt to be a secure place only as long as it remained 'Croatian'.

Some local Croats who returned directly after *Oluja* found their houses and apartments in relatively good shape and sometimes still furnished, since the Serbs who had occupied their homes during the war had fled in panic. By contrast, few houses had been well looked after by their Serbian occupants during the war. Many Croatian houses had been looted,

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returned in 1997, not to their own apartment in Knin, which was occupied, but to the house of a Serbian relative in Biskupija who was living in exile in Serbia and had not yet returned. Still, based on the fact that the husband was Catholic and his wife and children used to attend Catholic mass from time to time, local Serbs tended to consider the family as more Croatian than Serbian.

The Croat who returned in 1999 was not from a mixed marriage. He had been in Germany during the war where he had worked illegally, and had come home only after he was arrested by German police for not having a work permit.

[94] Cf. Peleikis (2001: 417) who describes similar processes for displaced persons in the Lebanon war.

devastated and even destroyed by Serbs, making it difficult for local Croats to return.



Plate 7. A house belonging to a Croat and marked with the graffiti 'Croat' to protect the house from looters after the *Oluja* military operation (summer 2000).

Croats who were unable to return immediately asked neighbours and relatives who had already arrived to protect their homes from further looting and destruction by marking them with the word '*Hrvat*' (Croat) in the same way as described earlier for the Serbs who stayed on. Two different processes were clearly at work here in the use of this term. While Serbs used it to hide their national identity, Croats used it to advertise it. Still, both groups used the term because they assumed that violence would only be directed against Serbian property. Although this was the case to some degree, in the rather anarchic conditions after the Croatian military operation, Croatian paramilitaries and other incoming Croats did not spare abandoned Croatian houses from looting and devastation. This was mainly for two reasons. First, non-local Croats would not have known which house was Croatian and which Serbian. In physical appearance there was no difference between a Serbian and a Croatian house, and many houses and flats of Croats had been used by Serbs during the war. For this reason, Croatian houses were simply looted on the offchance that they might be Serbian. Secondly, most of the looters acted purely for personal gain and did

not care who owned the property. The power that decided on property rights in effect lay in the hands of the armed bandits – and the courts, the police and the legal regulations failed to act to protect the property.

In this situation of lawlessness, the whole area around Knin fell into devastation. Croats who returned often found their houses or apartments ransacked and without furnishings and personal possessions. Schools and other administrative offices barely functioned or were shut down. With factories looted and then demolished, the economy lay in ruins. Added to this, the pre-war community that had thrived on the mutual everyday interaction of Serbs and Croats in an ethnically mixed region had disappeared. After the exuberance of coming home and repossessing their property, returning local Croats developed negative attitudes rather quickly. A middle-aged Croatian woman described her shock after realising that her house had been looted, and her disappointment about the conduct of the Croatian state, in the following way:

> We returned in 1995 after *Oluja*. We found sheep, nothing else. No-one helped us. No-one came to us … Windows were destroyed, doors missing. God, everything was destroyed and so it has remained to this day. Many things were stolen: doors and windows and bricks. What we had left behind we did not find. No-one from our government came and asked if we needed anything. Nothing, absolutely nothing. So we helped ourselves little by little. So we worked hard. It is very difficult for us.

The reality of coming home was often in stark contrast to the imaginings and expectations created in exile and nourished by memories of pre-war times. The complete destruction of communal life in social and economic terms and the wounds of war visible in the locality diminished the value of the house itself and negated the notion of home. Coming home lost significance for some local Croats and the decision to come home was often viewed in retrospect as a poor one.[95] In fact, the social and economic value of a house was very much determined by the living conditions returnees would face in the postwar period.

Many locals, especially those with a good level of education, chose not to return at all. They stayed either in the Croatian coastal towns or in Zagreb, places where they had spent their exile. There were many reasons why they did not return. At the beginning of the war, between 1991 and 1993, some of the local Croats had exchanged their private houses or apartments in the region of Knin with Serbs who up to that point had lived outside Serbian-held territory (see chapter 3). After the war, Croats often

[95] Cf. Svašek on similar feelings of disappointment after 'coming home' in the case of Sudeten Germans after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 (2000: 111–26).

decided not to re-exchange the houses and to stay in their newly acquired residence. The houses in the Croatian urban areas outside the former war zone were considered to be of higher value than the houses in the now heavily damaged region of Knin. In addition, the larger towns outside the former war zone offered a better economic future. Many former locals argued that they had found employment and/or better education opportunities for their children in the larger Croatian towns outside the Knin region. Others did not want to be reminded of the violent conflict, which still threatened to flare up in Knin. They preferred to live 'normal' lives rather than to return to a war-torn and empty region in which future conflict with Serbs seemed possible. A further factor was that people who had adapted to urban life were generally unwilling to return to the provincial town of Knin or to the village from which they originated. Having been made to leave their homes and integrate into urban life, these people seemed to have greater difficulty in returning home voluntarily.

For the same reasons, even local Croats who had not exchanged their houses in the early 1990s and finally had the chance to repossess their homes in the region of Knin did not necessarily return permanently. Their temporary return was partly based on the fact that the amount of government assistance for house reconstruction was tied to the number of family members resettling in the region. Many Croats therefore registered as having returned, but in fact left soon afterwards for their new homes in towns on the Croatian coast or other areas.

A few Croats who had exchanged their houses with Serbs during the war even repossessed the house they owned in Knin but did not return the house they had received during the war to its original Serb owner. Instead, they remained resident in the formerly Serb-owned house outside the former war region and used their house in the Knin region only at weekends (often even less frequently). They argued that the Serbs had lost their right to live in the region due to the Serbian aggression of 1991–5. The outcome of the war and their successful betting on the 'national card' to legitimise their own behaviour 'rewarded' these Croats with a house, at least temporarily.

Generally, it was the older generation who were more likely to return to their houses and home region than younger people.[96] Many had lived in their home region for their whole lives until the war. They had suffered emotionally in exile and could not wait to come home. A 50-year-old Croat from Potkonje, for example, described his father's feelings towards his home:

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[96] Similar postwar migration processes in postwar Lebanon are discussed in Peleikis 2005.

> We were in an apartment in Split during the war. My father died there. I believe that he would still be alive if we had stayed here. I lived in Split on the 12th floor, and my father had spent his whole life here in the village, in the fresh air. He had walked every day and spent time outside. ... My father had worked very hard with his own hands and by his own efforts. He had built this house, and you know, when a man is 70, and for six or seven years he is confined to a skyscraper living in 60 square metres, he suffered a lot, he longed for his home here. I rented a vineyard in Kaštela, about 10 km from Split, and for that he would leave the house. I thought that with this vineyard I would be able to make him go outside a little, that he would not be inside the whole day. But when we came to Kaštela for the first time to work in the vineyard, he worked on two plants and then stopped working and sat in the car. I asked him, 'Daddy, why don't you work?' He answered, 'I can't. I cannot work in the vineyard of a stranger. Now when I look at the vines in the vineyard I think who is working our land right now.' It was very difficult for him, and he did not accept this new vineyard.

Like their Serbian compatriots, the emotional relationship of Croats to the land was especially strong among the elderly. A similar attitude dominated relations to the family house. Comparing renting an apartment to living in one's own house, one elderly Croatian woman from Potkonje said:

> An owner is always an owner [*vlasnik je uvijek vlasnik*]. You cannot live in an apartment and pay rent. I would not like to live in an apartment. We stayed in exile for over two years... For me, it was like being abroad. I could not calm down, and when I came home on the 11th of August, some days after *Oluja*, I sat in front of my house, and my son said, 'Mom, come in.' But I said, 'Leave me alone, it is important that I am here.' I was so glad. In exile, I had to see the doctor every day. Here I live free, more than anywhere else. I do not need the seaside or anything else as soon as I am in my house.

In fact, all the elderly returnees were clear on one thing: they did not want to move from the village again, despite all the difficulties of the postwar situation. To be at home, in their own house, was always seen as the better choice. Even when their own house had been demolished, most of the elderly Croats did not want to exchange it for the house of a stranger.[97] A village woman from Potkonje, who lived in a house still marked by war damage, expressed her feelings the following way:

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[97] See Loizos on the value of personal connections to and private ownership of a house (1981: 177).

> Our daughter in Split has a house with many rooms and a weekend house, and the one in Šibenik has two houses and a weekend house, and the one in America lives like a queen, her husband is a doctor, and her older son is also a doctor. They have everything you can imagine. The one in America wants me to come, and the one in Split too, but I like it here the most. I am used to being here.

Especially for the older people, living in a small house in their own village was often preferred to living in a 'palace' in a foreign country or on the Croatian coast. The house and land were connected to sentiments of home and 'homeland', which could not be replaced by money or material things.

This attitude was also expressed by an elderly Croat who had handed back a house in Zadar to its former Serbian owner, which he had exchanged for his house in Knin at the beginning of the war. He was therefore able to return to his own house in the area of Knin. For this elderly man, the emotional ties to the house and the area were more important than any economic value, as property prices in Zadar, a beautiful coastal town, were considerably higher than those in Knin. His decision to return home, however, was also affected by economic factors. Like many other elderly people, he received a pension and was not forced to find work in Knin, which was increasingly difficult owing to the region's growing population.

Especially in the first months after *Oluja*, the town of Knin offered economic opportunities for young people too. In fact, the administration and public services such as schools and the hospital, which had been in the hands of Serbs until they fled at the end of the war, had to be rebuilt. Many people who returned and settled in Knin in the first months after *Oluja* therefore found employment in these sectors quite easily.[98] For some, the prospect of employment acted as an incentive to return (or to settle there for the first time, see section 4.5 below). This attitude was reinforced by the fact that not all Croatian expellees had managed to integrate in their places of exile nor had found (adequate) work there. Furthermore, based on the new housing laws, local Croats in principle had the right to occupy a former socially owned apartment or a private house in Knin if they did not own property or have use-rights for housing property in Croatia. This applied mainly to the younger generation of local Croats who had shared a household with their parents before the war.

In contrast to the newly incoming Croats who occupied the private family houses of Serbs, local Croats had much stronger moral concerns about occupying private Serbian property. In conversation, they often underlined the fact that they would respect private property and would not

[98] However, these job opportunities were soon exhausted.

seek to live in the property of others. A 35-year-old Croatian man from Biskupija who had been a soldier during war and took part in *Oluja* in 1995 was adamant on this point: "No one can take the home of someone else, we are clear about this".

Interestingly, this did not necessarily include former socially owned property, despite the fact that in the socialist system there was hardly any difference between socially owned property, for which people were granted extensive rights, and private property rights. After the war, local Croats made a clear distinction between private property rights and rights to former socially owned property. First and foremost, this was connected to the Croatian state policy concerning socially owned property. The category of socially owned property had been dissolved by the Croatian government in the early 1990s and former socially owned property had been put under state administration. After the Serbs had abandoned their former socially owned flats, it was seen as legitimate for the state to redistribute them.

Secondly, the distinction between private and socially owned property was connected to the feeling of having been discriminated against and ruled by Serbs during the socialist period and especially during the war in the 1990s (see chapter 3). This was regarded as particularly true in relation to the apartments that had belonged to the Yugoslav army in socialist times and had been used by the Serbian Krajina army during the war in the 1990s. Occupation of these apartments was seen as legitimate because the Serbs who were 'aggressors in the war against Croatia' had forfeited their rights to them. The fact that many other former socially owned apartments, which had been built by various firms and factories in Knin, were occupied by local Croats was justified by arguing that Serbs had been overprivileged in the socialist system and had received easier access to flats. The gap between legal norms and ideology on the one hand and the practices of property distribution during the socialist system on the other led to the creation of new norms which built on the idea of correcting perceived historical injustices.

Younger local Croats who returned but did not own property in the region of Knin were particularly attracted to former socially owned apartments there. Among them were young people who had lived in villages before the war, often in the home of their parents, either sharing a household with them or at least living under one roof. Moving to apartments in Knin gave them the opportunity to establish their own households and escape the control of their parents, village gossip and agricultural work. Furthermore, young couples preferred to live in the town of Knin due to the close proximity of schools and opportunities for finding work in the administration.

These new housing possibilities had other social consequences for local Croats. It meant a change in family size and household composition. Before the war, a village household often comprised several generations (cf. chapter 3), while after the war these households were split into an 'older' one in the village and a 'younger' one in town, accelerating the trend that had started during socialism (cf. PULS 2001). For example, not a single Croatian family with pre-adult children returned to the village of Potkonje. In Biskupija, the Croatian households had an average of two members,[99] and most of the village households were composed mainly of members of the older generation (over 65 years old).[100]

The young Croats who could still be found in the villages were mostly dependent on their parents, either because they were still at school, unemployed and/or unmarried, or because they were taking care of parents who were too old to manage by themselves. Most of the younger people in the villages of Biskupija and Potkonje were single men who would traditionally inherit the house and stay with their parents (and after marriage bring their wives into the household). For the young, life in the half-empty villages populated mainly by older people was often seen as boring. When all other young people had moved away, the young men spent as much of their free time as possible in the town of Knin.

Some elderly Croats also developed ambivalent feelings after having returned home. Although happy to be at home, they felt abandoned by the younger generation and were often lonely and suffered a feeling of powerlessness (cf. Jansen 2000). A house without inhabitants was seen as having little value or purpose. Indeed, the diminished household structure as well as the ambivalent emotional relationship to the emptied house and home in principle was mirrored among the Serbian neighbours. With no children, there seemed every likelihood that the local villages would soon be depopulated and the homes abandoned.

Another difficulty faced by nearly all returning Croats was securing the necessary funds to pay for reconstruction of houses and flats and the replacement of looted furniture. Although most Croats whose homes had been damaged or destroyed found it relatively easy to receive payments for

[99] Out of nine local Croatian households in the village of Biskupija in 2000, two comprised four members, one comprised three members, one comprised two members and five households were single.

[100] Of 18 local Croats living in the village of Biskupija in 2000, four were under 30 years of age, four were between 30 and 44, two were between 45 and 64, and eight individuals were over 65 years old.

reconstruction from the Croatian state,[101] the amount of state funds varied and was often dependent on connections to those in power and on friendship and clientelistic ties. In principle, this was similar to the situation in socialist times (cf. chapter 3). Now, however, clientelism did not advantage Serbs over Croats, but created social differences within the Croatian national group. Most people I talked to were therefore dissatisfied with the amount they got and were envious of other people who received more. A Croat from Potkonje, for example, described the state of his house after the war, as well as the help he received, in the following words:

> I did not find my central heating, I did not find my wardrobes, the furniture in the living room, I found nothing ... we needed everything. But we have not received anything from the Croatian state, especially compared to the Croats from the nearby town of Drniš where they rebuilt the houses and gave them furniture. The people from Drniš have been given everything. Here people received nothing ...

Still, after the war, some Croatian families took advantage of the need to repair and rebuild their home by adding another storey before the state reroofed the house. Some village houses belonging to local Croats thus became larger after the war, although fewer people lived in them. As before the war, the family house still represented an important status symbol and was therefore well looked after.

Furthermore, the kinship, friendship and neighbourhood ties between families meant that local Croats helped each other to rebuild their damaged houses. Dragica from Potkonje, aged about 60, described her experience:

> A [Croatian] friend from Biskupija came when we built the roof of our house. He transported the material for us and we gave him whatever he lacked, or he would offer us his help as soon as we lacked something. It was always like that, as soon as someone needed help we would help each other. When they built their [the friend's and his family's] new house after *Oluja*, our son went to help them [their old house was damaged by Serbs]. They would phone us up and ask if we could come, and of course we would. Then he [the friend] would offer *pršut* and would grill a lamb and then everyone would help and work for him. It was always like that. In this sense they are very nice.

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[101] Up to 2002, 111,000 houses were rebuilt by the Croatian government, of which the main part went to ethnic Croats (ICG 2002: 8). According to PULS (2001), 73.6% of former internally displaced persons reported that their houses had been repaired/rebuilt mainly with the help of state reconstruction funds.

The practice of joint assistance in construction work based on reciprocity can thus be seen as a continuation from socialist times (cf. chapter 3) – with the difference, however, that this time help was given only among Croats. In this way, the reciprocal house-building activities supported the creation of a Croatian community from which local Serbs were excluded. The distance between Croats and Serbs in the locality, however, also rested on other matters.

Owing to the difficulty in getting compensation for stolen goods, such as televisions, agricultural machinery and the like, some Croats helped themselves to these goods from abandoned Serbian apartments and houses. They rationalised this theft by arguing that they would take only those things that had been stolen from them in the first place. In this way, the washing machine or agricultural machinery of a Serb came to be used by his Croatian neighbour. The 'right' to steal emerged with the marginalisation of the owning group, in this case the Serbs, and was indirectly supported by the Croatian state through its unwillingness or inability to establish authority and intervene in such cases. At the same time, this form of 'reciprocal theft' indicated a breakdown of civil order, which was only slowly re-established in the years after the war, but relied mainly on a moral order based on nationality.

Many local Croats had pangs of conscience about stealing from their neighbours or from strangers. The embarrassment and unease felt about entering other people's houses, as well as using other people's belongings, has also been described by Duijzings (2000: 57), who described the situation of Croats from Kosovo who settled in abandoned Serbian houses in the region of Western Slavonia in Croatia during the 1990s war. However, according to (Croatian) informants in the Knin region, in some cases it was the possibility of being publicly shamed that restrained Croats from becoming thieves themselves. Instead, they chose the objects they wanted by looking into various houses and apartments, and then asked other people to remove the goods (mostly during the night) and take them to their own homes, for which they paid a small fee. Other local Croats stated that they had taken things from Serb homes to prevent them being taken by looters. However, when the Serbs returned, their property was often not handed back and the new owners continued to hold onto them. Compared with socialist times, when stealing from the state was quite common but stealing from individuals was very strongly condemned as dishonest (cf. Creed for Bulgaria 1998: 210-1), moral norms supporting civil rights seem to have declined in the immediate postwar period.

Still, there were also cases of honest and moral behaviour. A Croatian family in Biskupija, for example, saved the agricultural machinery belonging

to a Serbian family to whom they were bound by godfatherhood. As soon as the family returned, they returned the agricultural machines, which meant that the Serb family could begin farming again. Others showed at least their readiness to help returning Serbs by bringing them mattresses to sleep on. In these cases, friendship and concern for one's neighbour, both of which are based on moral norms, protected the Serbs.

When judging the postwar situation, however, one should not forget that for most Croatian families, the 'gains' made in the postwar period were often minor and did not compare to the losses suffered during the war. Few people actually grew rich during the war. Even those local Croats who took part in the looting could never be called war profiteers. In many cases local Croats found it difficult to maintain the standard of living they had enjoyed before the war. This was also the case in the village of Biskupija, where fewer local Croats had running water (due to the missing water pump), washing machines, telephones, televisions and other durable and consumer goods after the war than before. Table 4.1 shows the change in living standards in local Croatian households in Biskupija (2001 and 1990).

Table 4.1. The standard of living in local Croatian households in Biskupija, 2001 and 1990, based on the percentage of households with certain facilities

	2001	1990
Cistern	50	50
Running water	40	50
WC inside	40	40
Water heater	45	45
Washing machine	40	55
Refrigerator	100	100
Telephone (incl. mobile)	55	66
Radio	62.5	87.5
Television	70	80
Video	12.5	12.5
Car	45	55

Source: Questionnaire (sample size = eight households).

The apparently lower standard of living in the immediate postwar years may be related to the fact that few people had enough money to replace stolen goods, as pension payments were low and unemployment high. However, the statistics above mostly reflect the situation affecting the older generation since younger people had either emigrated before the war or had not returned

after it. Many of the elderly lived in houses built before the 1950s or 1960s and they appear to have had a lower standard of living in any case than the younger families.

Among elderly people, moving back to the family house in the village was also a strategy for securing and retaining private property and for providing cash or agricultural produce for their children. Many began agricultural work on their private plots again in order to provide their children in town with village food (cf. chapter 6). And although most of the young people moved out of the family house and into a socially owned apartment in town, they did not cut their ties with the village and their relatives living there. Many of them returned with their children every weekend to help their parents with agricultural work and to visit the cemeteries, just as they had before the war. Young relatives also helped to repair the family home. This desire to secure an economic asset as well as to maintain an emotional relationship to the family house can be seen as representing a generational continuity. Nevertheless, it was still unlikely that the majority of young people would one day return to their parents' house or that they would be able to sell the house at a good price, so the economic value of the house diminished.

A successful return depended most of all on the social relations between neighbours and other members of the community – not only Croats but also Serbs. Upon their return, the Croats in the villages resumed their lives as best they could. They began to meet for a cup of coffee, exchange news and share work just as they had always done before the war. However, such interaction was restricted to some degree by the depressing postwar atmosphere. Since most people had become impoverished by the war and because the overall situation – even for Croats – was less secure, they did not want to be a burden to one another. Still, good friends and neighbours would come by without announcing their visit and would be offered a cup of coffee – or *raki*, wine, *bevanda* (a mix of tap water and home-made wine) or juice – depending on the time of day and whether the visitor was male or female. Local hospitality demanded, for example, that when a man entered the house before noon and engaged in conversation, the *gazda* or *domačica* would serve *raki*. After lunchtime, the *gazda* or *domačica* would serve homemade wine or *bevanda*. Women would be served a cup of coffee and juice instead of alcohol. It was also still usual for a friend or relative to be invited into the house whenever he or she passed by. Other visitors would usually ring in advance if a phone was available.

Relations between local Croats and Serbs re-established only slowly. Wartime experiences and memories were still raw and these negatively

influenced relations with former Serbian friends, creating a distance between them. A Croat from Potkonje commented on relations with the Serbs:

> The war destroyed the good relations between people. We are frustrated because we had to move out of the region, and those Serbs who left, they [now] find their houses looted and burned or destroyed, which means that they are frustrated, too. This is why relations between Serbs and Croats are shattered and nothing is right any more, but time will settle things again.

Many local Croats were well aware of what their Serbian neighbours had done during the war, and they often said that they could not forgive those who had wronged them. A Croatian villager from Potkonje made the following remarks about the treatment of his former Serbian neighbours after the war:

> If they had behaved better during the war, and had tried to save and protect us during the war when Serbs started to take up arms and shoot at us, now the situation would be different. But our Serbian neighbours hurt us badly. They burned down our neighbour's house and we know exactly who did it. When they came back to our village after *Oluja* to find out about the state of their houses, we let them pass by and did not go out to talk to them. They did this to us in 1991–93, before we left. The Serbs came to sell their houses after the war. But let me tell you, some might be in America, some in Australia, or wherever they might be, it will never be better for them than it was here, because they were born here.

Generally, local Croats were very sensitive about Serbian returnees who were known to have looted Croatian houses or had harassed Croats during the time of the Republic of Serbian Krajina. They were opposed to the 'creeping' return of those Serbs who had been their persecutors during the war and therefore demanded a better screening of the returnees. Because of this, and because of the reduced presence of young people in the villages, it was generally difficult to re-establish (multi-ethnic) community life.[102]

Yet relations were not completely destroyed. In the postwar situation local Serbs and Croats were forced to learn how to live side by side again, and pre-war relations were not totally forgotten.

A Croat from Potkonje told me:

> Now I have no Serbian friends, people I know, of course, more or less from the time before the war. When we pass each other we greet

[102] Compare Peleikis on community building after a war when villagers have not returned permanently to the locality (2001: 418). Peleikis discusses the example of Lebanon.

> each other, but that is seldom, anyway. By chance we meet in town. But we do not visit each other at home.
>
> Before the war I had Serbian friends, but now it is somehow different. There is a distance between us. I had a very good Serbian friend before the war. We went to school together, to high school. Then we worked together on the railway. But when the war came he did not want to speak to me any more. At that time, we were hit with stones, we were persecuted, we had to leave our jobs. I had to quit my job and I went home. Now he [the Serbian friend] returned and I greet him again and we talk to each other. But it is not like it was before. Today we greet each other more or less when passing by. Still I always greet him. I welcomed him and his wife when they returned.

His wife added:

> I kissed his wife when they visited us, and she said 'you are very noble', because everyone else shuns her. But for me it is embarrassing, I cannot pass by without greeting, I have to talk to them. They see that they did wrong, so what should you do?

To a certain degree, then, Croatian returnees resumed their ties with Serbian neighbours, relatives and former friends on a local level. This was especially so in the village of Biskupija where some neighbourhoods were ethnically mixed and the war experiences of Croats had not been as negative as those of the Croats from Potkonje who no longer had direct Serbian neighbours. In some cases, people who had close family members 'on the other side' acted as a bridge as they had intimate knowledge about the suffering on both sides.

However, having personal ties with Serbs was not necessarily a reason for people to be more open towards them. Indeed, the psychological pressure to condemn people 'on the other side' could be even greater. I was particularly surprised by a woman from the village of Potkonje I interviewed who would kept accusing Serbs of the atrocities generally attributed to them and seemed to be a committed Croatian nationalist. When she mentioned that she had relatives in Biskupija, I asked for the name of the family. At this point she 'admitted' that she had been born into a Serbian family in Biskupija and had come to Potkonje through marriage. I was puzzled. Only later could I make sense of her reaction. Her strategy of collectively accusing all Serbs seemed to be a way of coping with the pressures and emotions relating to the war and of protecting her own position as well as her marriage in the Croatian village community. Later in the interview, when I asked how she managed in this situation, her ambivalence became more evident. She told me:

> Of course I still have relatives in Biskupija. Some of them returned after *Oluja*. But I have no interest in any of them. I told you that before the war relations between Croats and Serbs had been like those of brothers and sisters. We visited each other and called on each other and were friends. But this war has brought much suffering and evil and everyone has withdrawn into himself ... I feel sorry for both sides, you know because of what? Because as soon as a mother loses her children, she is a poor mother. As soon as she loses her loved ones, no matter if she is a Croatian or a Serbian mother, she is a very unlucky mother.

4.5 Changing housing relations of Croatian settlers

Most of the private homes belonging to Serbs in Knin, as well as many large Serbian houses in the villages, were inhabited by Croats at the time of my fieldwork. This was also true of many former socially owned housing blocks in Knin, which before the war had been mainly inhabited by Serbian workers from the TVIK factory and other factories, or had been allotted to the Yugoslav People's Army. This new Croatian dominance corresponded to the new property and housing laws in the 'area of special state concern'. The law on the 'temporary takeover and administration of specified property' was passed shortly after the Croatian *Oluja* operation in August 1995. According to the law, 'abandoned' Serbian properties were placed under temporary public administration. A second law on the 'lease of apartments in the liberated areas' terminated the rights of Serbian tenants if they were absent from the apartment for more than 90 days.[103]

In order to 'mitigate the consequences of war' and to 'ease the rapid return of Croats who were expelled between 1993 and 1995' as well as to 'facilitate the settlement of Croats' in the former Serbian-occupied regions, the 'Law on areas of special state concern' encouraged the following groups of citizens of the Republic of Croatia to settle:

- experts from all regions and professions who would contribute to the rapid economic development and reconstruction of the region;
- unemployed citizens or citizens who needed to solve their housing situation;
- Croatian settlers and returnees from abroad;

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[103] 'Law on the temporary takeover and administration of specified property' and 'Law on the lease of apartments in the liberated areas', *Narodne Novine*, Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia 73/1995; 06/1996; 1000/1997, Zagreb; 'Law on the areas of special state concern', *Narodne Novine*, Official Gazette 44/1996, Zagreb, 1616-1622.

- Croats from Serbia and Montenegro, as well as from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who decided of their own free will to settle in Croatia.

The law had a clear ethnic bias, listing different categories of Croats invited to settle in the Knin region. It also had a social component in that it encouraged the settlement of Croats who did not own property in Croatia or did not have any use-rights to apartments. Furthermore, the law encouraged Croats from all professional backgrounds to settle in the region in order to aid the reconstruction of the war-torn area.

The explanatory text of the law stated that all the persons listed would be allocated housing space by the Ministry of Development and Reconstruction (later called the Ministry for Public Work, Reconstruction and Construction), depending on the locality. Settlers would receive either a family house or an apartment, and in the case of farmers they would also receive additional land for agricultural use.

In order to qualify for abandoned housing space, the applicant was required to provide several documents:

- proof of service (at least three months) in the Croatian army during the war or other evidence of belonging to the categories of people eligible for abandoned housing;
- proof of identity including confirmation of Croatian citizenship;
- evidence of the registration of the housing space or land to be occupied in the cadastre or land registry;
- a declaration by all adult household members that they did not own property in Croatia (although they could own property in Bosnia or abroad) and had not sold property after 27 August 1995;
- a declaration that the applicant did not have occupancy rights to an apartment (especially to former socially owned apartments) and no other use-rights for houses in former war zones in Croatia;
- a declaration of the members belonging to the household;
- birth certificate;
- registration certificates.

The law stipulated that the settlers would be granted property rights for the houses and associated land after a period of 10 years of uninterrupted settlement and use of the property. This practice was not completely alien to people in Croatia as the new constitution of 1991 had placed socially owned property under state administration with similar stipulations. This property could be transformed into private property after it had been occupied continuously by the tenant for several years and after payment of a relatively small and subsidised sum, i.e. a price below the market value.

In accordance with the law inviting different groups of 'Croats' to move to the former war zone, Croatian settlers in the region of Knin came

from various regions in Croatia itself, or from Vojvodina and even Kosovo, the southern province of Serbia. The majority, however, came from different parts of Bosnia, such as the regions around Zenica, Tuzla and Vareš, mostly ethnically mixed areas where Croats had been in the minority before (and after) the war. Of the 31 Croatian settler families I interviewed in the village of Biskupija in 2000–1, only three came from other parts of Croatia. The rest all originated from Bosnia. Before the war, 44 of the 117 individuals had lived in the municipality of Konjic, i.e. more than one-third of the settlers. Three other families with a total of 12 members came from Vareš.[104]

There were many and various reasons for moving to the Knin area – social, economic and nationalist. Settlers coming originally from other parts of Croatia often had no property of their own under the socialist regime, whether their own home or a socially owned apartment. After the demise of socialism, the rents on private apartments tended to be very high in the Yugoslav successor states. Magdalena, a woman in her late twenties and the mother of a young girl, explained why she had moved from Zagreb:

> I had to rent a flat privately, I was a sub-tenant. I did not have a house, or a flat, I had nothing. I would not have come here if I had had something.

Housing difficulties were compounded by the fact that most of the settlers were unemployed. Moving to Knin enabled Croats who had become the victims of war – and the losers in the transformation from socialism to a market economy – to obtain housing, which they had not had before, and so begin a new life. In this way, the settlement of Knin by Croats can be seen as a means of protecting the socially weak and providing them with the basic necessities for life. It has to be remembered, however, that this was achieved at the cost of the Serbian section of the population in Croatia, whose property was distributed to Croats.

These considerations are also valid when considering the settlement of Croats from Bosnia, but the situation here was more complex. Nearly all of the settlers from Bosnia had been expelled from their homes during the war and many were also victims of violence. According to their narratives, many had relatives and friends who had died in the war. Many men had been drafted into the army or had joined up voluntarily, and had fought against Serb forces as well as against Muslim Bosniaks. Some had been imprisoned

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[104] Other families came from the municipalities of Zenica, Bugojno, Travnik, Kakanj, Tuzla, Sarajevo, Kiseljak, Kreševo and Tomislavgrad. Some of the children had been born since their families were expelled and fled their homes. Five children were born in Mostar, one was born in Čapljina, and one was born in Makarska, where the families found shelter after having been expelled from their home regions. An additional ten children had been born in Knin.

during the war and found themselves being guarded by former neighbours and friends. Women and children looked back on long periods spent in various refugee camps or in occupied houses or apartments in the Croatian-held territories of Bosnia-Herzegovina, mostly under very difficult conditions and often separated from their husbands, families and loved ones. As a result, families did not arrive in Knin directly from their homes. A settler aged about 50, who had moved to Biskupija with his wife, described his situation:

> I am from the region of Konjic. After I had to leave the village during the war I spent time in Vinkovac at my sister's place, also in Prozor, in Mostar, even in Vienna, and just before I came [here] I was in Čapljina. I lived in one room, but it was a very damp room. I could not sleep there and I slept more in my car than in that room. That is why I had to look for something better and I came here.

Some of the Croatian settlers from Bosnia had spent several years in Germany or other Western countries as refugees after violent expulsion from their home region. Many of them belonged to the 80,000 Bosnian refugees of Croatian nationality from Germany who had been accepted by the Croatian state. Compared to those who came directly from Bosnia, they were largely better off, since many of them arrived with some savings and/or with a car they had bought in Germany, as well as with other utility and consumer goods.

Ranko, together with his wife and three children, described how the family had moved out of Vareš in central Bosnia (Ranko had been a prisoner of war for some time at the end of 1993) and had found temporary shelter in a barn in Kiseljak, a small town still in central Bosnia, then in the Croatian coastal town of Rijeka where the family had lived in the one-room apartment of one of Ranko's sisters. Finally, the family obtained asylum in Germany with the help of a relative married to a German. In 1996, they 'returned' to Croatia because the eldest daughter could not continue her education in Germany. The family had no desire to return to Bosnia but wanted to live in Croatia. In fact, most of the Bosnian refugees in Knin had no firm vision of where to go after having to leave Germany. Like other Catholic Bosnian refugees, the only thing they knew was that they did not want to return to the region in which they had lived in Bosnia.

These decisions did not necessarily relate to the lack of housing property in Bosnia. In contrast to settlers originating from Croatia, many settlers from Bosnia owned housing there. However, their houses had often either been destroyed or occupied and was therefore now unavailable to

them.[105] Such settlers often described the kind of houses they had lived in and showed me photographs of their homes to demonstrate what they had left behind. Emotional ties to their destroyed homes were still strong and they used the photographs to assert that they had not been poor but had been well-respected house owners (*gazda*) in pre-war times. As in the Knin region, the ownership of private houses had been a marker of status throughout Bosnia. Petar, a settler, was keen to stress at the beginning of our conversation that he had owned a large two-storey house in Konjic, with a room set aside for a business, as well as another house nearby from which he had run a coffee-shop. Both houses had been completely destroyed and he had not been back since the war.

Other settlers from Bosnia, however, had not lived in a private family house but lived either with their parents or in a socially owned apartment. In many cases, the apartments had been damaged or destroyed during the war, or were occupied. Reflecting on the procedures involved in receiving such apartments during the socialist period, many settlers complained that they had waited a very long time to be housed there. They explained that clientelism and corruption had hindered the 'fair' distribution of these apartments under socialism. To a degree, this paralleled the experiences of people in the Knin region (see chapter 3). Ranko from Vareš, quoted above, explained his housing circumstances before the war in the following way:

> We lived for 10 years with my parents. In 1986, my mother died and my father married again. This was no life for us anymore because my father lived according to his own rules. So when my wife went to the hairdresser for a new hairstyle, my stepmother would comment on it negatively. But we couldn't move out of my parents' place earlier. This was not possible, although three times I had been at the top of the list for those in need of an apartment at my firm. At that time, corruption was rife but I told my boss that I would not 'grill a lamb' for him [a widespread practice for expressing gratitude or gaining favours] in order to receive an apartment. That is why I twice failed to get one. I only received a small apartment from my firm in 1987 and we moved there and felt relieved and free after having lived with my parents for so long.

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[105] Out of the 18 Croatian settler households I investigated in Biskupija in 2001, seven households had at least one member who owned housing property in Bosnia that had been destroyed. There was no settler household whose house in Bosnia was occupied. In four households, at least one member had held rights to a socially owned apartment before the war, but two of the apartments had been destroyed and two were occupied. In seven households, no member had rights to private or socially owned housing property in Bosnia.

Others had neither lived in a private family house nor in a socially owned apartment before the war. Ivan from Vareš, 35 years old and married, explained:

> We lived in a hut before the war, it was nothing. Only a hut. I can't return, I have no job, no place to stay, nothing. If I could have stayed in Bosnia, I would not have come here.

Whether people had owned property in Bosnia or not, most had no wish to return. Although many had positive memories of their pre-war lives, they felt that such memories belonged to a past that could not be rebuilt – their home community had been destroyed and they were homeless. Such feelings are related to the postwar nationalist political climate, as well as to memories of wartime violence and the ongoing national conflicts in their home regions. These ethnic Croats from Bosnia were bitter that the war had turned them into a suppressed and discriminated national minority in their native regions in Bosnia – a process of marginalisation that continued well into the postwar period. In some respects, this situation paralleled that of the Serbs in postwar Croatia. Considering these complex, transnational processes it becomes clear that the war and postwar period had marginalised national minorities who were still being discriminated against, and that the process of national homogenisation was still continuing. The process of occupying houses belonging to members of the national minority by members of the national majority was an important element in this development.

Another reason why Croats from Bosnia did not want to return was the disastrous economic situation of their home regions. Rural regions were especially badly affected and there was little hope of rebuilding the infrastructure in the short term. The war had resulted in the marginalisation and depopulation of many rural regions and an increase in the urban population. The fact that Croats moved into the economically weak former war zones in Croatia was therefore not completely representative of the general population movements which occurred in the former Yugoslavia after the war. However, the fact that in the Knin region most people settled in the town of Knin and not in the villages, and the fact that the villages of the former war regions in Croatia remained relatively empty while the towns filled up so quickly, were signs that this transformation had been experienced in Croatia as well. Furthermore, it must be recognised that Croatian settlers from Bosnia had moved into another country which was relatively more prosperous than the one they had left behind.

In some of these depopulated areas the war of the 1990s was not the only reason for emigration. Urbanisation and depopulation of the countryside had been well under way in many parts of Yugoslavia during the

socialist era – including the former war areas in Bosnia and Croatia.[106] Most informants, however, highlighted the causes and effects of war when explaining their personal reasons for not returning to their home regions in Bosnia. According to a 30-year-old woman with several children from Zenica:

> For us it is nicest at home, it is like in a song that says there is no paradise without the homeland. However, because of the war all our friends left, our people are not there any more. It does not make any difference if they were Muslims or Serbs or Croats, they all moved out of the region. There are now new people, and a new life we do not know.
>
> Many people have sold their houses and have settled somewhere else. Most went to third countries – to Australia, America. My husband's whole family went to Australia and Canada after the war. In our village there are now people from the region of Srebrenica, Muslims. They cannot return home as it is still too unsafe. But when they return one day the houses will most likely be empty, no-one of our generation wants to return. We do not return because we have no jobs there and because of our nationality. We cannot live together with Muslims. If we could live together we would not have been at war. There is no trust any more. We do not trust them and they do not trust us. I must now be afraid that he [a Muslim] will kill my child one day. We are afraid for the future of our children. It is not about me. For me it is the same – my father, for example, also said that it is not important for him that he survived. We would return if we did not have children, but for our children we have at least some kind of security here in Croatia.

Another Croatian settler expressed his views this way:

> In Vareš, the situation is very sad. There is nothing, no youth, nothing works, it is very difficult. Before the war it was very nice. We had dances every week and all the young people would come to dance and sing. It was really nice. Now in the whole village there are fewer than 10 young people ... We had a school in pre-war times in which we also learnt the Croatian language and the school had the Croatian school curriculum. That is now legally forbidden. They are also not allowed to learn the Croatian hymn.

When settlers were asked why they had decided to move to the Knin area, they often stressed that they had had nowhere else to go. It had not been

[106] There had been massive and mainly permanent migration to Western Europe during the period of industrialisation. Areas where factories were located in the countryside and in small towns constituted an important exception to these trends.

possible to choose. At the same time, however, they also stated that they had come deliberately, of their own choice, in the hope of regaining control over their lives and/or of starting a new life. Their expectations were strongly supported by the settlement policy of the Croatian state. In addition to being granted temporary housing rights in the former war zones of Croatia – the areas declared to be 'of special state concern' – the Croatian settlers were promised employment and other economic and social benefits and privileges. This policy was publicised by state radio stations, national TV stations and state-subsidised social organisations, as well as the agencies of the Catholic Church.

The concrete promises of the Croatian state encouraged the settlers' hopes of the 'freedom' and power they would enjoy in Croatia: the freedom to express their own thoughts, to speak their Croatian language, and to practise their religion, all of which they feared were not possible in contemporary Bosnia. In Croatia, Bosnian Croats felt assured of belonging to the national majority, which in their view implied participation in government and the control of institutions. Being deprived of their homes and coping with the traumatic experiences of war in Bosnia, they often referred to the single gain they had made: the securing of the 'homeland of Croatia', despite the fact that they had lived in multi-ethnic Bosnia before the war and not in the Croatia that had existed within the former Yugoslavia, and despite the fact that many of them had not been involved in the defeat of the Serb forces in Croatia. Most of the adult male settlers had been soldiers in the Croatian army (*Hrvatska Vojska*) or in the Croatian Defence Council (*Hrvatsko Vijeće Obrane*), and had fought in the war in Bosnia and their families had fled areas in Bosnia where the Serbs or the Muslims had seized power. Although they had failed to create a Croatian nation-state in Bosnia during the war in the 1990s, many still opted for a third Croatian-ruled entity of Bosnia-Herzegovina (known as the *Herceg-Bosna*). In this hope, they voted in a referendum on the status of the Croat people in Bosnia-Herzegovina held in autumn 2000 and initiated by the Croat People's Assembly, a body without constitutional status in Bosnia. However, they realised that the likelihood of this goal being realised was slim.

Still, most settlers felt they had fought for the Croatian cause and while they had not succeeded in creating their own Croatian territory in Bosnia, they believed that they had gained the right to live in Croatia after the victory over the insurgent Serbs in 1995. They often repeated the slogans of nationalist parties word for word and stressed that the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia had been necessary for the Croatian state to come into being and that this could be accomplished 'only through war' (Jansen 2000). The defence of the Croatian 'national territory' and more precisely, the gain

of a Croatian nation-state of which they were a perceived part, enabled them to accept more easily the individual losses they had suffered in Bosnia.[107] In this way, there was a shift from the importance of individual, private property rights to the importance of property rights based on national groupings. In fact, for many Croatian settlers the national property rights were seen as a precondition for their individual access to property after having lost their private property in the war. The shift from notions of individual property rights to national property rights was also accompanied by an uprooting of the people through war and migration.

On account of this, most settlers in the war-torn region declared themselves to be ethnic Croats. Many settlers from Bosnia had acquired Croatian citizenship only recently, in order to validate their settlement.[108] The majority lacked any personal links with Knin – they came as strangers and most were coming to the region for the first time. For them, the region was an empty space following the flight of the Serbs and its reintegration into the Croatian state through the 'homeland war' (as they tended to say). They assumed that the area was waiting to be settled by ethnic Croats. At the same time, they were unable to throw off the uncomfortable feeling of being newcomers. A man in his mid-40s from the region of Sarajevo expressed it this way:

> I think that we as well as all other citizens are needed in these regions, that is, in our beautiful homeland that I consider my homeland, my motherland of Croatia, and I have deep hopes that we will stay here, that we will not have to move on ... I believe my state and trust that it will support me. I want to be as trustworthy and honourable as I can. I want to stay here, because I fought in the war for Croatia. I fought trustworthily and honourably and I do not feel ashamed of that today. I do not feel ashamed of our flag.

Such declarations indicate the insecurity felt by many Croatian settlers from Bosnia about settling in Knin and their need to justify their status. Many settlers also 'marked' the houses they occupied with graffiti showing the words '*zauzeto*' (occupied) and '*Hrvat*' (Croat) and hung a Croatian flag from their house, or painted the Croatian coat of arms and other Croatian symbols (such as acronyms of the Croatian Democratic Union) on the outer

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[107] Compare Čapo-Žmegač (2001) on the reasons for settlement among the Croats from Vojvodina in the region of Virovitica and their integration into the local community.

[108] Of approximately 140,000 refugees from Bosnia in Croatia, 120,000 have since received Croatian citizenship and therefore no longer have refugee status. They are seen as 'settlers'. However, many have kept their Bosnian citizenship. Around 20,000 refugees from Bosnia still have refugee status in Croatia (MPWRC 2001).

walls. These symbols and slogans (also used by returning local Croats, as described earlier in section 4.4 above) marked the settlers as belonging to the Croatian nation and thus were an attempt to stamp their claim to the house and to justify their settlement in the area.



Plate 8. A house belonging to a Serb occupied by a Croatian war invalid. The graffiti says 'Occupied – Croatian army invalid' (summer 2000).

Many settlers from Bosnia were not only united by their Croatian national identity but also by other social bonds. As already noted, many settlers in Knin came from the Bosnian countryside, often regions that had not been industrialised or urbanised under socialism and that had been areas of outmigration even before the 1990s war. Quite a few settlers from Bosnia had already slipped to the lower end of the social ladder under socialism, with many having had only basic schooling and so having to register as unskilled workers. These people found it difficult to compete for jobs under the new market conditions in Croatia and Bosnia and so the chance to move to the former war region and occupy property was perceived as their only means of escape.

Other Croats from Bosnia with a better education, more money or better connections found opportunities to make a living in other Croatian towns like Zagreb or Split, or even went abroad to countries like the USA or Canada. In comparison to the settlers in the region of Knin, families living

outside Bosnia, as well as outside the former Croatian war region, were generally better off. This applied especially to those families who had already moved out of Bosnia before the war – most had found employment and could afford to rent an apartment or own a family house. Some relatives who were expelled from their homes during the war had remained in other Bosnian towns, mostly those under the control of Croatian authorities, like Čapljina and the western sector of Mostar. As Ivan from Vareš, who had moved to Biskupija in 1996, explained, 'We have all been torn apart. The war has divided all of us.'



Plate 9. A Serbian house occupied by a Croat settler family and painted with the Croatian chessboard national emblem symbolising Croatian property claims to the house (summer 2000).

At this point, it is necessary to differentiate settlers according to age, as this proved to be an important variable in property relations. Many settler families had several children, and young families often arrived without members of the older generation. Thanks to the high fertility rate of the settler families, Knin was the town with the 'youngest' population in Croatia after the war. This was also reflected in the high number of christenings and first communions celebrated by Croats in Knin compared to the low number of funerals (see table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Catholic life-cycle festivals in the municipality of Knin, 1995–2000

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Total
Christenings	16	125	183	190	177	131	822
First communion	–	132	132	163	191	220	842
Weddings	–	–	108	112	141	210	571
Funerals	7	19	28	25	30	21	130

Note: – = no information available.
Source: Klarić 2000: 8.

The table does not differentiate between Croatian settlers and local Croats, but because settlers made up the large majority of the Croatian population in Knin, it can be assumed that the table is relatively representative for this group. It is evident that the number of children born increased rapidly up to 1998, which might indicate that the ability to obtain a house was an incentive for pregnancy. Similarly, the steady increase in the number of weddings can be interpreted as a sign that people were inclined to settle and develop community ties. The number of funerals was relatively low (only 20% of the number christened), which suggests a low percentage of elderly people within the population.

A similar demographic trend was also found among settlers in the village of Biskupija. In my sample of 31 Croatian settler households in Biskupija (a total of 126 individuals) in 2001, 53 individuals were under 19 years old, 14 were between 19 and 29, 33 were between 30 and 44, and 18 were between 45 and 65 years old. Only eight were aged over 65 years. In fact, according to information given by the younger settler families in Biskupija and Knin, elderly relatives had often stayed on or returned to their homes in Bosnia. Their strong relationship to the locality seemed to have been decisive, despite the fact that they now belonged to an ethnic minority, the infrastructural and economic situation was difficult and their property had been damaged, destroyed or occupied. Ranko from Vareš, aged about 40, explained that his father had returned to Vareš in 1995 but had repossessed his apartment only in 2000, despite having applied for repossession in 1994. Some people also returned to their reconstructed houses. A woman aged about 25 from Konjic with two children described how her mother had returned to her rebuilt house in Bosnia:

> I have no one. No, I have relatives but they are not here with me. My father died but my mother is alive. She returned to Konjic, to the village where I was born. She lived in Makarska during the war,

> where my father died. He had a weak heart. And then my mother returned to her house in the village. They have rebuilt it for her, they did everything so that she can live there again.

Instead of returning to the rebuilt family-house with her mother – which would have surely been possible since the extent of reconstruction in Bosnia was related directly to the number of household members returning – this woman preferred to occupy a house in the Knin region. This meant that she was separated from her mother, with whom she had lived in Makarska in exile, and had no relatives nearby who could give her emotional and caring support while bringing up her two small children.

At this point it is necessary to provide a more detailed description of the procedures by which settlers received access to housing in the former war zones in Croatia. As explained earlier, the occupation of houses followed the ideology of war and was legalised by the introduction of Croatian state laws. In principle, houses and apartments were administered by the local commissions for 'temporary takeover' and the use of 'abandoned' housing space and property. However, it was not the local commissions but the Ministry of Development and Reconstruction which had the authority to decide on the distribution of housing space. Decisions were centralised rather than made at the local level. Centralisation was reinforced by the fact that the local commissions had often been founded a few months after the reintegration of the Serbian-held territory into the Croatian state. However, this centralisation and the time gap also gave the settlers the opportunity to decide for themselves which houses they wanted to occupy. Thus, even before the local commissions were established, many houses had already been occupied by settlers – settlers arriving in Knin would look for a house they liked by driving around the town and villages. In order to ascertain the national background and name of the former owner, they sometimes relied on the help of returned local Croats.[109] The legal procedure of registering the house sometimes took place long after they had moved in. This highlights the fact that for the process of occupation, the situation on the ground did not necessarily follow legal requirements. Furthermore, it suggests that rules and regulations might have been less important to the process of occupation than personal connections, needs and preferences (cf. F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann 2003).

Being strangers in the area, the family's choice of which house to occupy was essentially based on economic and social considerations. The house itself ideally needed to be in good condition, spacious, modern and with running water and a bathroom. Many families with children opted for a

[109] However, as will be described later, local Croats sometimes also helped to protect the houses of Serbian relatives and neighbours from occupation.

house in the town of Knin in order to secure good access to schools, shops and other facilities. In order to live in town, they would even choose an apartment to a large private house in a village. Only a few families from Bosnia looked for houses with land situated in the countryside, as most had no wish to take up agricultural work. Furthermore, the houses in Knin itself were connected to the town's water supply, while in the villages no pipeline existed and houses were often only equipped with a cistern. As a result, the houses and apartments in Knin filled up much more quickly than houses in the surrounding villages after *Oluja* in 1995. In the village of Biskupija, for example, the first settler family arrived in April 1996.[110]

However, some settlers deliberately chose to live in the countryside because they liked to live on their own and cultivate a garden or small plot for subsistence. A man aged about 45 from Bosnia, who had settled in Biskupija with his wife, said:

> I do not want to live in the town because I never learnt to live a town life. I cannot stand living in an apartment. I have to work at something, this and that, I have to be free to walk and to be out in the fresh air.

Another Croat from the region of Konjic in Bosnia, who had settled in Biskupija and was the head of a nine-member household, said:

> After we fled our village we lived in Čapljina, in a small house with two rooms. Then we moved on to Mostar where we got an apartment with the help of a social agency. The apartment was damaged in the war, but we received some material from the agency to repair it, which we did. We lived there for two years. It was nice there in Mostar, because it was already more peaceful and the end of the war was approaching. But we moved on to Biskupija after this region was liberated by Croats because we did not want to live in a town, but wanted to live in the countryside as we used to do.

In addition, housing units were chosen based on social criteria. Being new to the area, families preferred to live near relatives and friends than next to strangers – and they certainly preferred to live in a Croatian rather than a Serbian neighbourhood. This was another reason why some people did not want to move to the villages, even when the number of Serbs who had stayed on after *Oluja* was very small. In the town of Knin, very few Serbs remained, which appeared to guarantee that most neighbours would be Croats.

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[110] According to my survey of 31 settler households in Biskupija in 2001, 13 arrived in 1996, 11 arrived in 1997, and five arrived in 1998. In 1999 and 2000 only one family arrived per year.

Some settlers who had already obtained a house for themselves would then help their relatives and friends to find a house. Once they had spotted a suitable building close to their own they would phone their friends and relatives and tell them to come as soon as possible. This action resulted in a pattern of 'chain migration' to particular districts in the town of Knin, as well as to Biskupija. In fact, it was no coincidence that one-third of the settlers in Biskupija came from the region of Konjic. Many of them had been neighbours and/or relatives before the war and had stayed in contact throughout. Settlement in the same area and the establishment of community or even kinship relations in the neighbourhood was connected to creating feelings of being at home.[111] Still, in Biskupija as well as in Knin, there were also many families who had no relatives in the area and who had arrived alone.

Although the kind of house that settlers managed to acquire depended heavily on social connections, the time of arrival in the area was the primary factor. Those who came earlier had a much wider choice and were able to obtain houses that were in good condition. Many young families who had shared a household or house with at least one of their parents or in-laws before the war, were now able to occupy a house and establish their own household. Some families who arrived early even occupied several houses, as shown by the following story.

In 1996, 26-year-old unmarried Zdravko arrived in Biskupija from Bosnia with his parents, his 14-year-old brother and his 30-year-old brother, who already had a family. At the time of their arrival, the village was still relatively empty and it was easy for the incoming Croats to select whichever abandoned Serbian house they wanted. Zdravko and his parents and two brothers occupied not one but three houses situated closed to each other in the village. One house was chosen for the parents and the younger brother, one for the older brother and his family, and one for Zdravko which was intended to be his family dwelling as soon as he started a family. As the youngest occupant of a house in his family, he received the smallest house (which nevertheless was large and modern compared to others in the area). Zdravko, his brother and his father received legal confirmation of their use-rights to the houses. Two years after his arrival, in 1998, Zdravko married a young woman from Bosnia and they moved into the house registered in his name. His wife, Annica, was from the town of Konjic in Bosnia and had been living with her family in a smaller house in Biskupija.

Another example is more extreme. One of the first families to settle in Biskupija had previously lived in a single, shared household before the war.

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[111] Cf. Loizos for kin and regional settlement structure in a diaspora community in Cyprus (1981: 181).

In Biskupija, however, they occupied five houses next to each other. One was used by the elderly parents, another by an unmarried, elderly aunt who had previously lived with them, and the three other houses were used by the three adult sons. Two of the adult sons had started a family and wanted to live independently, while the third was still planning to marry.

This example highlights the fact that the scale of legal changes and the impact of nationalism after the war meant that access to property did not always follow clear rules and could be used as a means of social restructuring and profiteering by individual members of the Croatian national group. The legality of establishing new households and of a single family 'clan' occupying several houses was never properly addressed. The OSCE only took note of this practice in 1999–2000. Consequently, it decided that the status of households and property in 1991 would be the benchmark and so argued that the newly founded households lacked any legal basis. The OSCE referred to the fact that before the war two related families had often shared one house (houses often being built to accommodate two families), and not all young couples had set up their own household, not to mention having a house in town.

The settlers' organisation as well as many other Croatian institutions argued, however, that young families must have the right, as in other European countries, to set up their own household and not be compelled to share a house with their parents. In this way, they protected the individual benefits some settlers had gained during the postwar situation in 1995–7. Owing to the lack of consensus on this matter, the housing commissions did not intervene in cases of 'multiple occupancy'. However, in 2001 the OSCE started to document these cases and pressured the settlers to leave the houses.

Up to that time, the splitting of families and households into smaller components was one of the reasons why most of the settler households encompassed only two generations, with an average household size of four persons. This was the case in Biskupija.[112] It was not an unusual practice to

[112] In my sample of 31 settler households in Biskupija, seven comprised only one generation, 18 two generations and only six households were made up of three generations. In the case of the two-generation households, these were mainly married couples with pre-adult children. In one case, the household comprised a mother with a son, and in two cases it comprised extended households with a sibling of one of the spouses. The three-generation households comprised mainly married couples with children and one parent (usually the mother) of one of the spouses (usually of the husband). Concerning the number of household members, two households had one member, five had two members, four had three members, eight

'keep' the house in case one of the unmarried adult children married and started a family. Having a house ready and waiting was a vital asset for a man who wanted to marry. Most girls and young women found the idea of starting a family and living in a nice spacious house very attractive – especially as this would have been beyond the dreams of their parents. However, it must be remembered that there were not many other options for young women other than marriage and having a family: educational opportunities in Knin were limited, and, because it was difficult to obtain scholarships and jobs were scarce, no-one could afford to travel to the coastal towns for education.

In Biskupija, several single men from Bosnia started a family almost immediately after their arrival in the Knin region by marrying girls from neighbouring settler families. This readiness to marry was, on the part of the men, largely due to the fact that they had served in the army for several years and were now aged 30 or so, which, in the Croatian context, signalled that they were ready to marry. The young women they married were generally in their early twenties, considerably younger than the men. At the time of my fieldwork, their children were already toddlers and so the mothers tended to stay at home with them during the day.[113]

Generally speaking, in the first years after the war, the house was a significant status symbol for settlers: the bigger and more modern a house, the prouder the family living in it. The fact that the family only occupied the house and did not own it did not seem to undermine this pride because all settlers occupied rather than owned their houses.[114] But not all the settler

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had four members, seven had five members, two had six members, two had seven members, and one household had nine members.

[113] For women who were approaching the age of 30 or were even older it was very difficult to find a marriage partner. In Bosnia, as well in the region of Knin, the age at first marriage was relatively low (20–25 years) and men and women often married at a similar age. Interestingly, the men who had passed the established marriage age and were therefore older than the average were not interested in women of about the same age but wanted to marry a young woman (up to 25). This attitude was based on traditional values of virginity and fertility connected to the young age of a woman. In fact, there was a saying that for women under 20, love was the reason for marriage. In contrast, women between 20 and 30 'had' to be married off (with the help of their parents or a dowry), while women over 30 had no chance of marrying at all.

[114] However, in 2000, young couples often pointed out the difference between having built one's own house or occupying a house. While the former was seen as a personal and generally undisputed achievement, the latter tended to be seen as a temporary opportunity to accommodate the family. For further elaboration on this, see chapter 5.

families had found pleasant, spacious and modern houses for themselves. A considerable number lived in small apartments or older houses some distance from the town, sometimes without a proper bathroom or water supply. Even those who had arrived early and had a good range of homes to choose from, faced moving into partly demolished buildings without furniture. Many settlers were shocked by the poor condition of the houses and facilities they found in the region of Knin. Given the Croatian state propaganda issued by the government, they had expected far better conditions than those they met there. A settler put it this way:

> Concerning our life here, when we first arrived and even for some time afterwards, it was ugly and poor. The houses were devastated and burnt, the streets were full of rubbish. Everything had to be cleaned first, to be set up and moved, so that we could start a more or less normal life.

In the villages, many houses had damp walls, no water supply, and the distance to schools and other institutions was considerable. Kata from Zenica, who settled in Biskupija with her husband Stanko and their four small children, was not impressed:

> We have nothing here. I have to fetch water from the spring, as there is no water in the house. I started doing this again only four days after I gave birth. The children are still small and the rooms are damp. These are no conditions for living. We have no job and we live from day to day.

Another settler who had moved to Biskupija in 1999 explained that he was living in a kind of weekend house, which had not been intended for year-round occupancy and did not even have a water tank:

> Before *Oluja* mostly Serbs lived here. They had their flats in Knin and came to the village only for the weekend. They spent some time here, on Saturdays and Sundays, and then went back to Knin. They never planned to live here permanently, but we have no choice. We suffer here in these conditions, but they promise it will get better ...

A survey of living standards of Croatian settler households in Biskupija (see table 4.3) showed that between 22% and 28% of all households lacked running water, a WC inside the house or a refrigerator.

Table 4.3. Standard of living in Croatian settler households in Biskupija, 2001

	Yes		No	
Water tank	17	94%	1	6%
Running water	13	72%	5	28%
WC inside	14	78%	4	22%
Water heater	13	71%	5	28%
Washing machine	16	89%	2	11%
Refrigerator	14	78%	4	22%
Telephone (mobile)	5 (+13)	100%	0	0%
Radio	15	83%	3	17%
Television	16	89%	2	11%
Video	8	44%	10	56%
Car	10	56%	8	44%

Note: Unit = household.
Source: Questionnaire.

Compared with the households of the local Croats discussed earlier, settler households were still generally better equipped. However, it has to be borne in mind that the vast majority of settler households included pre-adult children while most of the local households comprised only elderly people. Disregarding national grouping, the households of elderly people were generally less well equipped than the households of families with children. Furthermore, as highlighted when describing the process of house occupation, the standard of living varied among settlers, as this depended mainly on the condition of the house chosen by the family. In order to repair and furnish houses damaged and pillaged in the war, some settlers participated in the looting going on around them, searching abandoned houses for furniture and other goods. However, others distanced themselves from the looting and stressed that they had invested their own money in furnishing their homes, and/or that they had brought their own furniture from Germany or Bosnia.

In addition to their perceived legal right to occupy Serbian homes, and their economic need to do so, Croatian settlers associated the cleaning, repairing and furnishing of the house with the act of acquiring rights to it. The various legal, social and ideological justifications overruled the moral

concerns people normally held about moving into a house which was the private property of a stranger who had built and inhabited it.[115]

Making oneself at home was linked closely to the establishment of social relations to neighbours and other community members. After arrival, the settlers began to help one another, for example by cleaning houses or reconnecting electricity supplies. As noted for the returning local Croat population, they also visited each other to drink coffee and were often enthusiastic about the development of a real community. Relations with the local Croats, however, remained superficial, and settlers and local Croats would rarely visit each other. Relations with Serbs, especially in the first years after the war, were poor, which was hardly surprising given that the settlers occupied Serbian houses and often even used their furniture and other personal possessions. They either ignored the Serbs or scolded them as they passed by. Often, they did not even know the names of their Serbian neighbours. This situation improved slightly over time so that, by 2000–1 for example, some Croatian settlers greeted Serbs in passing and would even exchange a few words. However, they rarely invited each other into their homes for coffee.

This kind of conflict behaviour, in which most Croatian settlers avoided open conflict with Serbs by ignoring them completely when passing by, or greeting them but not socialising in any meaningful way, could be called 'negative tolerance'. Robert Hayden (2002: 160–1) used the term in relation to religious sites in Bosnia, defining it as a tolerance which is forced upon people who live next to each other, but who do not share the same values and who have no positive picture of the other. This form of 'negative tolerance' made living side by side possible. However, because the conflict remained unresolved, it was potentially explosive and prevented the two groups from moving closer together.

Although the settlers' position was supported by the Croatian state, it proved difficult for them to appropriate space in the village apart from the houses they occupied and the Catholic churches they attended.[116] In the village of Biskupija, which was dominated by Serbs in 2000, settlers had far fewer meeting places than the local people. Adults did not meet publicly except in front of the church on Sundays. Young settlers met near the football field and in summer at the nearby lake. Because there was no café in Biskupija, people had to go to Knin if they wanted to go out for a drink.

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[115] Cf. Duijzings (2000: 57) who described that the Croats from Kosovo, who resettled in Western Slavonia in 1992 and occupied the houses of Serbs who had fled during the war, felt uncomfortable about entering the houses of others and using their private belongings.

[116] This was quite different in the town of Knin where the settlers dominated.

Generally, the settlers were more closely oriented to Knin than the local people, and they felt increasingly excluded from village life as more local Serbs returned. The village space was effectively being reclaimed as 'Serbian' again, while the town of Knin remained 'Croatian'.

4.6 Changing housing relations of Serbian returnees

In the first few years following the reintegration of the former Serbian-held territory into the Croatian state – especially up to 1997 – the return of Serbs was obstructed by the general lack of political will on the part of the Croatian authorities to accept returnees. This was especially true for young male Serbs who had served in the army of Serbian Krajina in the war against Croatia. Without travel documents and lacking basic information about the availability of housing and economic opportunities in the former war zone it was very difficult for Serbs to return. Furthermore, in the political and social conditions prevailing in the aftermath of the Croatian military operation, exiled Serbs were also afraid to return to their homes.

The changing housing and property relations of Serbs who had fled the region in 1995 were closely connected to the new legal regulations. On the basis of the law passed in 1995 concerning the 'lease of apartments in the liberated areas', the use-rights of Serbs to former socially owned property were cancelled if they had not made uninterrupted use of the property for three months. This practice was similar to the socialist regulations concerning socially owned apartments, in which tenants would lose their use-rights as soon as they failed to use the property for a certain period of time (usually three months). However, the new property law did not take into account the actual situation of the Serbian refugees and was therefore discriminatory: Serbian refugees did not have the opportunity to return to the area because they lacked the necessary new travel documents that would allow them to cross the Croatian borders with Serbia and Bosnia. The law was thus formulated in such a way as to make the repossession of a Croat-held apartment virtually impossible. The new legal treatment of property rights was discriminatory in other respects as well. For example, the family members of the legal tenant (e.g. wife, children, etc.) did not have the right to use the accommodation if the legal tenant was absent. The 'abandoned' apartments were, like private property, then put under state administration and could be passed on to those persons eligible for the use of private 'Serbian' housing. This was a crucial aspect of the law, because the holders of tenancy rights were mostly male and had served in the army during the Serbian Krajina regime. Because of this, they were afraid to return to the region. Female returnees were subject to less hostility in the first months and years after the 'liberation' of the territory; however, (social) security was

harder to obtain for women as they had fewer rights to housing. Discrimination against Serbs was especially severe since Serbs, unlike Croats, were unable to acquire private property rights to former socially owned housing in the transition period in the 1990s and instead lost their use-rights during exile. Last, but not at least, they faced severe difficulties in repossessing occupied private housing property and applying for reconstruction funds.

In 1998, under pressure from international organisations, the Croatian state launched a return programme and so created the basic conditions for return. The programme enabled Serbs to cross the border more easily, supplied returnees with the right to a so-called 'green card' that provided funds for the first six months after return, and set up procedures for the repossession of occupied private property. The programme therefore signalled a significant change in policy. However, not everything presented on paper was implemented and the results were very disappointing with respect to repossession of property. Furthermore, the difficult security situation (or at least the subjective feeling of fear among the Serbian refugees) changed only slowly. The lack of economic opportunities and poor infrastructure remained a significant barrier to return. A further step was taken with an action plan inaugurated by the new government between 2000 and 2002, which concentrated on the repossession of property – but again, the results were disappointing.[117]

To explain why people returned at all under such difficult circumstances, it is important to understand the living conditions of the Serbian refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (since 2002 renamed Serbia-Montenegro) to which the large majority had fled. In the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, many refugees found it difficult to adapt to the circumstances of their new life, especially since they were not welcomed by the Serbian state (Nikolić-Ristanović et al. 1996; Leutloff 2002a). Refugees from Croatia could not receive work permits and were prevented from obtaining Serbian citizenship while they still held their Croatian citizenship. Many refugees were deeply disappointed by their treatment at the hands of the Serbian state.[118]

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[117] The return programme and the action plan in the context of the repossession of property are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

[118] This negative reaction by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was surprising given its nationalist wartime policy. Serbia could have welcomed the Serbs from Croatia as 'brothers'. However, the Serbs from the war zones in Croatia were potentially politically dangerous to Milošević, as they were extremely disappointed about the lack of military engagement on the part of the Yugoslav army during the decisive *Oluja* military operation. In fact, many Serbs from Croatia were convinced

Fortunately, many Serbs from the area of Knin had relatives in Belgrade and other larger cities who had moved there for economic or educational reasons long before the war started. These families accommodated and helped the refugees on their arrival in Serbia.[119] However, relations with the host family tended to become strained as time went by, and refugees faced paying high rents if they moved out of their relatives' apartments. Because it was impossible to cover the rent with a single salary, refugee families with several household members often lived in very small flats. This made the situation for refugee families particularly precarious. Refugees were often shocked and disappointed about the situation in which they found themselves, and expressed their despair in words like these by a man in his early fifties who returned to Biskupija in 2001:

> Being a refugee is perhaps the most difficult thing that can happen to a person. It is more difficult than death because the state did not welcome or accept us.

Those who found the circumstances of exile particularly difficult – either emotionally or economically – and who had not been actively involved in the war in Croatia, thought about returning home. Generally, elderly people returned home first. They returned to the countryside, to houses which had not been occupied by Croatian settlers due to their remoteness or state of disrepair. Often, individuals received information about the state of their home from those who had remained. Others who had no-one living close by did not know what to expect: some found their houses completely destroyed, others found them occupied – and, as many returnees explained, they were often not even allowed to approach their property. I frequently heard stories from Serbian returnees about the years between 1996 and 1999 when settlers would immediately call the police to protect themselves from the claims or

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that Milošević had 'sold out' the Serbian-held parts of Croatia to Tuđman in exchange for regions in Bosnia. The negative attitude of Serbs from Croatia towards Milošević explains his negative reaction towards them (Mappes-Niediek 1995; Leutloff 2002a).

At the same time, the Yugoslav government had no real interest in supporting the return of the Serbian refugees to Croatia. Although the refugees were a burden to Serbian society, the government profited from them during the international embargo against Serbia (1992–2000) because part of the international aid directed to the refugees was claimed by the government.

[119] According to estimates by UNHCR, about 52% of the Serbian refugees from Croatia were accommodated by relatives and friends for the first year after their exodus. About 30% established their own households, often in small summer houses or in small rented apartments. Around 16% lived in the collective accommodation provided by the state (UNHCR 1996: 23).

even only the gaze of the returnees. Sometimes they were yelled at and harassed.[120]

Serbs whose homes were occupied or destroyed often had no choice but to return to old and disused houses, or even to stables. Some Serbs who could not move into their homes stayed in houses belonging to relatives and neighbours who had not yet returned. Others spent some time in the homes of the remaining Serbs until they were able to move back into their own property. A few were lucky enough to return to houses that had been saved from occupation with the help of Croatian relatives or close neighbours. In this regard, the village of Biskupija was a positive example. Ljubica, a Serbian woman of about 40, explained:

> Our Croats [her Croatian neighbours] did not allow Bosnians to settle in our houses.

However, while this was the case in some places like the hamlet in Biskupija to which several local Croats had returned, in other villages no local Croats lived nearby to protect Serbian property. In the case of the house of an elderly couple from the Popović hamlet in Biskupija, the son-in-law, a Croat from Zagreb, came to the village after *Oluja* and marked the house with a Croatian flag. He wrote his name next to the Croatian coat of arms to save the building from occupation, but without success. As has been discussed earlier (section 4.4) in relation to returning local Croats, Croats were not always able to prevent their empty houses from being looted, despite the Croatian national ideology whereby property rights were to be secured for 'Croats'. However, not all Croats followed the ideology that demanded opposition to Serbs. Factors like friendship and kinship created 'cross-cutting ties' (for the theoretical concept behind this, see Gluckmann 1965) on the basis of which Serbian property was partly protected by Croats, too.

It is now important to turn to elderly people and consider why they returned. Elderly people decided to return primarily for emotional reasons.[121] Like their compatriots who had remained at home in 1995, or their Croatian neighbours who had already returned, they had strong emotional ties to their house and land. Many elderly people had lived their whole lives in their village and were not used to living in larger towns where they became homesick. Nevenka, aged about 60, commented:

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[120] When the new government came to power in 2000 the situation of the Serbs improved, as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

[121] According to a survey on the returnee population in Croatia carried out by PULS (2001), 80% of the returnees said that their main reason for returning had been emotional as they had wanted to come home. This result corresponded to my survey of Serbian returnees to Biskupija, where 24 out of 27 people questioned said that they had returned for emotional reasons.

> It was horrible for me in Serbia. Nowhere were there any of my own people, we moved here and there and nowhere did we feel at home. I went back to obtain the necessary documents in 1997 and I was glad to find my house still there. It was looted, of course, I did not find anything besides a small, old bed and an oven which I got from Nada, a relative of mine. This is how I survived the first winter, without any doors and windows. There were no people here in 1997, but I had time to think about how life had been before the war and I understood that it was best to be in my own house.

Moreover, many elderly Serbs said that they had returned because they did not want to be a burden to their children with whom they had shared a household in exile. In fact, although a considerable number had shared a household or at least lived under the same roof before the war, in exile the conditions were quite different. Elderly people felt distressed about the strained circumstances. After war and migration in the 1990s, many elderly people were forced to live with their children in small and expensive apartments in urban areas and not, as before, in large village houses. The younger generation often had to work very hard to pay the rent and meet the living costs which had either been covered at home by sharing a family house or through joint agricultural labour. In exile, elderly people had few opportunities to contribute to the joint household since they lacked any source of income. Those living in Serbia did not receive pension payments from the Croatian state and could not work in agriculture.

For the elderly, returning home offered them the chance to regain their independence and support themselves. Although many returned to destroyed and looted houses, they felt that they were back on their own property (*na svojem*), that they were once again their own master (*gazda*) and head of the household (*domaćin or domaćica*). In 2001, some 75% of the returnees to Croatia were living at their pre-war address, which demonstrated that they had returned to their own property (PULS 2001).

In addition to the emotional aspect, the reasons for returning also had a clear economic basis. From 1998, the Croatian state return programme provided returnees with payments for the first six months. After that, based on their pre-war terms of employment, they often managed to receive a small pension from the Croatian state (from €75 to 200 per month).[122] In addition to these cash resources, most elderly returnees to the villages also returned to working their own plots of land, or kept a cow and some chickens. This

[122] However, this was very little, considering that the average price for groceries in Croatia was higher than that in Germany. Furthermore, pension payments were restricted to the elderly who had worked for a certain number of years before the war; employment during the war period was excluded.

served their own basic needs and enabled returnees to live off their limited cash resources, just as they had done under socialism.



Plate 10. Serb returnee woman in the kitchen of her house near Knin (spring 2001).

Serbs who returned also tried to protect their homes from further devastation and occupation. They were aided by the increasing involvement of international organisations, especially the OSCE. From 1998, Croatian settlers no longer dared to force Serbs out of their houses and they stopped looting occupied homes. But again, as most of the modern housing was occupied by settlers, the Serbs who returned tended to be those who owned marginal housing. As time passed, some young people returned, but their number was small. Dragan, a Serbian returnee in his mid-40s, stated in 2000: 'Mainly old people live here now. When there is a funeral, 15 out of 20 people use a walking stick'.

This situation is reflected in table 4.4, which shows the number of returnees according to age and year of return. In the village of Biskupija, of the 112 returnees I surveyed only 6% were under 20 years old, 10% of them were between 20 and 29 years old, 14% of them were between 30 and 44 years old, while the groups aged over 45 made up 70% of the returned population. A survey on the returnee population produced for UNHCR in Croatia (PULS 2001: 13) shows that the demographic structure of Serbian returnees in the village of Biskupija is relatively typical of the age structure of Serbian returnees in other places in the former war zone. According to the

UNHCR survey, the average age of Serbian returnees in the former war regions in Croatia was exactly 60 years in 2000. Only 8 of the adults were between 18 and 39 years old, 27.2% percent belonged to the 40–59 age group, and 62.1% belonged to the age group of 60 and older. Many households consisted only of a single person, either male or female, or they comprised an old couple, sometimes with an unmarried son or daughter. Middle-aged couples who returned often did not have children. Similar household sizes and compositions could also be found in the village of Biskupija. According to my survey based on a sample of 59 households, 18 households had only one member, corresponding to 30%, 27 households had two members (45%), 10 households had three members (17%). Only four households had four or more members (8% of all households). The household compositions are shown in table 4.5.

Table 4.4. Age structure of Serbian returnees according to the year of return in Biskupija, 1996–2000

Year of return	**Age on return**					Total number of returnees
	0–19	20–29	30–44	45–64	65 and older	
1996			1	2	5	8
1997		1	7	12	17	37
1998		2	3	14	11	30
1999	3	7	5	8	3	26
2000	4	1	0	3	3	11
Total	7	11	16	39	39	112

Source: Based on a survey of 112 returnees conducted in the village of Biskupija in 2000–1.

Table 4.5. Household composition of local Serbs, 2000–2001

Single families:	
Single female households (widowed or unmarried)	14
Single male households (widowed or unmarried)	4
Incomplete families:	
Mother and unmarried son	2
Mother and unmarried daughter	1
Nuclear families:	
Elderly married couple (both partners on average over 60 years)	22
Middle-aged married couple (both partners between 40 and 60)	2
Married couple with unmarried sons (over 25 years)	6

Married couple with unmarried daughter (over 25 years)	1
Married couple with (pre-adult) child(ren)	3
Extended families:	
Married couple with one elderly parent	3
Complex families:	
Three-generation household (grandparent(s), parents, children)	2

Source: Questionnaire.

Why then did so few younger people return or return only gradually to their home communities? Again, there are several reasons for this and a key one is linked to housing. Families who had lived in the town of Knin in pre-war times said that now they were forced to live with their parents or siblings in the villages, since their apartments and houses in the town were occupied. In most villages, however, transportation for schoolchildren to the town was difficult and adolescents and children often did not find friends of the same age in the vicinity. In the village of Biskupija, the situation was a little better since some of the local Croat families of mixed marriages had school-age children. They showed solidarity towards the Serbian schoolchildren and helped them out. Ljubica, the mother of a 20-year-old woman who was the first of the younger generation to return in 1997, said:

> My daughter returned in 1997. She spent two years in Belgrade to finish the second class of high school, she was 16 at that time. When she returned to our village there was no bus but Jozo [the Croatian father of two boys of Nina's age], gave his own children a ride to Knin and so he also took her along. But there were cases in which she had to return on foot [a distance of about five kilometres]. We then went to the municipality to ask for a bus that would fetch the three of them. But only the three of them as there were no other local school children. Those from Bosnia had their own bus.

Unwillingness to return to the village was also connected to the experience of war and violence, as well as the settlement of new Croats in the village. This will be discussed later in more detail. The greatest barrier for return, however, was the fact that the younger returnees could not find employment. This was largely due to the Croatian nationalist atmosphere and the economic crisis in the country, particularly in the former war zones. Only a very small number of Serbs, mostly those in mixed marriages, found jobs. Furthermore, the unemployment rate in Knin rose steadily and reached 60% in 2000. The following stories illustrate how the lack of employment was experienced by Serbs.

Ljubica, mentioned above, had been employed for many years in the 'Kninjanka' sewing factory in Knin until she fled to Belgrade during *Oluja* in 1995. The factory had about 800 employees in 1986 (Đorđević 1989: 27). From her return in 1996 until 2000, she was unable to find a job. The sewing factory was under state management and operated at a reduced level with only 30 employees, all of them Croats. In the winter of 2000, however, Ljubica was given the opportunity to start work again at Kninjanka. The factory had received further financial support from the state, and under the pressure of international organisations it had introduced the policy of employing Serbs as part of the local authority's efforts to reduce ethnic discrimination in the public sector that had predominated in Knin in previous years. However, although this was a positive signal on the part of the local authorities, it was not clear whether Ljubica would receive a salary, and if so how much, as the other employees had not received their salaries for several months. Still, Ljubica started work and was quite positive about it, especially because she enjoyed the good atmosphere in the factory. She worked in a team with Croatian women (local Croats and settlers alike) and felt they did not mind that she was a Serb. However, only three months later the factory closed down completely having failed to compete in the marketplace. Ljubica never received any payment for the work she had done.

Nikola, who was about 30 years of age and from a neighbouring village, suffered an even worse experience than Ljubica and felt severely discriminated against. Before the war, he had worked in the post office for many years, where his father had held a senior position. After Nikola returned to the Knin region in 1998, he applied for a job three times but each time his application was turned down and the post office employed a Croat. The post office officials explained by saying that Nikola had failed a test, though he had not been invited to take one. Nikola was convinced that his was a case of ethnic discrimination.

In summary, then, without the possibility of work, return was not a real option even if a house was available. The value of a house to its returning owner was very much bound to the social, economic and political conditions of the time. This was also true for the returning local Croats, who also tended not to return if the social and economic conditions in the Knin region were unfavourable. In the case of Serbs, however, these conditions were much worse, as they had to cope with latent ethnic discrimination. The unwillingness to return on the part of Serbs must also be considered against a background of gender-specific factors. Younger women in particular preferred life in exile in urban areas to postwar village life. Like the Croatian women from the villages in the Knin area who had fled during the war and now lived in larger Croatian towns, Serbian women were attracted to their

new life in towns in Serbia, especially Belgrade, which was considered modern. There they found that there were none of the social controls that had existed in the villages and they could escape working in agriculture and animal husbandry. Furthermore, town life was vibrant compared to the monotonous and lonely hours spent in the village house without the company of other young women. Instead of returning, many unmarried young women from the Knin region sought to escape the unpleasant prospect of remaining a poor, unemployed refugee by marrying a man with a home in Serbia. Others sought mobility through education, sometimes even in third countries, or by simply working hard to earn their own living. Of course, an improvement in status or social security was difficult to achieve in Serbia, too. Not all managed it, and many women lived in very difficult circumstances. Even for those with a stable income, it was considered a luxury to have one's own room. Thus many refugees with no permanent employment had to share a room with several others where, owing to the lack of space and the insecurities of refugee status, personal items were often kept packed in boxes. By 2001, six years after leaving Croatia, a situation that had seemed only temporary and therefore bearable had became permanent and this realisation plunged many refugees into desperation. Many still had not been issued with Yugoslav passports and were therefore not allowed to work in the state sector. At the same time, they had very ambivalent feelings – many were not ready to relinquish their Croatian citizenship but at the same time held onto the hope of building a future in Serbia rather than in the villages in the Knin region.

Although young men had similar reasons for not returning, their perspective was quite different. First of all, they had generally enjoyed more freedom in village life than the young women. They were not expected to stay at home and were less subject to the controlling gaze and moral pressure of the villagers. Secondly, as unmarried men in exile, their position was made more difficult because they did not have a material base to offer a future wife should they want to marry a local girl from Serbia. Like their female compatriots, they often failed to find a permanent job and thus found it hard to rent accommodation for themselves. They too lost years of their youth during the war and in exile. Those with the necessary contacts via family or friends therefore emigrated abroad. Others returned to their home villages because they expected to inherit the family house and land (or at least part of it) and so they could count on having a material base. As discussed by Čapo-Žmegač (2003a) in relation to Croatian migrant workers in Munich, men's emotional connections to the house and land were perhaps stronger than those of women. This was based on traditional patrilineal

values and the fact that men had often built a house in their native village, while women generally left their village when they married.

Because inheriting a house and its land was traditionally linked to taking on responsibility for both the property and care of the elderly parents, many young men felt an urgent need to return home, especially if they were the only son. Sometimes siblings alternated between helping out at home and carrying on with their own lives in their place of exile. In families without sons, one of the unmarried daughters generally returned to care for the parents and the house. Since women were more likely to care for the sick and elderly at the expense of their own life chances, some women also returned to carry out these tasks despite having a brother. But in the village of Biskupija as well as in the neighbouring villages, it was usually the young unmarried men who returned more often than young unmarried women despite being confronted with greater security problems and nationalist hostility.

When investigating the reasons and processes relating to the return of the Serbs, it should be noted that the number of people who registered as having returned was much higher than the number of permanent returnees. Many Serbs came to Knin to register their 'return', stayed for some weeks, mostly during the summer, and then 'disappeared' to Serbia or abroad. In summer, therefore, a considerable number of young people and children appeared to live in the villages. The initial purpose of these visits was often to apply for Croatian documents. Croatian passports enabled Serbs to travel without a visa to most European countries where they could look for work, as well as to apply for returnee benefits once they had registered with one of the international organisations active in the field. Many also applied for reconstruction of damaged property or for the repossession of occupied property. For both procedures – repossession and reconstruction – Serbs had to register in Knin and declare that they planned to return permanently. However, many Serbs had not yet decided whether they really wanted to return for good or only to repossess and/or reconstruct their property as an investment (or for emotional reasons).

Like the elderly, younger people also had emotional and nostalgic ties to their relatives, the family house, the village community and the surrounding landscape in which they had grown up and which they remembered from the times before the war and in most cases up to their expulsion in 1995. As Pine (1996) found among villagers in highland Poland, the house and land were often seen as important bearers of identity reinforced by kinship and neighbourhood relations, as well as by rituals connected to the land. Exiled young Serbs came to visit the family graves and sometimes simply to participate in the funeral of a close relative.

Coming home for a limited time, they enjoyed the quiet life of the village compared to the busy life in town. They also helped the elderly prepare firewood for the winter and do agricultural work, and, importantly, they undertook repairs to the house.

Like the returning Croats and Croatian settlers, the returning Serbs often faced a monumental task in cleaning up and repairing their abandoned former homes. But in the case of the Serbs there were not many young people around to help. Furthermore, hardly any Serbian families received reconstruction funds for their damaged housing from the Croatian state until 2000. According to a survey by PULS (2001), a Croatian opinion research institute working for UNHCR, some 40% of the Serbian returnees countrywide applied for reconstruction assistance from the Croatian government up to spring 2001. In the Šibenik-Knin area, only 8% of all applicants received aid from the Croatian government. In 1996, international organisations began to make funds available for the basic repair of Serbian houses that had been devastated or destroyed. This represented an important step towards facilitating the return of the Serbs. However, the distribution of international funds for reconstruction was not always impartial. The amount of reconstruction funds and the quality of work differed greatly among the international NGOs. While the reconstruction work organised by an Italian NGO between 1998 and 1999 was very basic and mainly served the purpose of providing shelter, reconstruction supported by a German organisation in 2000–1 was undertaken to a much higher specification and was comparable to the quality that Croats received from the Croatian state. Secondly, personal connections to individuals working for the international organisations could determine the amount of reconstruction assistance received. Thirdly, for the employees of the international NGOs active in reconstruction, it was sometimes difficult to establish who really intended to live in the reconstructed house. In the case of an unmarried Serb who still lived with his mother, for example, a nearby house belonging to the family was reconstructed but, on completion, it was locked and the son continued to live with his mother. Of course, the rebuilt house might have increased the son's chances of marrying, and he might have had plans to move to this house as soon as he found a wife. As in the case of Croatian settlers who occupied an additional house in case one of the unmarried adult children might marry, local Serbs considered it a great asset to have a reconstructed house available for when a son should marry. Such a house was of material value to the owner, whether inhabited or not. However, given that some people were in urgent need of reconstruction aid and were having to live in stables and other sub-standard accommodation, the case described above illustrates the inequalities that were built into the system. The same can be

said of houses which, after reconstruction, were closed up because the owners continued to live in Serbia. Still, for the people whose houses were rebuilt (as well as for others), their own house had much more personal significance than the fact that it merely provided a roof over their heads. It offered a real opportunity for return as soon as the economic and social conditions improved in the Knin region.



Plate 11. Serb returnee family in front of their house reconstructed by EU funds in a village near Knin (summer 2000).

Frequently, the condition of the houses of Serbian returnees and their furnishings were very poor. The kitchen often doubled as the living room, and even in 2000, windows were sometimes still covered with plastic rather than properly glazed. Inside, furniture was reduced to simple necessities. It was often old and broken, and the walls tended to be bare. Appliances like washing machine were often missing. As can be seen in table 4.6, the standard of living in 2001, six years after the end of war, had worsened considerably compared to the prewar situation in 1990.

Table 4.6. A comparison of living standards in Serbian returnee households in Biskupija, 2001 and 1990

Year	2001				1990			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
Cistern	43	71%	17	29%	45	76%	14	24%
Running water	22	37%	36	63%	38	64%	21	36%
WC inside	21	35%	38	65%	35	60%	23	40%
Water heater	25	43%	33	57%	31	58.5%	22	41.5%
Washing machine	16	28%	41	72%	38	70%	16	30%
Refrigerator	45	79%	12	21%	52	93%	4	7%
Telephone (mobile)	22	38.5%	35	61.5%	43	77%	13	23%
Radio	35	59%	24	41%	51	93%	4	7%
Television	36	62%	22	38%	47	89%	5	11%
Video	5	9%	52	91%	11	20%	43	80%
Car	9	16%	46	84%	33	58%	24	42%

Source: Questionnaire.

Compared with settler housing and the housing of local Croat returnees, the housing of local Serbs was generally in a much poorer state. Because the Serbs often found empty and devastated houses after return and had few compatriots to provide them with building materials and furnishings, they had to purchase them. Repairing and equipping a house was very expensive. Humanitarian organisations supplied the returnees with the basic materials and utility goods like doors, stoves, beds and agricultural equipment, but they did not donate washing machines, refrigerators or televisions. Another reason for the poor condition of housing was the fact that younger people were often not sure if they would stay permanently or return to Serbia. There was little incentive to invest in a house which might soon be abandoned again.

Generally, the diminishing value of houses and the lack of interest among younger people to return was closely linked to the slow re-establishment of community relations. Again, for many Serbs, the experiences of war were difficult to forget, even years later. Not only did they have memories of their own suffering during expulsion and exile but they also lived daily with the stories of relatives and neighbours who had stayed on and witnessed the violence following the victory of the Croatian army. The stories transformed formerly positive social relationships into

negative ones, restricting the custom of getting together and socialising in the intimate space of the home and in the home community in general.[123]

During my stay in Biskupija, many rumours circulated. According to one report, the bodies of Serbs who had disappeared during *Oluja* or its aftermath had been thrown into the nearby lake. This was why local young people who returned did not want to swim there – even in 2000–1 – despite having done so before the war. The young Croatian settlers, by contrast, had no such qualms and enjoyed swimming in the lake in summer. The village space was thus differently occupied according to the emotions and memories of pre-war, wartime and postwar experiences of local Serbs, local Croats and Croatian newcomers.

Relations with the local Croats had suffered during the war, not least because of the hostilities and crimes perpetrated by local Serbs against local Croats, and by local Croats against local Serbs after *Oluja*. Forty-year-old Ljubica, who returned in 1997, told me:

> When a neighbour of ours died in 1997, no-one was at the funeral, only myself and my father, and maybe a few other people, because the local Croats did not want to come. They were scared. Croats feared Serbs and vice versa. They looted our houses and that is why they were afraid. My godmother took all of my things. That is why she did not want us to return. But, during the time of Serbian Krajina, Serbs from another village looted all the houses belonging to Croats in the village. All the stuff is spread among different houses and no-one will give it back. The damned West plays tennis and has fun and we are at war with each other and behave like wolves. And they want us to live together again. We need another 40 years for my daughter to have a good life.

As this quote shows, relations with the 'other' group depended not just on structural conditions and the 'grand narrative' of what had happened in the village and in Croatia during the war, but on personal experiences. Such experiences kept some people from returning, while for others they were an incentive to return. Most Serbs who returned were reluctant to accuse Croats as a whole, but opted for an individual approach. This applied not just to the crimes committed by Croats, but to the crimes of Serbs as well. In their turn, Serbs hoped that Croats would judge them individually too. Mirko, aged about 50, told me:

> I have the patience to wait for Croatia to fulfil its promises towards Serbs because I myself was a great critic of the Serbian aggression against Croatian places during the war. As a man who belongs to the

[123] See Mountcastle and Danon for the impact of war on community life and notions of home (2001: 107).

> Serbian nation, I will support those who charge and sentence the Serbian war criminals, as well as all those guilty of other war crimes. I have never judged people according to their national origins, but according to their character, how much they do for others, how much they achieve for themselves. I have a Croatian godfather, he is a Croat from Biskupija. He is honourable [*pošten*], a man whom I like along with his children and his brothers. We were brought up together and have very similar opinions about many things in life. He is my best friend. The war did not divide us. He went into exile in Šibenik during the war and that was a very unpleasant and embarrassing moment for me. When we met again after the war, we both cried because of the strong emotions involved. We were both very sorry for what had happened during the war – all the suffering – but we were also happy that we will again live together, next to each other.

In this case, the local Croat who was Mirko's best friend related very similar experiences and emotions when I spoke to him about Mirko, and I observed that the two families visited each other often. Although the generally warm feelings of Serbs towards local Croats with whom they had been friends in pre-war times were not always reciprocated on the part of the Croats, the problem between Serbian and Croatian locals was minor compared to the relations between the Serbian returnees and Croatian settlers. The latter were usually treated with general mistrust and rejection. The occupation of housing property played a significant role in this hostile behaviour. As we have seen, most Serbs were not interested in socialising with settlers and vice versa.

Still, in 2000 the general situation in the Knin region was peaceful and conflicts between Croatian settlers and Serbs mainly comprised verbal harassment.[124] Compared with the first years after the war, relations between Serbs and Croatian settlers had improved considerably and Serbs could rely increasingly on public institutions to secure their basic rights. This was connected to the changing political climate in Croatia. Seventy-year-old Mira, who had remained in Biskupija during *Oluja*, described the impact of these changes as follows:

> All kinds of things happened, the Croatian settlers argued a lot with us and stole whatever they could, we had to constantly watch all our

[124] However, isolated violent incidents did still occur. In 1999, a former politician in the Republic of Serbian Krajina who had returned was beaten up in Knin; in 2000, Serbian and settler young men fought in a pub; in 2001, a newly elected Serbian politician was beaten up in daylight in Knin.

> things. Now it is already different. As soon as they start to provoke us we can call the police.

Mira's statement indicates that, by 2001, the police had become somewhat less partial and were actively protecting Serbs when they were threatened by Croats. This new behaviour by the police reduced the number of cases of provocation by Croatian settlers.

The improvement in relations between Serbs and Croatian settlers was also experienced by Mira's neighbour, 70-year-old Milica, who had returned in 1997. She said that in the first years following her return, the Croatian settlers from Bosnia who lived on the other side of the road had often yelled at her, and their 14-year-old son had deliberately bumped into her when she passed by. However, she said that this situation had improved considerably from 2000 with the new government. The Croatian settler family even began to greet her. In individual cases, especially when other neighbours were more remote and/or the settlers appeared to be pleasant, Serbs and settlers even visited each other for coffee. It would appear then, some five years after the war, that the implementation of civil rights was gaining ground and having a positive impact on the daily lives of some people. Nevertheless, divisions between Serbs and Croats, especially between Serbs and Croatian settlers, were still strong.

Serbs generally socialised within their own group. In Biskupija, they were joined by the small number of local Croats while the Croatian settlers tended to keep apart. With more Serbs returning, the Serb villagers were able to monopolise two or three public places where they could meet regularly. On weekdays in the late afternoon and early evening, local men from different hamlets and of various ages would meet in front of the only shop in Biskupija where they played cards and drank a few beers from the shop.[125] Every Sunday afternoon, the men of Biskupija, local Serbs as well as a few local Croats, met to play the traditional Dalmatian game of *balote*. Few of the Croatian settlers knew how to play, and the few who played with local people did not feel particularly welcome. Young returnees met in front of a ruined café to talk, often staying till after dark (there were no street lights in Biskupija and there had not been any even before the war). For special occasions, especially when young unmarried women returned for the summer or for a short visit, the local young people organised afternoon picnics at which they roasted a *janjetina* (lamb). They collected money for the *janje,* as well as for drinks, and met outside the village at a picturesque

[125] In pre-war times, age groupings were significant in determining who took part in various activities, while in the postwar years men met together regardless of their age. This change was certainly linked to the small numbers of young and middle-aged Serbian returnees.

nature spot. On these occasions, the men played *balote* and *šija*, another traditional Dalmatian game, and with the women they sang Dalmatian songs which were known to all the locals from pre-war times. However, although I was surprised that so much socialising was going on, these social activities were a pale imitation of events before the war. Most young people still felt isolated in the village and were bored.

4.7 Conclusions

This chapter has examined the social profile of the various groups of people who returned or settled in the Knin area after the war. It has also explored their motives for returning or settling as well as their special ties to property and home.

I have argued that the war and postwar conditions reinforced the relevance of nationality in regard to access and use-rights to property. While Croats received access rights to housing owned by Serbs, Serbs lost their rights to housing. The few Serbs who stayed on in their homes in the Knin region during the Croatian military operation were motivated by their desire to remain in familiar surroundings. However, the pull of a familiar environment was undermined by the experiences of violence that followed the army operation and left people intimidated and in a state of insecurity, with no support from the Croatian authorities. Relationships to the home also changed with shrinking household sizes and weakened social relations in the absence of nearly all young people.

The attacks on housing and individuals as well as the powerful nationalist policy of the Croatian state made it difficult for Serbs to return. However, return to one's house was not only linked to physical access to the house itself but also to the economic conditions prevailing there. It has been shown that many elderly people had better economic prospects at home than in exile, while for younger people the reverse was true. Furthermore, older people generally had stronger emotional ties to their houses and land. Therefore, it tended to be the older members of the family who returned while the younger relatives chose to come and visit rather than stay. By adopting this strategy of maintaining a stake in both worlds, families sought to secure their property rights and the economic value of their home, as well as maintain social and emotional links to the home and home region.

Returning Croats were initially euphoric to be at home again after years of occupation of their homeland by Serbs. The experience of violence had a severe impact on their relation to their houses and their land and had encouraged the notion of a Croatian national homeland. However, the value of their property was not only determined by national considerations but by economic and social factors too. After their return they found themselves in

an economically devastated and socially marginalised area. Many families decided not to return permanently owing to the better economic and educational opportunities that were available outside the region and because their home communities had been torn apart. Like the Serbs, it was mainly the elderly who returned to the villages. They received pensions and had stronger emotional ties to their houses.

Among the insights gained into the logic of house-occupation I have shown that younger Croats began to use former socially owned apartments in the town of Knin that had earlier 'belonged' to Serbs. This was a practice made possible by the new Croatian housing laws, and while they did not occupy private Serb houses, this was generally legal as well. Here it seems that local Croats still chose to respect certain civil rights of Serbs. By respecting Serbian private housing in this way, they obeyed a moral norm other than the national one expressed by postwar housing laws. The occupation of former socially owned flats followed not only the logic of war, but also a logic from socialist times, in which Croats considered Serbs as having unlawfully profited from the socialist system.

Many Croatian settlers who occupied housing space in the Knin area had lost their houses in their home locality (mainly in Bosnia) because of the war. Often they were also unemployed or unable to find the money to rent an apartment under the new market conditions prevailing in the postsocialist system. These were not simply the direct results of the war – they were also the legacy of the general postsocialist transformation. Social entitlements like housing and jobs had been cut, with no social net founded on civil rights to catch and support the truly needy. For the 'victims' of the war and the 'losers' in the postsocialist transformation, opportunities to move to an area in which housing was free was not necessarily related to nationalist motivations. However, because the Croatian state made some effort to deal with social questions using nationalist criteria and policies, many settlers profiting from this programme adopted a nationalist point of view, too. By looking at the practices of occupation of houses, it becomes clear that the most decisive factors in the bid for access to housing were not necessarily the laws but family strategies and matters of timing.

All groups had been uprooted as a result of migration and the experience of violence. Each group had to develop strategies to cope with the damage wrought by war and the economic crises that loomed over daily life in the region. Relations to housing property differed along national lines owing to the legal and political framework of postwar Croatia, which supported the settlement of Croats in Serbian houses in the region of Knin (and other regions). But nationality was not the only critical factor. The ownership of houses and land divided the Croats into two groups: while

most local people owned property and/or accepted the private property rights of their Serbian neighbours, Croatian settlers also occupied the private homes of Serbs. These differences weakened feelings of national unity. A 'we-group' alternative – 'locals' versus 'settlers' – came into play and conflicted with the national group concept.

Chapter 5
The Dynamics of Housing Conflicts

5.1 Introduction

In the former war zone in Croatia, property conflicts between Croatian settlers who had temporarily occupied houses and the Serbian owners remained largely unresolved until 2001. While most of the Croatian settlers continued to live in the houses they had occupied, the great majority of Serbs had no access to their property. This was the case despite extensive efforts by international organisations in advocating private property rights. In 1998, international pressure resulted in the state revoking sections of the national property laws and the establishment of new administrative procedures to solve the conflicts in a non-juridical way. However, right up to his death in 1999, Croatia's autocratic president Franjo Tuđman and his HDZ government showed little enthusiasm for implementing the programme. It was only after changes in political power, which took place at the national level in early 2000, that an action plan for the repossession of houses was adopted and the repossession procedure gained new momentum.

This chapter focuses on the reasons for this slow implementation, the consequences of this policy for both the Croatian settlers who occupied Serbian property and the Serbian owners, and the strategies they employed in dealing with the situation. In this context, it is useful to consider the model of F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann (1999), which identifies four layers of property relations: the ideologies concerning property, the property legislation, the social property relations, and the practices in the locality – in this case of Knin. In order to look more closely at how the legal and administrative procedures for the return of occupied property are put into practice, I differentiate between those procedures which 'end in a conclusion which has meaningful consequences for action' for both parties involved and so-called 'pending' procedures, 'which never reach conclusions that are consequential' and which therefore tend to perpetuate conflict or even lead to its escalation (Elwert 2001: 2544). I also investigate the ways in which 'disempowerment of law' took place in relation to the property repossession

laws, which means that property rights were not decided upon by legal provisions and procedures but by local groups (Elwert 1999: 12–13). In the following sections, I first describe the legal and procedural background of property repossession. Then I introduce the local, national and international political actors with their ideologies and strategies concerning property repossession. Thirdly, I discuss the reasons for the slow implementation of laws and procedures in more detail. In order to understand the opposing perceptions of occupants and owners, I analyse the opportunities and strategies of both groups concerning housing relations, i.e. the sale of property, the illegal occupation of houses, and dealings surrounding alternative accommodation.

Given the different profiles of the Croatian settlers and the Serbs outlined in the previous chapter, it is clearly too simplistic to view each as a homogeneous group sharing the same opportunities and values in matters relating to residential property. I therefore look at individual decisions in the light of the changing legal, political, social and economic situation in the region of Knin. It becomes evident that some Croatian settlers benefited from the housing and occupation practices, gains that were often made at the cost of the Serbian owners. At the same time, however, these gains were also made at the cost of other settlers or of society as a whole. Because of the failure to implement procedures and the 'disempowerment of law', it was not only the Serbs but also the majority of Croatian settlers who lived in insecurity and often in poverty. This meant that a permanent solution to the housing situation seemed extremely unlikely.

5.2 The 'Programme for Return and Accommodation' and barriers to implementation

5.2.1 The legal and administrative framework

After the massive flight of Serbs from the former war zones in Croatia and the destruction or allocation of their houses to Croats, international organisations – especially UNHCR and UNTAES (the latter was taken over by the OSCE in 1997) – placed strong pressure on the Croatian government to facilitate the return of Serbs to their home regions and the repossession of their private property. The organisations argued that the right to return had been secured for all former residents of the war zones by the Dayton Agreement of 1995 – including the Croatian Serbs. In addition, they made clear that the protection of private property was supported by the Croatian constitution.

Until 1997, representatives of the Croatian government had rejected these claims by arguing that the occupied property would continue to be registered in the name of the Serbian owner and not under the name of the user. Following this logic, there was no need for action, as the private property rights of Serbs had been secured. In reality, however, Serbian owners had virtually no means of repossessing their property at that time. With no use-rights to the occupied property, the Serbs' property rights had been severely undermined.

In 1998, a milestone was reached when a return programme was launched by the Croatian government.[126] Special focus was placed on the repossession of private property that had been allocated to temporary occupants. Croatian national property laws that had legalised the occupation of abandoned housing were revoked,[127] and so-called 'decisions on the use of private housing' could no longer be issued.[128] The introduction of civil institutions and new, complex procedures was aimed at enabling the repossession of Serbian property and at the same time at providing Croatian settlers with alternative accommodation. These procedures were designed to transform the housing and property conflict from an 'either-or' situation, in which the Serbian owners were opposed to the Croatian settlers and one party would benefit only at the cost of the other, to a 'win-win' situation, in which both parties would benefit (for theoretical considerations see Elwert 2001: 2546; Gosztonyi 2002).

In order to achieve this transformation, housing commissions were created in all municipalities that needed mediation in property conflicts. The commissions consisted of volunteers from the local community, since the task was unpaid. In principle, all the local groups – i.e. (returned) local Croats, (returned) local Serbs and new settlers – were to be equally represented in the commission to ensure its objectivity. The task of the housing commissions was to prove that use permits for Serbian houses were justified, and to deliver requests for the eviction of illegal users. Furthermore, the commission received and dealt with ownership claims and was supposed to coordinate the repossession of the property by its owner.

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[126] 'Programme for the return and accommodation of displaced persons, refugees and resettled persons', 26 June 1998.

[127] See '*Zakon o prestanku važenja zakona o privremenom preuzimanju i upravljanu odrednom imovinom*', 28 July 1998 (http://burza-nekretnina.com/hbn/prop29.htm).

[128] Such decisions (Croatian: *rešenja*) were known as 'Decisions on the temporary allocation of private property in accordance with the law on the temporary take-over and administration of certain property' (abbreviated as 'LTTP decisions'). In the following they will be referred to as 'use permits'.

The Agency for Mediation in Transactions with Specified Real Estate (*agencija za pravi promet i posredovanje nekretninama*, henceforth abbreviated as APN) was established in 1997 to mediate in housing property transactions between private owners and interested persons, and to support the solution of problems connected to property rights in the Republic of Croatia. While the agency gave owners the opportunity to sell their houses, it also helped to support the implementation of the return programme by offering alternative accommodation to the users/occupants of houses who had to leave the property they had occupied and return it to the legal owners (Deutschlander and Roggia 1998: 25). The alternative accommodation, which APN and the housing commissions were supposed to offer to settlers, was property that the APN had purchased from citizens in the former war zone – mostly from Serbs in exile. Housing was sold irrespective of whether the property was occupied, empty, damaged or destroyed.[129]

A settler could either buy the house offered as alternative accommodation using a credit scheme (instalments paid over a period of 10 years), or, if this was not feasible or not desirable, it could be rented at a subsidised rate of 100 Kunas per month (approximately €15). If a settler received social welfare benefits, he/she was only required to pay a symbolic amount of 1 Kuna per month (just 15 cents). For settlers with the right to alternative accommodation, these regulations represented a far better opportunity to acquire property than on the private housing market.

5.2.2 Results of the Programme for Return and Accommodation

Despite the new legal and procedural regulations for resolving private property conflicts, the effects were minor in the municipalities of Knin and Biskupija, as in most of the former war zones in Croatia. Until 2000–1, a Serb's access to property did not change much at all (OSCE Zagreb 1999; ICG 2002). It was still almost impossible for a Serbian owner to repossess his/her house if it was occupied by a Croatian settler.

According to information provided by the municipal authorities in Biksupija in 2001, some 40% of the use permits legitimising the occupancy of Serbian housing by Croatian settlers in the village of Biskupija were cancelled in 2000. But only 14% of all settlers had moved out of the houses they occupied in the village, and only 2% of the settlers had found

[129] The APN was criticised for supporting the sale of Serbian houses and so cementing ethnic cleansing. Critics argued that Serbs had no alternative but to sell their property, as it was easier to sell a house than to repossess or rebuild it (see Deutschlander and Roggia 1998: 27). For a further discussion of the willingness of Serbs to sell their houses, see section 5.4 below.

alternative accommodation. The rest had left the village without being offered other accommodation. According to the housing commission in the municipality of Knin, only about 10% of the registered property cases had been 'solved', and even here the majority of these cases were of settlers who had moved out of the property without being offered alternative accommodation.

The figures for the municipalities of Biskupija and Knin were similar to those provided by the Ministry for Public Works, Reconstruction and Construction (5 November 2000) for the former Croatian war zones as a whole. According to the Ministry, 18,000 private properties had been allocated for temporary use during and after the conflict, and more than 11,000 requests for repossession were subsequently handed in. As a result, 3,708 properties were repossessed by their legal owners (OSCE Zagreb 2000b). This represented about 20% of the occupied properties. These figures were slightly higher than those for the municipality of Biskupija and twice as high as those given by the housing commission in the municipality of Knin.

In short, the housing commissions solved very few cases and often did not function at all. The work of the APN was very slow too. Although the agency was set up at the end of June 1997 and saw lively interest by potential sellers and buyers, not many houses were actually bought and sold.[130]

5.2.3 Political barriers to property repossession

Although international organisations were relatively successful in pressurising the national government in Zagreb to accept Serbian private property rights by installing legal and administrative procedures for property repossession, they had a hard time influencing public discourse and putting property repossession into practice on the local level. The discourses and interests of those in power did not comply with the aims of the international organisations.

Until the death of President Tuđman and the end of HDZ rule, the nationalist parties and organisations at the local level could count on national-level support. In that period, Croatia was an extremely centrally organised democracy and it is therefore difficult not to hold the Croatian

[130] By January 1998, APN had received 5,112 applications for the sale of property and another 2,030 applications for property purchases. However, only 345 houses were sold (Deutschlander and Roggia 1998: 27). According to OSCE Knin in spring (2001), the huge number of unprocessed applications remained stable in 2000.

government responsible for the failure to implement the adopted laws and procedures for property repossession.

Still, the local branches and organisations were able to tone down or actively promote national policies. The leading nationalist party, HDZ, which ruled the country from 1990 to the beginning of 2000, was especially strong in the 'reconquered' town of Knin after 1995. The regional party consisted of local Croats as well as Croatian settlers, with the latter providing the party with its strongest support in terms of population share of settlers in Knin. Reflecting its interests, the party painted the Serbs as the perpetrators of war against Croatia, while Croatian settlers were treated as the legal holders of housing rights (see chapter 8). Many local institutions, including the housing commission and the APN, acted as mouthpieces for the nationalist ideology since most of their employees owed their positions to HDZ.

However, the Croats native to the region of Knin had tended not to occupy private property themselves and some had actively supported the property rights of Serbs over those of the Croatian newcomers from Bosnia. This created a good deal of inner-party tension. When local Croats occupied high positions in public institutions, as was the case with the housing commission in Biskupija which was headed by a local Croat, the situation of the Serbs improved slightly. But in the Knin region, the 2,000 local Croats were outnumbered by the 9,000 settlers, and as a result their position was rather weak. Even if a housing commission genuinely attempted to resolve property conflicts by following all the legal requirements, it rarely made much progress. The housing commissions were not independent agents but were bound to other institutions, especially the APN, but also to other housing commissions and to the police, who were charged with carrying out forceful evictions if necessary. These institutions and agencies were not always keen to cooperate since they sought to protect the Croatian occupiers of Serbian houses rather than promote the procedures that protected private property rights for all citizens as set up by international bodies.

Moreover, the occupation of Serbian houses received indirect justification by non-state organisations present in the locality of Knin, particularly the Catholic Church. Like the HDZ, the Catholic Church in Knin was itself heavily supported by the Croatian settlers from Bosnia who were more 'religious' than the local Croats (see chapter 7). In turn, the Church supported the settlers' occupation rights and publicly supported the right of every Croat to live in his Croatian 'homeland', to receive a plot of land and to be provided with decent housing. It also promoted public discussions about the region that presented Knin as the historic homeland of the

Croats.[131] The Catholic Church therefore provided an alternative and conflicting ideology to the one set up by the international organisations.

Nationalist mobilisation was also practised by HVIDRA (*Hrvatska Vojni Invalidi Domovinskog Rata*) – the association of wounded veterans of the so-called Croatian 'homeland war' (*Domovinski rat*). HVIDRA had branches in many Croatian towns, and in Knin it had between 300 and 350 members who had fought in the Croatian army during the war. Most had moved into the region after the war to settle in Serbian houses,[132] and therefore had a strong interest in defending occupation rights. While the majority of members came from various regions of Croatia, a considerable number also hailed from Bosnia. Reflecting the war experiences of its members, the organisation was active in reminding the population of the crimes committed by Serbs against Croats during the war(s) and of the positive role – at least in its opinion –of the Bosnian Croats who had fought on the side of Croatia. Such images were also used to justify the Serbs' loss of property rights. Unlike the well-established institutional base that supported Croatian national property rights in the region of Knin, Serbs had no local political or civil representation at the beginning of the return process. At that time they were mainly represented by international organisations active on the national and local level in Croatia, primarily by the OSCE and UNHCR.

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[131] However, the attitude of the Catholic Church was not monolithic. Some high church officials like Bishop Komarica in Banja Luka openly accused the Croatian government of impeding the return of the Serbs and appealed to Bosnian Croats to return to Bosnia. The role of the Catholic Church concerning settlement and return in the Knin region is explained in more detail in chapters 7 and 8.

[132] However, unlike their comrades outside the former war zones in Croatia, who enjoyed the right to state-owned apartments as compensation for their injuries, war invalids residing in the former war zones did not have this right. Instead, they received temporary use-rights to apartments and houses (*privremeno rešenje)* like other Croatian settlers. On account of this discrimination – as army invalids saw it – demobilised and disabled soldiers started to move out of the region from 1999. This was intensified when, in 2000–1, many war invalids were told that their use-permits had been cancelled. Of approximately 1,000 war invalids in Knin in 1996, only about 300–350 still lived there in 2001. This weakened the role of HVIDRA in Knin.

5.2.4 Legal barriers and discriminatory practices in property repossession

Although the provisions of the return programme included the repossession of residential property, the political climate and ideological perceptions encouraged several legal barriers that hindered the process of repossession, especially regarding former socially owned housing.

Socially owned apartments

While the laws adopted in 1995 for the allocation of abandoned housing space included private property as well as former socially owned property,[133] the institutionally fixed procedures to repossess property introduced in 1997 were directed at housing space in private ownership only. This was largely the result of the policies of the international community, which was initially slow to pressure the Croatian authorities to change the laws concerning former socially owned property. The international community adopted the European Court's definition, which accepted different forms of property, including immovable property, movable property (bank accounts and stocks), as well as fixed rights such as pension rights, rights to social assistance, and so on, but which failed to address housing rights as property rights. Thus, by following the European Convention as a guideline for dealing with property rights, the repossession of former socially owned housing rights was inadequately addressed.

However, it is important to understand that the Croatian state did not address this issue either. The Croatian authorities were generally reluctant to take up the issue of property repossession, and in the case of former socially owned apartments they argued that the Serbs, by being absent from their apartments for several months, had thereby lost their rights of possession. This cancellation of use-rights on the basis of prolonged absence was not new but had been practised under socialism as well (see chapter 4).

From the Serbian perspective, this process was less logical. At that time Serbs had few (if any) opportunities to return as they were prevented from crossing the border to Croatia. In fact, their chance did not come till 1997 when they were permitted to return providing that it was for the purposes of a 'family reunion', which presupposed that a part of the family still resided in Croatia (International Crisis Group 2002). For most Serbian refugees, this was certainly not the case.

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[133] Law on the Lease of Apartments in Liberated Areas 1995, *Narodne Novine*. Official Gazette 73/1995, Zagreb.

In 2000, many Serbs expected their housing rights to be reinstated and that, as the former holders of socially owned apartments, they would be granted the right to buy their apartment at a preferential price – as was the practice with former socially owned property for Croats in regions outside the former war zone after the demise of socialism. According to OSCE information for 2001, about 6,000 Serbs who had formerly held housing rights to socially owned apartments in the former war zone applied for repossession as well as the right to buy the apartments. The housing commissions received the applications but were not authorised to act upon them (ICG 2002: 9–10).

During and after the war about 30,000 (mainly Serbian) households lost their rights to their former socially owned apartments, of which more than 20,000 were situated outside the former war zone. The apartments were allocated instead to Croats and the Croatian government accorded a considerable number of Croatian occupants the right to buy the former socially owned housing. As a result, many apartments formerly used by Serbs had been privatised by 2001 and legally registered with Croatian owners (ICG 2002: 10).

Private property

Even the repossession of privately owned housing property, which was addressed in the provisions of the return programme, was severely hindered by legal rulings that gave settlers preference over owners. The following are some of the barriers that people faced in trying to prove legal ownership of property.

(a) Missing ownership documents and obstacles to registration

Because a large number of private house-owners lacked evidence of ownership – either because inherited property was not properly registered during the socialist era or because owners had avoided registering their houses for other reasons (see chapter 3) – the Croatian authorities refused to process the applications. In the village of Biskupija, 69 houses were legally occupied but the housing commission received only 35 applications for repossession. One reason for the low number of applications may have been that owners had to apply for the repossession of their property in person. To do so, owners had to travel to Biskupija from their places of exile, a trip that was impossible for many of them (see chapter 4). Another reason seemed to be that many owners lacked the necessary documents that would prove ownership and therefore did not apply for repossession at all. That this became a barrier to property repossession is clear from the 35 applications for repossession in the village of Biskupija, which were received by the local

housing commission. Based on these applications, 28 use permits for Serbian houses were cancelled. The other seven applications were not processed because the applicants could not prove that they were the full legal owners of the houses in question. Either the houses were not listed in the property register, or the land rights were not clear.

Of course, it was still possible to register houses, but this option was costly especially for houses built after 1968 and therefore not documented by aerial photography.[134] In this case, the property had to be surveyed and registered in the property cadastre as well as in the land registers. For many Serbs, the costs involved in this process posed a serious obstacle to registration.

Registering a house was even more complicated when the land on which the house was built did not belong to a single owner or heir, but to several individuals This was often the case in cultural inheritance patterns where each (male) child would receive an equal share of land (see chapter 2). In such cases, an application for repossession could only be processed on the basis of an agreement with all the owners or heirs, or by taking the co-owners to court (which could be done *in absentia*). If the co-owners did not intervene, and if other parties (such as neighbours) confirmed the ownership, the application for repossession could be processed. Again, the court procedures were costly and many owners lacked the necessary financial resources. Just as important was the fact that many people lacked the information and legal advice about how to set about resolving these issues. Sometimes even lawyers were not well informed and failed to propose the easiest course of action.[135]

Where ownership was uncertain, the Croatian state tended to allow double standards to be applied in the case of Serbian owners and Croatian settlers. It allowed settlers the use of houses that did not exist in the property cadastre or land register. In such cases, Croatian settlers received approval for the use of the plot on which a house was built. In contrast, the Serbian owner had to register the house in order to reclaim it. This demonstrates that Serbian owners bore the brunt of the difficulties that arose from inadequate ownership documents and were the victims of discriminatory practices that evolved in the 1990s.

(b) Erroneous use permits

Another problem lay in use permits for occupied houses that were issued for the wrong building by mistake. This occurred because neither the Ministry

[134] The last aerial photograph was taken in 1968. It was easy to register buildings that appeared on this photograph.

[135] Personal information by Ratko Gajica, Serbian lawyer in Knin, spring 2001.

of Development and Reconstruction nor the local housing commissions had allocated housing to settlers in a systematic way. Instead, settlers had been free to choose for themselves which house they wanted (see chapter 4). After having found a suitable house, a settler was required to establish the name of its owner and the land it was built on via the cadastre office and/or property registry. With this information, he/she could then apply to the Ministry of Development and Reconstruction for use permits to the house. However, the cadastre office or property registry often provided erroneous information about the owner. This happened either because the house did not exist in the property register, or because the settlers found it difficult to locate the house on the cadastre map. Settlers sometimes mistakenly received information about another (often neighbouring) houses. In Biskupija, three settler families – all living in separate houses belonging to different Serbian families – shared a use permit for one and the same house, although they each claimed to have the correct document for the house they occupied.

In such cases, it was even more difficult for Serbs to reclaim their houses. Sometimes, they reclaimed a house that was occupied in practice but was not registered as occupied since the settlers held a legal use permit for a different house. The settlers, on the other hand, claimed to have received legal rights for the use of the house, unaware of the fact that they had received an erroneous use permit, or just pretended not to know this. To resolve such cases, the housing commission first had to amend the permit held by the users. On the whole, however, housing commissions avoided getting involved in such complicated cases and thereby covertly supported the use-rights of settlers.

(c) Unconditional provision of alternative accommodation

One far-reaching problem was connected to the state's self-imposed obligation to provide settlers with alternative accommodation when they moved out of an occupied property and when they had proved that they did not own property in Croatia. This meant that settlers had the right to state accommodation without having to prove they were socially needy, i.e. that they lacked the income to rent an apartment. They were also not obliged to report that they owned or had access to usable housing property in Bosnia.

According to the sample of settler households in the village of Biskupija, 54% of all households owned private property or had lived in former socially owned apartments in Bosnia before the war, but had been expelled from their homes and their property had been devastated, destroyed or occupied. Still, owning private property or holding rights to former socially owned apartments in Bosnia gave them the right to apply for repossession or reconstruction. Interestingly, according to the survey data,

only a small number of settlers applied for the repossession or reconstruction of their property. They explained that they were certain they would not return and planned to stay in Croatia. Consequently, they maintained that they did not want to endanger their position in Croatia by reclaiming their house or apartment in Bosnia. The few who had applied for the repossession of their housing in Bosnia were thinking about selling their property in order to buy a house through APN[136] in the Knin region or in other parts of Croatia.[137] They pursued their property claims in Bosnia independently of their claims and expectations of receiving alternative accommodation in Croatia. In a few cases, people who occupied housing in Knin even managed to repossess their property in Bosnia and rent it out to other people.

(d) Excursus: property repossession in Bosnia

For Croatian settlers, the legal situation in Bosnia in 2001 for the restitution of property was in many respects better than in Croatia (ICG 2002: 7).[138] The procedures involved can be summarised as follows:

Housing rights to former socially owned property that had been distributed to members of the national majority during the war were recreated on the basis of the Dayton Peace Agreement.[139] Refugees from Bosnia who had been expelled and forced to abandon their houses and/or former socially owned apartments could reclaim their apartments in the same

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[136] Those houses which Serbs had sold to APN could be used as alternative accommodation for Croatian settlers and could also be acquired privately. Individuals interested in such houses could contact APN in order to receive a list of the houses available. Buying a house through APN offered advantages over buying a house privately because APN ensured that the house came with full documentation, that the price was relatively low and that in most cases it could be bought on a credit scheme.

[137] This was not in line with the repossession programme in Bosnia, which stated that former socially owned apartments could be repossessed but must be used by the family concerned. It was not legal to repossess housing with the aim of selling it. However, people tried to bypass these provisions in certain ways, often successfully.

[138] This was a result of the wide jurisdiction granted to the international administration in Bosnia, headed by the Office of the High Representative of the United Nations (OHR). According to the Dayton Peace Agreement, the OHR was charged to facilitate, mobilise and coordinate the activities of the international organisations and agencies involved in the civilian aspects of the peace process (Rose et al. 2000: 7).

[139] Although housing rights were not protected by the European Constitution, in Bosnia such rights were accepted by the Office of the High Representative as property rights in the sense of the right to live permanently and undisturbed in an apartment.

way as their private property. However, if the application was granted and the occupying party had left the apartment, the applicant had to move in within a period of 90 days otherwise he/she would relinquish the right to it. This shows that in the restitution of former socially owned apartments (in contrast to private property), the actual use of the property was a decisive factor.

With regard to private property, the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia worked on the principle that the interests of the owner of a property must overrule the interests of the user and occupant. All users had to leave the claimed property. Nevertheless, the users were granted certain rights, in particular the temporary protection of property use. Users had a period of nine months in which to leave the property. If an occupant did not leave the property within this time, the party faced eviction.

Only persons 'in need' – i.e. those who had no access to their own property and lacked the necessary income to pay rent – were eligible for alternative accommodation. The correlation of 'need' and housing space was based exclusively on welfare criteria. Regarding individuals temporarily occupying the property of others, the procedures of the international community were based on the obligation to provide socially weak individuals (e.g. the poor and disabled) with accommodation. In such cases, alternative accommodation could not be refused.

However, although this housing policy appears sound in legal terms it was not put into practice. As in Croatia, the realities in Bosnia diverged quite significantly from the law. In 2000, only 26% of all applications for the restitution of private houses were approved and implemented. Only 9% of the applications for the restitution of apartments led to repossession. This included destroyed residential property where no actual return took place. However, the situation improved after 2001 and the repossession process was speeded up (Grandits and Gosztonyi 2003).

(e) The right to reject alternative accommodation

In contrast to the situation in Bosnia, settlers in the former war zones in Croatia occupying houses reclaimed by their owners did not have to accept the alternative accommodation that was offered to them. This created another problem concerning the repossession of property. Settlers who were offered alternative accommodation tended to refuse it in the hope of obtaining better accommodation (or at least as good as the housing they were currently occupying). This delayed the process of repossession enormously, as the following case from Biskupija makes clear.

A young family from Bosnia had been occupying a large, modern, two-storey Serbian house since 1997. It had two bathrooms, four bedrooms,

several stables and a yard. The owners, a Serbian family of six, returned after some time and found shelter in an older and smaller house belonging to a relative that was located close to their occupied family home. Immediately after their return, the Serbs applied for repossession and tried to speak to the occupants about a solution to the problem. However, their attempts failed. The occupants called the police and the Serbian family was asked to stay away from the house and not to harass the settlers since they held a legal permit for the use of the building and were entitled to occupy it until they moved to alternative accommodation. In the summer of 2000, the settler family finally received the offer of a house purchased by APN as alternative accommodation. This would have finally solved the housing conflict with the Serbian owners. However, the settlers rejected the APN house for two reasons. First, it was considered to be too small. It had been a weekend house with only three rooms and no storage space, and so was significantly smaller than the house the family legally occupied. Secondly, the APN house was situated close to a Serbian neighbourhood. The family argued that they did not want to live in a Serbian neighbourhood permanently and in the long run would like to find a house in a Croatian area, if possible in the town of Knin rather than in the countryside. Accepting the APN offer would have effectively barred the settler family from obtaining alternative accommodation in the town of Knin or another more attractive location. They therefore refused to take the house offered to them in the hope that APN would offer them another house which would meet some, if not all, their criteria.

In the case described here, the alternative accommodation had disadvantages only from the perspective of the settler family. Because until 2001 settlers had not been under pressure to accept alternative accommodation, this family understandably waited for the offer of a house that would meet their requirements. However, the political and social circumstances in the region must also be taken into account. Housing was not the only issue at stake. Since it was uncertain how the economic situation or the national composition of Knin would develop in the years and decades to come, many settlers simply did not want to tie their futures to Knin but preferred to leave all options open.

(f) Uncoordinated distribution of alternative accommodation

The criteria by which alternative accommodation was granted were generally very lax and because most settlers qualified for it, it was not surprising that there was not enough to go round. APN did not have sufficient funds to buy Serbian houses, to reconstruct them, or to build new housing for alternative accommodation. In fact, most of the houses purchased by APN had been

damaged and had to be rebuilt by the new owners in order to be made habitable. At the same time, APN was not particularly interested in distributing alternative accommodation to settlers so that Serbs could return. Until 2000, APN did not consider the fact that an occupied house had been reclaimed by its owner as a priority criterion for the offer of an APN house. Instead, APN houses were given to families with the financial means and/or social capital to do the necessary repairs even if they were not occupying a house or if the house they inhabited had not been reclaimed by its owners.[140] The following example illustrates this.

In 2000, a Bosnian settler family from a small village near Konjic – a couple with four children and a grandmother – signed a contract with APN for a Serbian house located in the mainly Croatian village of Potkonje near Knin. The house was slightly fire-damaged and its value was estimated at €18,000. Because the couple were now unemployed and received social welfare, the family paid a subsidised rent of 1 Kuna per month to APN. However, in order to make the house habitable, they invested a lot of their own money in basic repairs. For this, they relied on savings they had brought with them from Bosnia. In fact, they had arrived only recently in Knin expressly to buy a house. Up to that time they had lived and worked in the town of Čapljina in western Herzegovina where the economy was stronger than in Knin.

Certainly, most settler families who moved to Knin after 1995 had no means to repair their houses because they had been unemployed for years and had spent all their savings on the house they occupied. But more recent settlers who were able to bring some savings with them were at a distinct advantage. This however did not solve the problem of property repossession in Knin.

(g) Protection of illegal occupancy

Although Croatian settlers could not acquire a legal use permit for a house after 1998, many actually moved into Serbian houses long after this date. This was tolerated, if not supported, by many local institutions. The local HDZ held the view that no settlers should be left homeless, whether they had temporary permission to use a house or not. In some cases local offices of the Catholic Church also helped Croatian families to settle in the region and occupy housing, even after the law on the temporary occupation of houses had been revoked.

In the village of Biskupija, for example, a local parish priest from the Franciscan monastery in Knin helped a Croatian refugee family from Bosnia

[140] On the problem of the lack of criteria in the distribution of new housing, compare Simpson's example of a township north of Johannesburg, South Africa (1997: 477).

to settle in a Serbian house in 2000, although the Croatian state authorities had not issued use-rights since 1998. The family consisted of a young woman in her early twenties, her husband in his early forties and their two young children. Neither spouse owned property in Bosnia and neither intended to return to their home region. After becoming refugees of war, they had come to Croatia where they were sheltered in a hotel near Split. In 2000, they were forced to move out because the hotel was to be renovated and used for tourism again.[141] They turned to their Catholic parish priest in Split for help to find accommodation. The priest established contact with the Franciscan parish priest in Knin, who promised to help the family find accommodation by talking to the mayor and the head of the housing commission in Biskupija. Although from a legal point of view the occupation of Serbian houses was prohibited, the priest asked the local authorities to tolerate the use of a house that had been empty for some time after another settler family had moved out of the region. He argued that the owner had not yet returned, while the settler family did not have a roof over its head and was in acute need of housing. The head of the housing commission agreed.

Between 1997 and 1999, the transfer of such houses from one settler to another was often accepted by the local housing commission, despite the fact that use permits were no longer issued. The legal situation regarding private property rights for all citizens of the Croatian state, irrespective of nationality, was therefore at odds with what was actually happening on the ground. Here, the housing commission based its decision on Croatian nationality and, as it claimed, on the level of need of the user. This is also shown in the following example.

Bozidar, a 60-year-old Serbian man, fled to Belgrade from Knin during the Croatian military operation in 1995. Soon after his departure, his house in Knin was occupied by an elderly Croatian woman from Bosnia. The

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[141] According to the UNHCR field office in Knin (briefing note September 2000), during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–5) more than 60,000 Bosnian Croats and Muslims fled to the Dalmatian coast. While many found a permanent solution to their situation through local integration, resettlement and repatriation, in 2000 some 3,150 refugees still lived on the Dalmatian coast in collective centres and private accommodation. As well as refugees from Bosnia, the Dalmatian coast received some 70,000 Croats fleeing the Serb occupation of the Krajina region and Eastern Slavonia. In 2000, some 33,000 internally displaced persons still lived on the coast. As the Croatian government office for displaced persons and refugees continues its drive to close collective centres in tourist facilities, the need to find permanent local care and maintenance or repatriation solutions becomes even more urgent.

woman received a legal use permit for the house. In 1998, when she was too old to take care of herself, she decided to move into an old people's home in Bosnia as she had no relatives in Knin. To Bozidar, it seemed that his house would soon be empty and he hoped to be able to repossess it. Before the woman moved out, she and Bozidar agreed that she would hand over the key to the same housing commission to which Bozidar had applied for repossession. Bozidar intended to fetch the key after his arrival back in Knin. However, when Bozidar returned from exile only a few weeks later, he saw that a new settler had already moved in. When Bozidar approached the housing commission about the new user and asked for the key to his house, his request was rejected and he never received an answer. Later he tried to ask the new settler family, a couple with two children, how it was that they had acquired his house, but – as he told me – they yelled at him and refused to answer his questions. They told him that he should 'go home to Serbia, as Croatia was a state for Croats only'. He subsequently reapplied to the housing commission several times for the repossession of his house, even providing all the necessary documentation, but still did not receive an answer. Since the local authorities refused to collaborate, Bozidar remained unable (as of spring 2001) to find out whether the new user had a legal permit for the use of the house or was living there illegally.

As in Bozidar's case, the housing commission in Knin showed no political will to act according to the rules laid down in the return programme. Instead of returning houses to their Serbian owners, the commission protected the illegal users. Occupied houses for which the residents had no official use-right were not registered as occupied. This gave housing commissions a reason not to process applications by the owners of houses for which no user was formally registered. Furthermore, housing commissions had no legal status (OSCE Zagreb 2000c) and were therefore not in the position to order evictions, even when a settler occupied a house without holding a legal use permit. Evictions could only be ordered by a court– a different procedure to the one operated by the housing commission. It was generally unclear to Serbian owners, and even to many Croatian officials, whether final responsibility rested with the court or the housing commission (ICG 2002: 7).[142]

In summary, then, the return programme formulated procedures for the repossession of property which promised much on paper but delivered

[142] Even when an owner received a positive court verdict, the decision was seldom implemented if it involved the eviction of the user. This was seen as politically too problematic (i.e. no-one wanted to implement the decision). Furthermore, the costs of a court case were very high and had to be covered by the plaintiff (personal information provided by the OSCE Knin legal department, 20 April 2001).

little in practice. Instead, the procedures in the Knin region protected the status quo of Croatian settlers, while at the same time failing to provide either the owners or the settlers with any lasting solution. The practices that blocked the process of repossession by Serbs and supported the incoming Croats must also be seen in the light of the influence of the ruling nationalist parties in Knin (see chapter 8).[143] Following Elwert's definition of a procedure that has 'an outcome with consequences in action', the procedures applied in the Knin region cannot be called procedures in the narrower sense. Instead, because the local administration and other locally powerful groups decided on property rights and did not adhere to local provisions, it can be argued that a 'disempowerment of law' was under way (Elwert 199: 12–13). However, because this disempowerment was supported by the political leadership in Croatia, at least until the death of President Tuđman, it can be argued that the new return programme – with its repossession procedures based on civil rights – had no legitimacy in Croatia, but was a concept that had been brought into Croatia by the international community and had had no meaningful impact on property relations.

5.3 Political changes and new steps in property repossession from 2000

On the national level, power relations were transformed following the death of President Tuđman in December 1999 and the parliamentary elections that followed in January 2000. After this election, a coalition of six former opposition parties led by the Social Democratic Party (SDP) took over governmental responsibility. In the areas outside the former war zone, social issues prevailed over war in political discourses and people hoped for economic progress. With Croatia aiming at EU membership, leading national politicians as well as broad sections of the population accepted the guidelines and principles of the EU institutions, including the OSCE, not only in terms of economic reforms but also in issues related to the war. The coalition government admitted that Serbian civilians who had remained in their homes after the *Oluja* military operation had indeed suffered violence and that Serbian houses had been looted and burnt as well as occupied. After the introduction of the 1998 return programme, the new leadership's political commitment to deal with Croatian war crimes and ease the return of the Serbs marked a second milestone in its treatment of war issues. The

[143] In Cyprus, Scott observed similar pressures: political patronage influenced the distribution of properties. Thus for the ruling National Unity Party, property distribution became an important means of consolidating its position (1998: 149).

subsequent action plan for the return of the Serbs was aimed at resolving the problems concerning the repossession of private property, especially the issue of alternative accommodation. Furthermore, with the change in government, the political corruption associated with the allocation of property was discussed much more openly in weekly magazines such as *Feral Tribune* and *Globus*, and weekly television shows like *Latinica* or *Globalno Selo*. The international community reacted very positively to the new government and entrusted it with speeding up repossession procedures, rewarding it in advance with financial loans for reconstruction and other assistance for the former war zones (Grandits 2004). The changes on the national political stage thus accelerated the acceptance of private property rights over national property rights and encouraged greater public awareness about the social issues linked to property rights (see, for example, OSCE Zagreb 2000c).

However, in many respects the government reforms were only half-hearted. Despite appearing to show a political will to ease the return of the Serbs, this new orientation by the government was simply a bid to gain credibility in the eyes of the European Union and accelerate negotiations for EU accession rather than any moral conviction that the Serbs should have the right to return. At the same time, public figures and local power-holders debated moral issues and criticised the government's conduct on issues relating to the war (Vukecevic and Galic 2002). The controversial topic of war crimes committed during the 'homeland war' was discussed at length and stirred up strong emotions. In opposition to the new liberal voices in the government, veterans' associations as well as right-wing political parties organised large public protests against the 'desecration' of the 'homeland war'. These nationalist groups put the government under strong pressure regarding the arrest of Croats identified as war criminals by the ICTY, and the return and repossession programmes for the Serbs. Their populist rhetoric divided the public, and in towns like Knin where the 'homeland war' had a special significance for the local population, radical and divisive politics quickly took hold. This development was reinforced by the extremely precarious economic situation in the former war zone. In Knin, the ongoing resettlement of the town and its wider region after August 1995 was paralleled by steadily increasing unemployment. By 2001, the official unemployment rate stood at more than 60% compared to about 22% for Croatia as a whole in 2002 (ICG 2002: 11). Since state funds for the regional HDZ governments had been cut, the HDZ and the local authorities in Knin were forced to collaborate increasingly with international organisations, as well as with the new national government. These ambivalent developments are now examined in more detail.

(a) Creating additional alternative accommodation

In 2000, the Council of Europe Development Bank granted Croatia a loan of €30 million to reconstruct houses and to create alternative accommodation for temporary occupants. This amount was matched by funds from the Croatian government for the same purpose. In addition, the Croatian government applied for a further loan of €40 million from the Development Bank, which was approved in October 2002. Again, the Croatian government planned to match the loan with funds amounting to €40 million (ICG 2002: 13).

In 2000, the German humanitarian organisation Arbeiter Samariter Bund, the main implementing partner in EU-funded reconstruction in the former war zones from 1996 (EUPOPNEWS May 1999),[144] started to rebuild houses purchased by APN in order to offer settlers alternative accommodation.[145] This eliminated some of the obstacles to repossession and had a synergetic effect, as it enabled Serbs to return to their homes by creating alternative accommodation for settlers. The following account is an example of this process from Biskupija.

[144] In the municipality of Biskupija, the Arbeiter Samariter Bund had rebuilt about 110 destroyed or damaged Serbian houses by 2001 (European Union Programme for Reconstruction 2001).

[145] Before a settler household moved into an APN house, the Arbeiter Samariter Bund would repair or rebuild the roof and supply basic facilities, as well as ensure a specified number of square metres of living space per person. The same procedure was applied to the reconstruction of private housing for Serbs willing to return, as well as to government-funded reconstruction projects.

Apart from the fact that the reconstruction programme eased the tense situation in regard to alternative accommodation, it had other advantages for settlers, too. When settlers intended to buy a reconstructed APN house on a credit scheme, the selling price for the APN house was based on the value of the house before reconstruction. This was an incentive to settlers to move into alternative accommodation.



Plate 12. A house formerly owned by a Serb family and bought by the Croatian agency for property transmission. The house was reconstructed with EU funds and then used by a Croat settler family (winter 2000).

Mato from Bosnia and his family, comprising a household of five people (himself, his wife, two children and his mother) had occupied a large and pleasant house on the main street in the village of Biskupija since 1996. In 1998, the house was reclaimed by its owner and the permit allowing Mato's family to use the house was cancelled in 1999. At that time however, he was not forced to move out since no alternative accommodation had been offered to him. Luckily, in the summer of 2000, APN purchased a beautiful and spacious house situated on the main road, not far from the house used by Mato's family, with a panoramic view of the town of Knin and its castle. This house was offered to Mato and his family as alternative accommodation. However, the house was unfinished, and the settler family insisted that they would only move when some of the rooms had been fully completed. The Arbeiter Samariter Bund agreed to go ahead with the construction work, which was completed in the summer of 2001. Mato's family received a contract from APN whereby they would pay a monthly rent of just 1 Kuna for the house on account of Mato being unemployed and the household being assessed as 'socially disadvantaged'. In September 2001, Mato and his family moved into the house and were very satisfied with it. In turn, the Serb owner could finally repossess his house.

This case is one of the few success stories in which repossession worked for the benefit of and in agreement with both parties – the owner and the occupier. The settler from Bosnia seems to have come out of this very well – he solved his housing problem by gaining permanent housing rights to a very beautiful and well-located house without any investment on his part.[146] The repossession procedures had finally worked as originally intended.

The settler still had some concerns with the system, however. He feared that his relatives and friends, who had moved to the village from 1995 onwards, might move away over the coming years once they were offered alternative accommodation elsewhere, and so he would find himself left behind in a Serbian village without a circle of close friends. This shows again that the value of a house is determined not only by permanent ownership or use-rights, or by its measurable economic value, but also by social dimensions such as proximity to relatives and friends, the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood and prospects for the future.

In spring 2001, most settlers whose houses had been successfully reclaimed by their owners received a letter informing them about the cancellation of their use permits. But despite the large amounts of money paid or promised for alternative accommodation by the Croatian state as well as by the international organisations, the large majority of settlers continued to live in the houses they occupied because new accommodation was not forthcoming (OSCE Knin 2000a). Their future was therefore still uncertain, which increased their feelings of insecurity and also diminished the value of permanent housing for those who had already solved their housing problem. Because property rights are long-lasting rights (Elwert 1999a), the importance of ensuring secure property rights into the future must not be overlooked.

(b) Eviction of illegal occupants

In spring 2001, the Croatian state, under pressure from the OSCE, devised an action plan that would reassess all use permits issued to temporary occupants in a bid to identify illegal occupation and to review alternative accommodation. The plan included the eviction of illegal occupants who did not hold an offer of alternative accommodation.

At the order of the new government in Zagreb, a government commission together with the Knin housing commission began checking the housing permits issued to Croatian settlers. During the summer and autumn of 2002, the commissions sent out numerous warnings of eviction if illegal

[146] However, he helped Arbeiter Samariter Bund by finishing the house and so invested his own labour in the house.

property was not vacated voluntarily. Included in the eviction orders were Croats who occupied several houses, as well as Croats who occupied a house despite owning housing property elsewhere in Croatia or having received reconstruction aid for their house. In Knin, 24 cases of multiple occupancy were detected by the government commission after the review of all housing decisions. However, although the temporary permits for the use of the housing were annulled, only one case was finally resolved with the house being returned to the owner (OSCE Knin 2000b). Generally, eviction decisions were not implemented (with the exception of 17 cases in Korenica in 2002), mainly because the local housing commission lacked the necessary authority (ICG 2002: 13). In evaluating the practices involved in resolving illegal occupation cases, one could argue that it is not useful to speak about a procedure in the narrower sense, as no solution was offered to the parties that had a 'consequence in action' (Elwert 2001: 2544).

(c) Regulating access to alternative accommodation

The action plan also reconsidered the conditions for the allocation of alternative accommodation to legal occupants. Persons who occupied a house that was reclaimed by the owner, and who were therefore required to move out, were given priority in receiving an APN house. This matched the government's stated commitment to easing the repossession of houses for Serbs.

If a settler refused to accept the alternative accommodation, he/she lost the right to alternative accommodation altogether. Six years after Dayton, the legal situation concerning procedures for repossession of private property in Croatia was approaching the legal situation in Bosnia. But there were also other connections between Croatia and Bosnia in terms of housing rights. In order to reduce the total number of settlers in need of alternative accommodation, plans were made to exchange data on reconstruction and the repossession of property (residential and land) in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. Families who had received reconstruction aid or had repossessed property in Bosnia were excluded as beneficiaries of alternative accommodation in Croatia (Ministry of Public Work, Reconstruction and Construction 6 June 2001; ICG 2002: 14). However, this ruling was not always systematically followed.



Plate 13. Croat settler family from Bosnia in a house bought by APN (spring 2001).

Generally, the government still neglected to take decisive steps in regulating access to alternative accommodation based on social criteria. The housing commissions applied the principle that temporary occupants, regardless of their ability to support themselves, should be provided with alternative accommodation before being evicted, instead of granting housing assistance only to those settlers who qualified as needy on the basis of the Croatian welfare law. Cases in which several closely related individuals or families – for example, parents with up to three adult children and their families – occupied several large houses, despite having jointly inhabited a single house before the war, continued to be ignored. This stance significantly slowed the process of repossession of private property (OSCE Zagreb 2000a: 3; OSCE Zagreb 2000c; ICG 2002: 13).

Significantly, the reinstallation of housing rights for former socially owned apartments was not tackled by the Croatian government at all, despite increasing pressure from the international community.[147]

[147] The Croatian government made a first step to compensate lost housing rights to former socially owned apartments in November 2003. However, by the summer of 2004 the newly re-elected HDZ government in Zagreb had not moved to alter the existing legislation.

5.4 Changing values and strategies of occupiers and owners

Having described the dynamics of the legal and administrative issues affecting housing and their practical implementation, I now turn in more detail to the changing values and expectations of the settlers and the Serbian owners with regard to occupied property. Despite the introduction of new laws and changes in political power structures, these shifts in values and strategies tended to be more gradual, evolving alongside the slow implementation of the procedures. Furthermore, people's expectations and strategies with regard to property were influenced by their experiences and the events of the past.

5.4.1 Changing relations to occupied houses: Croatian settlers

As has been shown in the previous chapter, most of the settlers who arrived in Croatia/Knin between 1995 and 1997 and received a use permit for a house expected that they would be granted life-long use of the property and perhaps even the option of passing on the property to the next generation. They saw the housing they had received as compensation for their suffering in the war. These attitudes were largely based on the political propaganda and promises made by the HDZ government under President Tuđman. The widespread belief that property rights were permanent was one reason why many settlers made extensive repairs to houses and even started constructing additional buildings such as stables and barns (see chapter 4).

These positive expectations, encouraged by the Croatian state between 1995 and 1997, were gradually frustrated over the following years. Because international organisations pressured the Croatian state to revoke the property law, settlers found their rights reduced to a more or less temporary state of enjoying 'use-rights' to the houses they occupied. In the long run, they were supposed to hand the houses back to the legal owners. With the slow but steady return of an increasing number of Serbs, settlers became increasingly disillusioned about their new homes in Knin. This feeling was aggravated by the position of the new government from 2000. As we have seen, it was at this time that many settlers received an official letter from the local housing commissions informing them that they would have to return the occupied house to the legal owner as soon as the state could provide them with alternative accommodation. Settlers lived with the insecurity of not knowing when and where and what kind of accommodation they would be offered. Two examples from Biskupija and Knin show the kind of dilemmas Croatian settlers faced in 2001.

In 1996, 40-year-old Jozo and his family arrived in Biskupija from Bosnia. The family had nine members, comprising a married couple, Jozo's

brother, his mother and five children. They lived in a small, three-roomed house on Biskupija's main street. They held a legal use permit for the house and wanted to stay in the village. However, in 1999 they were told that their house had been reclaimed by its owner, who had already returned from exile with his family and were waiting impatiently for the house while staying with relatives nearby.

The settler family felt uneasy about the situation. They were aware of the fact that the owner had a legal right to reclaim the house and that their use permit had been cancelled. They also felt pressured by the presence of the owners living close by. They argued with the owners and made it clear that they could not be forced out until they had been offered alternative accommodation. But they were also nervous about their insecure position and tried to push their case for new accommodation with the housing commission and APN. However, they were unsuccessful. The only house made available by APN in the municipality of Biskupija was half-finished and still damaged, and would have needed significant investment to make it habitable. Although Jozo's family was in principle interested in the APN house, they did not have the financial means to help in the reconstruction of the building and therefore had no chance of moving in. Both parties, the settler family and the owners, were dissatisfied and disappointed with the whole process, which further embittered their relations with each other. As has been outlined by Elwert (2001: 2544), the fact that the repossession procedure was pending intensified the conflict between the parties and divided them further.

Another settler family in a similar situation was that of former war veteran Mladen who was in his mid-thirties and who had settled in Knin with his wife and two children. Mladen also received a letter informing him that the legal owner had reclaimed his house. Mladen said that if he had known from the start that he would have to move out again, things would have been easier for him. Now he was forced to uproot his family and start all over again. The family's state of insecurity was prolonged by the fact that neither the housing commission nor APN offered any alternative accommodation.

Like Mladen, many settlers only realised some time later that their housing situation had not been permanently solved and that they would have to move again. Their hopes of staying in the house for many decades, and perhaps even of being able to pass the house on to their children, were dashed. Instead of perceiving the house as a long-term resource and capital investment, most now saw it as a temporary shelter. For this reason, the majority of settlers no longer spent money on repairs and improvement, and many houses fell into decay. The value of the house they occupied was mainly based on the fact that paid no rent. Ante, a settler aged about 40 from

Zenica in Bosnia, who had moved with his wife and five children into a house in Biskupija without running water, explained:

> This is not my house. If it were my house I would invest some money in buying a pump. But tomorrow the owner may return and we would have to leave everything behind for him.

Duijzings (2000: 57) described a similar trend in the context of the resettlement of Croats from Kosovo to Western Slavonia. According to Duijzings, Croats did not repair the houses they occupied because they feared that they would have to leave them again if the Serb owners returned.

For many settlers in the Knin region, this situation was accompanied by anxiety about their future as well as by the perception that they were being socially rejected by the returning Serbs. From the settlers' point of view, the return of an increasing number of Serbs indicated that their power was growing at the expense of their own. A settler aged about 50, who originated from the region around Sarajevo and had settled with his family in the village of Orlić where Serbs outnumbered Croatian settlers in 2000, expressed it this way:

> I feel that the more Serbs return to the area – I mean the more they gather here – the more they outnumber us, the less they want to speak to us anymore. In the beginning there was a very small number of them here [in the village] ... maybe 12 to 15 Orthodox people. OK, at that time the effects and wounds of war were still fresh in people's minds, and people did not communicate with each other. Later this became better and better. Until last year, when they [the Serbs] started returning in masses.

The settler pointed out that he felt discriminated against and ignored by the returning Serbs. Other settlers even felt threatened by them and expressed the wish to move out of the neighbourhood. When asked why, they answered that the Serbs had 'reconquered the space'. This suggests that Croatian settlers still perceived the region in which they lived as national territory with exclusive rights for the majority group. However, this perceived reoccupation of territory by increasing numbers of Serbs was essentially a rural phenomenon. The town of Knin remained almost exclusively inhabited by Croats and was therefore seen as Croatian territory by settlers.

Many Croatian settlers, whether occupying houses in rural areas or in the town of Knin, felt deprived of the rights they had been promised. They stressed that they had invested much work and effort in rebuilding and maintaining the houses that had become their homes over the past few years. They were desperately disappointed to learn that they were set to 'lose' it all again. They blamed the Croatian government for these changes and the Serbs for profiting from the situation. The 30-year-old head of a settler

family, who in 1997 had moved into a Serbian house in Biskupija that had been devastated in 1995 and had been empty for two years, commented on the return of the Serbs and their wish to repossess their property in the following way:

> Now Serbs are returning. It is normal that people return to their homes. This is normal, nothing new, only that it makes the catastrophe here in Knin even bigger ... You settle the house for them. In fact, you clean up the house and repair it and make it habitable again. This house was damaged and we had to repair it before we could move in. The windows were all broken, the whole house had been empty. When they return, they will find a house that we settled and rebuilt.

To make the situation even more difficult, the Croatian settlers were not only having to contend with increasing numbers of returning Serbs but also with a deterioration in their relations with the local Croats. As the population grew in the Knin region from 1995 onwards so there was a worsening of economic conditions, and Croatian settlers and local Croats began to compete for jobs and positions. Settlers felt they were always second in line behind the local people. They argued that they did not deserve to be treated as second-class citizens since they were Croats and had fought for the Croatian state. Furthermore, local Croats were seen to be once again socialising with their Serbian neighbours, seemingly building up local alliances against the newcomers. Zoran, a 40-year-old settler who had moved into a village close to Biskupija, told me:

> I see that they [the local Croats and Serbs] have greater sympathy towards each other than towards us who have settled here in the region. They [the local Croats] would prefer that we leave, rather than the Serbs.

In explaining the sympathy shown by local Croats towards Serbs, some settlers pointed out that many of the local Croats had Serbian relatives and were therefore not 'real' Croats. Such settlers were therefore adopting a nationalist position in order to stress the rights of their own group and to protect themselves from being displaced and dispossessed. A settler from the region of Sarajevo put it this way:

> I really wonder, it is not clear to me, and it doesn't make sense to me ... are we second-class citizens? Once we were not second-class citizens but we are now. This is how the situation is at the moment.

Amid the deteriorating social and economic situation for Croatian settlers, including the uncertainties surrounding the housing situation, many came to believe that Croatian national solidarity should be reinforced. Those settlers who had illegally occupied a house were especially prone to such thinking.

Until 2000 – before the HDZ had lost power at the national level – many of these settlers had trusted that the housing commissions and other institutions in the region of Knin would not evict them. But when politicians began to publicly propagate the view that private property rights would now be respected and that illegal occupants would have to move out of Serbian property, this trust was shaken. The settlers hoped that a re-nationalisation of society would strengthen their rights.

By contrast, other settlers who had originally been holding a use-permit accepted more easily that they would have to return the house they occupied to the legal owner. Instead of becoming radicalised, they trusted the government not to evict them until they were offered equivalent accommodation. In the municipality of Biskupija, this confidence was supported by the head of the housing commission, a local Croat. He personally delivered the letters informing settlers about the cancellation of their use permits, explaining that the settlers could stay in the houses they occupied until the municipality offered them alternative housing. As we have seen, this form of negotiation served to relax tensions between the settlers and the Serb owners. Indeed, from 2000, many of the settlers welcomed the owners when they approached, inviting them in for a cup of coffee and showing them the interior of the house. A woman aged about 40, who came to Biskupija from a village in the Bosnian municipality of Konjic, explained why she did not worry about the return of the Serb owner of the house she was living in:

> The owner once came to speak with us. He had received a decision that the house would be returned to him. This will happen as soon as the municipality of Knin builds us a house for our nine family members, because we have seven kids and with us two parents we are nine. As soon as we get such a house, we will return this house, and we will move out. But we do not know when this will happen because the municipality doesn't have any money, and we are their citizens and they can not tear us out of the house.

Another settler, aged about 35 and married with two children, expressed a similar opinion:

> This is not my house. I did not build it. The owner built it ... The state will have to give us a new place to stay. The Serbian woman who asked for her house back can move back in as soon as the state solves the housing problem for me. I cannot say that this is my house, because I did not build it. It is a private house.

Relaxed attitudes such as these were based on sound reasoning. Although both owners and occupants were left waiting for decisions to be made by the authorities, the settlers were in a better position since they could occupy the

property until they were provided with equivalent housing. The knowledge that settlers' housing rights had precedence over the rights of the owners gave the settlers a feeling of security.

On the other hand, families who lived in poor quality housing, e.g. without running water or in damp rooms, waited impatiently for alternative accommodation and claimed that they would accept any offer. They often showed greater sympathy for the Serbian owners. A settler from Biskupija, who lived in a house without running water, said:

> I would prefer to have my own room than this one here, than the whole house here, if I knew that the room was my own property. The man who owns this house also had to leave here and he is suffering in exile, so what can I do? He and his children, they suffer too.

However, these settlers were not necessarily eligible for alternative accommodation. Even when settlers legally occupied a house, they were only eligible if the house they occupied was reclaimed by its legal owners. But in the village of Biskupija, 60% of the use permits for occupied houses were not cancelled, and in the municipality of Biskupija, this figure was nearly 70%.

Indeed, some settlers were visited by the owners who informed them that they had not applied to repossess the house. As described earlier, this was often because they were unable to provide the necessary ownership documents. Other settlers had no contact with the owner and remained completely in the dark about the owner's intentions. Although this meant that they were under no direct pressure to move out of the occupied property, it also meant that their future was very uncertain. They were in the uncomfortable situation of having to wait and see whether the owner would one day reclaim the house. Every stranger who passed by and glanced at the house was seen as a potential owner and the occupiers were often quite nervous and fearful as a result.

For these settlers, the waiting and the general lack of information indicated that the state did not recognise their need or their wish to vacate accommodation that was the private property of another person. In 2000–1, in particular, when national and local politicians as well as international organisations promised to invest large amounts of money in providing alternative accommodation in Knin, those settlers whose houses had not been claimed became very worried. While settlers whose houses had been claimed could register for alternative housing, they were not eligible to do so. This enforced passivity was difficult for many of them to bear. They were worried that they might miss the chance of receiving a house of their own, and they felt excluded from the housing programme through no fault of their own. In their view, they belonged to a forgotten category of settlers

who still lived in Serbian property without even being assigned as a 'pending case' by the administration. For this reason, being involved in a pending procedure, in which property repossession had been formally started but not resolved, was seen by many settlers as better than having no participation in any procedure at all. The following case from Biskupija illustrates this situation.

Ivka and Ivo, a Bosnian settler couple with two teenage children who were occupying a Serbian house in Biskupija, were very unhappy that the owner had not yet applied for repossession. For the family, this meant that their hopes of receiving alternative and, most importantly, permanent accommodation from the state were groundless. Instead, they were forced to live in a prolonged state of insecurity, wishing every day that the owner would get in touch with them and apply for repossession.

Clearly, settlers who found themselves occupying less desirable or badly constructed houses wanted the owners to apply for repossession so that they could be rehoused in better conditions. One settler living in poor housing conditions summed up his anxiety neatly: 'The owner moved to Finland, but I beg God every day that she will return.'

5.4.2 In- and outmigration of Croatian settlers

Given the changes in the legal, political and economic conditions in Knin described above, not all settlers were prepared to wait for alternative accommodation and many opted to emigrate again. Most were highly dissatisfied with their social and economic position, did not expect an improvement in their situation in Knin, and thus sought a change for the better. On the whole, those who had the opportunity did not hesitate to move away. The migration of Croats from Knin first started in 1998, and intensified in 2000–1. In the village of Biskupija, 10 Croatian settler families out of a total of 69 who occupied Serbian houses had moved away by 2001. While some of these families moved to the town of Knin itself,[148] others moved to other regions of Croatia or even abroad. The latter were mostly people who had been unemployed or found it hard to make a living in

[148] Between 1998 and 2000, settlers who already occupied a house in the region of Knin and held a legal use permit sometimes left the house they had occupied and moved into better accommodation. As in 1995 and 1996, they based their decisions on factors like the location of a house (in Knin or in a village), its size and furnishings, and social relationships with neighbours (friends or relatives). However, the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood was important, too (see chapter 4). Holding a legal permit for the temporary use of a house was seen as being less important.

Knin,[149] but who were generally well informed and well educated. They either applied successfully to a foreign embassy for the right to emigrate or found a permanent job outside the former war zone. In their situation, the original lure of free accommodation in an occupied house and the possibility of being rehoused in permanent accommodation at a very low price in the former war region held little appeal – what they wanted above all was to make a success of their lives and secure their own future.

A small number of settlers from Bosnia had the option of returning to their own homes after successfully applying for the repossession or reconstruction of their property there. This return process was at that time also partly supported by the Croatian state. In 2001, a Croatian state programme made sets of construction materials available to 500 families who moved back to Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition, several international organisations, many of them also having an office in Knin, supported the return programme established under the Dayton Peace Agreement. The organisations offered to rebuild the homes of settlers willing to return to Bosnia. However, the offers always exceeded demand, and those who signed a reconstruction contract often did not return but went on occupying houses in Croatia. The motives behind such actions were complex.

Generally, return was viewed more favourably where living costs in Bosnia were lower than those in Croatia. This depended on employment prospects or, if the settlers were elderly, on pensions in relation to average living costs (which were lower in Bosnia than in Croatia).[150] Most of the people who expressed a willingness to return to Bosnia were elderly.

At the same time, people were still migrating into the Knin region. Two settler families moved to the village of Biskupija in 2000. The number of immigrants to the town of Knin was much higher but no official figures were available as these settlers usually occupied houses illegally. Most of these immigrants had lost access to residential property in other parts of Croatia or Bosnia and/or had become unemployed and were unable to rent an apartment. Through moving to one of the poorest regions in Croatia, they hoped to be able to occupy a Serbian house for free. Even though use permits were no longer issued for occupied housing, they relied on the good will of local institutions not to evict them. Migrants who came to Knin after 1998 therefore illegally occupied houses and were often poorer than the other settlers.

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[149] Those who had a permanent job in Knin were not under pressure to move out of the region again.

[150] Croatian settlers from Bosnia received their pensions from the Bosnian state. These were usually considerably lower than the average pensions in Croatia, making it difficult for pensioners to live in Croatia.

Up to 2000, many of the newly arrived settlers moved into housing vacated by emigrating Croats. Instead of returning the key of a house to the housing commission or directly to the Serbian owner – as regulations demanded – emigrants often handed the key to incoming settlers. They justified this by saying they wished to support other Croats in need. Some also stated that the owner had not reclaimed the house and so had not demonstrated any intention of using it. Instead of abandoning the house, they argued, it was better that another Croatian family should use it.

In 2000, for example, 30-year-old Zdravko and his family moved out of the Serbian-owned house that they had occupied since 1996. Instead of returning the key to the housing commission, Zdravko said that he had left the key in the door so that a young disabled Croatian war veteran from Bosnia and his 19-year-old wife, together with their baby and the man's father, could move into it. Zdravko declared that he had wanted to show solidarity with his Croatian fellow settler. In his opinion, this was more important than respecting the ownership rights of the Serb owner who most likely would only lock up the house and return to Serbia, since few Serbs were interested in returning permanently anyway. He further argued that the new settlers only wanted to use the house temporarily until the family received alternative accommodation outside the former war zone for which the former soldier was eligible on the basis of his war injury. In Zdravko's opinion, the social and national rights of Croatian settlers had priority over the ownership rights of Serbs whose intention to return was unclear.

This point of view differed from the procedure proposed by the OSCE, which advocated that a vacated house whose owner had not returned should be sealed in order to prevent illegal occupation. This ruling was to apply regardless of whether the owner had the intention of returning or not. The OSCE argued that private property rights should be respected.

However, when houses were passed on to other settlers this was not always governed simply by national solidarity or sympathy. Instead, emigrants frequently handed over the keys of a house to an incoming settler family for a fee. Because incoming settlers reckoned they would be able to use such housing without paying rent for the next few months (or even years), access to such houses had a market value and emigrating settlers often 'sold' a key for a few hundred euros. In addition, some argued that they had maintained the house and had made basic repairs – like reconnecting electricity or mending doors, for example – and so had invested substantial sums of money. Zdravko, for example, took €350 from the disabled war veteran when passing on the house to him. According to the new settler, the money was 'financial compensation' for the repairs that Zdravko had made to the house. Such financial transfers indicate that, in

addition to national criteria, economic considerations were beginning to play a greater role in property relations, at least for individual settlers who had occupied property. However, rather than stressing any market transaction in the form of selling access to (temporary) housing or compensating for repairs, settlers preferred to emphasise the common cultural 'base' of their Croatian nationality as the main reason for passing the house onto other settlers.

5.4.3 Changing relations with occupied houses: Serbian owners

As we have seen, by 2000 Croatian settlers were beginning to realise that one day they would have to move out of the houses they occupied into alternative accommodation. At the same time, Serbian owners were becoming frustrated by the lengthy process of repossession. This feeling had intensified over the years, replacing the initial relief that the house had not been destroyed in the aftermath of *Oluja*.

Most of the Serbs who had fled in 1995 later heard about the state of their homes from friends and relatives – whether it had been destroyed or was being occupied by settlers. Immediately after the war, Serb owners tended to view occupation as a temporary situation, believing that it would be easier to have their property rights reinstated than to have their houses completely rebuilt. However, the precarious political and social position of the Serbs in the postwar period soon shattered this hope. Notwithstanding the feeling of loss surrounding destroyed homes, many Serbs whose houses were occupied by Croatian settlers seemed to have even stronger sentiments of loss and injustice in 2000. A 50-year-old Serb from Biskupija expressed his despair in the following words:

> The house is not destroyed, not burnt, but completely devastated and occupied. It is a six-room house, two bathrooms, nice central heating. It had about everything a normal man needs for a normal modern life. In an effort to repossess our house, we have been in court against the Republic of Croatia for four years. The court worked fast and decided in our favour for the repossession of our house, but the house is still not empty and we can't move in.

The informant saw the fact that he could not repossess the house, despite the positive decisions by the court and housing commission, as a great injustice. Serbs realised that, in practice, the occupants had stronger rights to the property than the Serb owners. In a bid to resolve this impasse, some Serbs paid several thousands of euros to Croatian settlers to effectively 'buy them out' of the house. This was the only sure way they could regain access to property between 1995 and 1999. Even in these cases, settlers sometimes removed doors and electrical plugs before leaving the house for good. This

behaviour was linked to the conviction shared by many settlers that they should make the return of Serbs as difficult as possible. Furthermore, many settlers believed they were simply exercising their rights since they had repaired war-damaged houses after moving in and had often invested considerable time and money in doing so. After having removed furnishings, they often tried to sell or barter the items in a bid to make further economic gain out of this transaction.

In 1997, Milica and Pešo, the elderly couple who were my hosts in the village, paid about €1,500 to a Croatian settler family – a couple with five pre-adult children – in order to obtain the keys to their house after the family moved out. They could afford the money only because their two children, who were both married to Croats and had good jobs in other parts of Croatia outside the former war zone, supported them financially. Still, despite the financial agreement, as well as the mediation efforts of Milica and Pešo's Croatian son-in-law, the settler family removed the doors and all the furniture when they moved out. The Serbian family found the house devastated and completely empty. The Croatian settler family moved to another house located in Knin where they had better access to schools and infrastructure, but since both parents were unemployed, the family soon spent the money they had received from the Serbian couple and their living conditions deteriorated.

The practice of buying back houses from settlers has always remained something of an exception. Few Serbs had the money to pay settlers to move out, and most did not enjoy the social status of my hosts who were able to rely on family connections with Croatian professionals working in Zagreb. Many were also simply unwilling to pay for their own private property to be returned to them. From 1998–9, when in principle the new legal and administrative regulations allowed Serbs to reclaim their property, Serbs were increasingly convinced that settlers were profiting from the situation at the owners' expense. In their opinion, settlers enjoyed free housing by not paying rent to the owner, while Serbs in exile had to pay high rents for accommodation. They also often refused to recognise or pay for repairs the settlers had made and, as the following case illustrates, even argued that the settlers had let houses fall into decay instead of maintaining them properly.

In 2000, Mira, an elderly Serbian woman, tried to regain the key to the house that belonged to her daughter and which had recently been vacated by settlers. However, the settler family asked for financial compensation of a few hundred euros for the repairs they had made to the house before being prepared to return the key (see also Vukčević and Galić 2002). Mira was outraged – she did not want anything the settlers had brought into the house and said she would not pay them a cent. In her view, the settler family had

ruined the house and had lived there for free for the last few years. Mira went to the housing commission several times and explained her point of view. She hoped that the head of the housing commission would put pressure on the settler family to hand over the keys after they moved out of her daughter's house. However, she was unsuccessful. Like Mira, many Serbs were powerless in such situations and could only wait for better times. The housing commissions did not intervene in the settlers' dealings, regardless of whether they occupied housing legally or illegally.

The Serbian population reacted with increasingly radical attitudes to the problems involved in the repossession of private property. An elderly returnee told me in the summer of 2001 that she would have preferred her house to have been destroyed than to have it occupied. Such reactions were based on pragmatic considerations since, in 2001 obtaining reconstruction funds seemed to be easier (although still difficult) than repossessing one's house. While this woman attempted to find a way to repossess her occupied house by all possible means and on all levels, her neighbour, whose house had been destroyed, had already received reconstruction funds.

However, such reactions also had an emotional component. It would be easier, the woman stressed, for her to see her house destroyed than to have to pass it every day knowing that other people were using her possessions and being humiliated by the occupants. Having given up hope that she would ever be able to repossess her house before she died, she thought it might be better to destroy her property simply for her own peace of mind.

Like this woman, who was convinced that the Croatian state was dragging its feet on matters of repossession, many Serbs continued to mistrust the Croatian authorities. This encouraged covert resistance against Croatian institutions and increased the level of support for Serb national parties. Some Serbs tried to pressure the head of the housing commission by threatening to make their housing case public. Individuals said they would call in Croatian TV if their particular housing case was not resolved soon. Such media coverage, they hoped, would encourage international organisations to force Croatia to act. They also hoped to find support among Croats outside the former war zone – from people who respected the private property of others. This highlights the fact that many local actors were aware of the different and often exclusive norms of private property which co-existed in Croatia and which had different proponents.

Some Serbs – mostly those with close Croatian relatives – proudly pointed out that individual local Croats had protected, or at least tried to protect, their property from being occupied or destroyed by incoming Croatian settlers and others. Here again, Serbs made a clear distinction

between local Croats and Croatian settlers. The latter were seen as invaders and 'enemies' of Serbs who did not respect their property (and other) rights, while local Croats seemed to respect these rights and to share similar norms of social conduct.

Yet Serbs did not judge all settlers in the same way. For example, when faced with socially underprivileged settler families with several children, some Serbs recognised that the families were occupying Serb houses on social grounds. These Serbs understood that it was inhuman to force families who were unable to feed their own children out onto the streets. Instead of blaming these impoverished settler families for occupying their houses, they stressed that the state was responsible for the situation. In some cases, returned Serbs even helped impoverished settler families, for example by bringing them clothes which they had received as a donation themselves, but for which they had no use. Like many of the settlers, most Serbs expected the government to resolve housing issues by providing poor settlers with alternative accommodation. However, they were increasingly convinced that the government did not have any real interest in solving this problem.

5.4.4 Sale of housing property by Serbian owners

Serbs who lost patience waiting for repossession and young families who had no intention of returning at all were the groups most interested in selling their property. Despite this, however, only a small property market developed for several reasons. First, it was difficult to sell occupied houses on the private market because potential buyers did not know when the occupants would move out and when they would be able to use the house. Secondly, many owners lacked the necessary ownership documents for their property in the region of Knin, and nobody wanted to buy a house that was not legally registered. Thirdly, many Croatian settlers who had moved to the former war zone were impoverished and did not have the funds to buy a house. Others did not have long-term plans for the future and so did want to commit to buying a house in the region.

In addition to selling property privately, Serbs could also ask the APN to purchase their occupied housing. However, selling to APN was not easy because the agency did not buy property without evidence of ownership, and generally purchased far less housing than was offered. Furthermore, APN did not always act according to regulations.[151] Many Serbs complained that

[151] APN's stated *modus operandi* was as follows: When an owner contacted APN about selling a property, a commission of experts (consisting of a lawyer, an engineer and an economist) visited the property and determined its value according

their applications to sell were not treated equally by the APN central office in Zagreb. While some applications were processed quickly, i.e. within several weeks, some took years (e.g. some applications made in 1998, APN's first year of operation, had still not been processed in 2001. Many people who wanted to sell their property therefore did not get the opportunity to do so.

Moreover, APN was rumoured to buy houses located in remote areas without complete infrastructure and which settlers would not be willing to accept as alternative accommodation. According to other rumours, APN pushed sellers to accept a lower sum than that fixed in the purchasing contract. For example, owners would receive €15,000 for a house evaluated at €25,000, and it was rumoured that employees at the central APN office pocketed the difference of €10,000.

Property prices in the former war zones were relatively low compared to prices in other parts of the country and this often did not meet the expectations of Serbian owners. However, in comparison with residential property in Serbia,[152] prices in the Croatian former war zones were high. Serbs who sold a house in Croatia could easily buy another, even larger, house in Serbia. For those people who sold a property in Croatia in order to buy a house in Serbia, the actual price offered in Croatia was therefore less of a barrier than might be assumed.

Not surprisingly, one of the most significant obstacles to selling the family house was emotional attachment. It was usually the case that the owners and their close relatives had built the house themselves and on land that might have been in the family for centuries (see chapter 3). Bringa

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to criteria also applied in other parts of Croatia. On this basis, the agency established a provisional price for the property. The owner could bargain with the agency in order to reach an agreement concerning the price. This was important because owners tended to ask for a higher price than that proposed by the agency. Once an agreement had been reached, APN offered the owner a contract. The overall procedure was scheduled to last about 45 days but in practice it often took much longer. After receiving an offer, the owner had another 30 days to accept it. If he/she accepted, payment was either expected immediately, i.e. some four to five days after the owner left the house, or in two instalments if the owner continued to use the house for a certain period of time. In this case, the owner received the second instalment when the property was vacated. If the purchased house was empty, it could be allocated as alternative accommodation to settlers whose use permit for a house had been cancelled due to a request for repossession. When a property was already occupied, the settler was given preference in acquiring a contract from APN (Deutschlander and Roggia 1998: 26).

[152] Belgrade was an exception. Housing prices in the Serbian capital were considerably higher than in other parts of the country.

(1995: 86), who referred to the tragedy of burnt houses in Bosnia in the 1990s war, describes the distinct social and economic value of a house for its owner(s) in the following way:

> Only when we realise the amount and length of the hard work and effort which families have invested in the building of their house (and home), can we fully understand the tragedy of the systematic burning of homes in rural Bosnia in the war and the devastating effect it has on people. When they lose their house, they lose all they have worked for in the past and much of what they have lived for in the future.

For Serbs from the Knin region, this assessment applies not only to destroyed houses, but also to occupied homes and their decision to sell. At the same time, the decision not to sell a house sometimes contradicted economic considerations, especially when Serbian refugees from Croatia had decided never to return.

It must also be remembered in the context of selling that different household members represented different viewpoints, depending on their age and whether they had actually returned to the family home. Many pre-war (i.e. pre-*Oluja*) households had split up after the war. While elderly family members often returned, younger ones remained in exile. In such cases, it was the older generation who prevented the sale of the house, and because elderly parents were usually the owners of the house they were in an especially powerful position. We can see this in the case of Milka and Sava, a married couple aged about 70 years, who returned to their spacious and modern family house in the village in 1998. The family house, built between 1974 and 1984, was the couple's pride and joy and they had saved for some 30 years to finance its construction. The couple's two adult sons had lived in Knin in a socially owned apartment registered in Sava's name. After the war, the apartment in Knin was occupied and the house was in a slightly damaged condition. When Milka and Sava returned in 1998, they applied for reconstruction as well as for the repossession of the flat. They received aid from UNHCR to repair their house, but did not hear anything concerning the repossession of the apartment. Although the sons had initially wished to return, their involvement in the Serbian army during the war, their poor economic prospects and the fact that the apartment was occupied made their return difficult. In fact, only one of the sons visited the parents once in early 2001, while the other did not come at all. In the meantime, the elder son had started a family and the younger son had married. Both abandoned their intention to return and preferred to remain in Novi Sad, a town in the Serbian province of Vojvodina where they had settled after being expelled during *Oluja*. The brothers rented small flats that cost them the larger part of their

salaries. In order to break out of the vicious cycle of working to pay the rent yet still not having enough money to live on, they thought about buying apartments in Novi Sad. The brothers raised this with their parents, suggesting that they should sell the house in Biskupija and buy three smaller flats close to each other in Novi Sad – two for the young families and one for the parents. Besides solving their own housing problem, the brothers argued that the proposed arrangement would also solve the problem of keeping in contact with the parents and helping them in their old age. But the elderly couple did not agree to sell their house. Even after Milka died in early 2001, Sava did not want to move to Novi Sad but lived alone in the house. He preferred to stay 'at home', even without his sons, than live in a 'foreign country' where he did not feel at home.

As this example shows, generational conflicts occurred over the sale of the family house. A considerable number of young Serbs from Knin argued that Knin was unrecognisable as the town they had lived in before the war and that they had no feeling of coming home when visiting the town after *Oluja* (see chapter 4). Selling the family house represented an attempt to break with a past they perceived as a burden, as well as a chance to build a new future in exile – but they were often blocked by the older generation who refused to sell.

5.5 Conclusions

This chapter has sought to establish why the implementation of repossession procedures for private property was so slow and uneven. Essentially, repossession was prevented at the political level. Instead of implementing the new laws and finding solutions to the 'blind spots' in legal procedures, Croatian national parties and civil initiatives encouraged discriminatory practices. The illegal occupation of housing was not prosecuted and became an area in which categorisations based on nationality overruled private property rights. Furthermore, alternative accommodation for settlers who should have vacated occupied private housing was in short supply, and consideration of social criteria in the allocation of alternative accommodation was generally not well addressed by the Croatian authorities.

Up to 2000, settlers were granted alternative accommodation without having to prove that they were in need, and they did not have to accept accommodation if it did not suit them. Instead of adhering to the new property repossession provisions, the Croatian national parties and civil initiatives followed a nationalist ideology which resulted in the 'disempowerment' of Serbian private property rights because in so doing they won the support of the Croatian settlers. It is interesting to note in

relation to former socially owned property that no provisions for repossession were adopted at all – which was partly based on the fact that the international community was much more hesitant about pressing the Croatian state to re-establish housing rights. Following the political changes in Croatia in 2000, the adoption of an action plan to resolve the problem of property repossession resulted in some improvements but was generally executed half-heartedly. The new government began to regulate access to alternative accommodation and, among other issues, to deal with illegal occupancy. Settlers were informed that they had to vacate occupied private housing. However, the repossession of former socially owned housing and related social questions were again not well addressed and the allocation of alternative accommodation as well as the execution of eviction orders remained slow.

In the second part of the chapter the focus turned to the consequences of the pending procedures as well as the inadequate addressing of social criteria in property repossession. This was looked at from the point of view of both the occupiers and the owners. While it was found that some settlers profited from these circumstances, the majority of settlers and owners were unable to solve their housing problems permanently and their futures therefore remained uncertain.

For most Serbs, the long process of waiting for property to be repossessed led to frustration and radicalised views of both Croatian settlers and the Croatian state. For settlers, free access to housing was often the only asset available to them. Feeling discriminated against and threatened by the new political line as well as by the returning Serbs, these settlers, particular illegal occupiers, therefore tended to support radical nationalist parties that promised to secure their housing rights. Other settlers, especially those who held a use permit but were living in poor accommodation, were more optimistic that the changes would bring advantages. As a result, they often developed a more open attitude towards the returning Serbs.

From the perspective of both occupiers and owners, the transformation of property relations was based not only on legal and political factors but also on economic and social conditions. Faced with the economic crisis in the Knin region, many settlers were unable to make a satisfactory living, and those with better connections decided to leave the area. For this group, special housing rights lost much of their value. Frequently, they sold their use permits to late-arriving settlers, profiting from the fact that the new settlers tended to be poor and were unable to obtain legal use permits from the housing commission. Against the background of migration into and out of the region, some individual settlers managed to profit from the property

transactions while the situation of many settler families, as well as the general social situation in Knin, worsened overall.

At the same time, many Serbs who did not return permanently but who planned to stay in exile retained their houses due to the lack of market opportunities, their emotional relations to the property or disagreements over the sale among family members.

Chapter 6
Land Use and Land Access

6.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapters, residential property was important for a wide range of reasons to people in the postwar region of Knin. First and foremost, it was an economic asset, which could be sold or exchanged, or simply lived in. It was also a social asset in that it linked people to the locality in which they lived, and gave them a sense of being rooted and 'at home'. As an added dimension, the connection a person felt to his or her house, whether privately owned or rented, was determined also by the nature of the links to the land on which the house was built. This latter aspect was reinforced where the land in question was declared to be the exclusive homeland of a particular national group, as was the case for the Knin region during and immediately after the war. However, it is also evident that the value of residential property decreased when people found themselves unable to make a living from the land in their home community. For these reasons, my investigation of property relations following ethnic war could not be restricted to housing alone but also included the changing relationships between people and the land itself. As this chapter will attempt to show, besides the social functions of land – and its symbolic meaning as national homeland and territory – land was viewed as an economic asset on account of its potential for agriculture. Why some people sought to exploit this potential while others did not, and how they went about it, is the subject of this chapter.

Any discussion of agriculture in the region of Knin in the postwar period must address the direct impact of the war on agriculture, as well as relationships between each population group and the land. It is particularly important to bear in mind that such links were not only influenced by the war but also have much deeper historical roots. These find their expression in the values and social norms of land and agriculture as a way of life.

As in all former socialist countries, the collectivisation of agriculture in socialist Croatia went hand in hand with industrialisation. In a

development that differed from the other countries, however, land remained largely in private ownership. In the postwar period, access to and use of land was promoted by the Croatian state, as well as by international agencies. Their intention was to re-establish an economic base for the region, as factories were not expected to reopen in the immediate future. Both the state and international agencies assumed that, given the large amount of privately held land, agricultural production could be transformed relatively easily into a market-oriented industry.

Given the context of the economic and social devastation of the postwar period, it is interesting to assess the role of this economic rationale in shaping relations between people, the land and agriculture in particular, and the extent to which these relations were determined by national, ethnic or other social affiliations/divisions. This chapter focuses on the question of the extent to which land fulfilled the social and economic needs of villagers and citizens in the postwar period, and investigates the role of national and other social affiliations in determining access to and use of land.

A useful distinction that can serve as a point of reference for this discussion is Stephen Gudeman's (2001) differentiation between the 'commons', or base of a community, and the market. The term 'commons' refers to the locally specified domains of value including shared interests, laws, practices and customs, as well as identities ranging from the kin group to the nation. This communal realm puts collective interests before self-interest, which is the main motivating force of the market realm (Gudeman 2001: 7–10). Gudeman argues that the 'commons' and the market are closely interrelated: 'No trade or market system exists without support of communal agreements, such as shared languages, mutual ways of interacting, and implicit understandings … The two realms may be institutionally or tactically interwoven' (2001: 11).

In this chapter, I explore the relationship between the market and the 'commons' within the context of the agricultural sector in postwar Knin, where values exhibit distinctive inconsistencies. By looking at subsistence-oriented and market-oriented agriculture, as well as the development of agricultural cooperatives, different spheres of community relations can be uncovered, spheres in which community values may come into conflict both with personal economic interests and with collective national goals. Before I turn to the postwar situation with respect to agriculture, I will look briefly at the general economic conditions in the postwar region of Knin and the main strategies people used to cope with them.

6.2 Coping with economic devastation

During the 1991–5 war, the economic base of the Knin region was almost completely destroyed. All the region's factories, the main source of employment under socialism, suffered looting or devastation. On the heels of the war came more general problems that characterised the postsocialist transition. The difficult economic situation brought about an overall breakdown of the market, with many processing factories and firms going out of business (Žimbrek, Žutinić and Par 2000). Under the new market conditions, ownership problems also arose. Few factories in the former war zone had been privatised, and there was little investment in modernisation. As a result of this, unemployment in the Knin region was high, rising to more than 60% in 2001.

An equally negative picture can be drawn for the agricultural sector, which had previously relied on domestic (household) farming of private plots (largely on the basis of secondary employment), as well as on the agricultural cooperative of Orlić-Markovac in Biskupija municipality (see chapter 3). Agricultural machinery and livestock, whether privately or cooperatively owned, had been stolen during and after the war, and the land was devastated (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry 1996: 22–3). In 1996, the local agricultural cooperative was placed under new management. This put a final end to the symbiosis between private family farming and the agricultural cooperative that had evolved under socialism.

It can be argued that, with its disastrous economy and its 12,000 inhabitants, Knin was overpopulated in 2000–1. The number of inhabitants in 2000 was almost the same as in 1991, mainly on account of the large-scale immigration of Croatian settlers and the slow but steady return of Serbs. Because of this, and the high fertility rate of the Croatian settlers (see chapter 4), the population continued to grow despite the lack of any prospects of economic development.[153]

After the war, most employees in the Knin region, as in other war-affected parts of Croatia, were state employees, either in the police, the army, the schools or municipal offices.[154] Until 2000, however, in a situation marked by a serious shortage of jobs, these positions were made available only to Croats, both locals and newcomers. A large percentage of the

[153] However, due to the high average age of Serbs in the region, it could also be expected that the number of Serbs would decrease again as a result of higher mortality. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous chapter, Croatian settlers started to move out of the region once they realised how bad the economic situation really was.

[154] A limited number of cafés and shops made up the small private sector in Knin.

unemployed – Croatian settlers, local Croats and local Serbs alike – received social benefits of approximately €50 per person per month. This may appear a small amount, but each dependent household member received these social benefits, and thus an unemployed couple with three dependent children would receive €250 per month. This was almost as much as the average monthly income in Knin (approximately €300–400 in 2000). However, not all unemployed people qualified for social benefits, as recipients were not permitted to own property (houses or land) in Croatia. This meant that Croatian settlers who did not own property in Croatia were likely to qualify for state social assistance, while those locals who owned property were excluded from it. However, in many cases, because the property was fully registered in the father's name for as long as he was alive, but was partially owned or possessed exclusively by his (grown-up) children (see chapter 3), this arrangement left the children eligible for social assistance. Furthermore, many elderly members of the population had been in employment for a certain number of years and therefore received pension payments.[155] The survey data on the main sources of income from households in the village of Biskupija, which I gathered in 2001, show the differences between the main three groups: Serbian returnees (and Serbs who remained), Croatian returnees and Croatian settlers in the village of Biskupija.

According to the survey, only 5 out of 55 Serbian households (i.e. 9%) in the village of Biskupija received their main income from wage labour. In one case, a young unmarried Serbian woman, who had been a nurse at the local hospital in the town of Knin, had remained during *Oluja* and kept her position. In other cases, individual household members worked in the private sector, mainly in construction work. Those Serbian households with a cash income through wage labour were the best off. On average, they received approximately €500 per month. Thirty-eight Serbian households (70% of all Serbian households surveyed) relied on pension payments for their main income. Unlike wage labour, which was often unreliable or seasonal, pensions were a secure source of income, although pension payments were often very low. Fifteen of the households surveyed received a pension payment of less than €125 a month. With an average household size of two members, each member thus relied on €67.5 per month, which was only slightly more than state social assistance. Another 15 households received a pension payment of between €125 and €200. Eight households received a pension payment of more than €200. Of these households, two members

[155] However, there were also discriminatory practices concerning pension payments. In the case of Serbs who had lived in the Republika Sprska Krajina, past employment during the war years (1991–5) was not considered valid for pension payments in Croatia.

were pension recipients in four cases. Nine Serbian households, representing 16% of all Serbian households surveyed, relied largely on social assistance from the Croatian state. Three households (5.5% of the total surveyed), received payments based on the Green Card for returnees. However, these payments were limited to six months.

An analysis of these figures must recognise that the large majority of Serbian returnees and Serbs who remained after *Oluja* were elderly. This applies to the village of Biskupija, as well as elsewhere in the war-affected areas of the country. With the return of young people, the percentage of those receiving social assistance grew further, as unemployment was generally high and ethnic discrimination contributed to particularly high unemployment rates among Serbs.

Although not representative of all Croatian returnees in the former war zone owing to its small sample size, the survey further showed that of the eight local Croat households in Biskupija, four relied on pension payments, one largely on social assistance, and three derived their main income from wage labour. In addition, elderly local Croats tended to live in the villages, while the percentage of younger local Croats was higher in the town. Therefore it is likely that in Knin town, the percentage of local Croats receiving pensions was lower than that of local Croats in Biskupija, while the percentage of those sourcing their main income through wage labour or social assistance would have been higher. In general, it was the younger population in particular who were most affected by unemployment.

An investigation of the main sources of income for Croatian settler households in Biskupija reveals that 17 out of the 30 households surveyed relied on social assistance, which amounts to approximately 57% of all those investigated. Eight households received their main income through wage labour (in five cases, this was seasonally restricted). These represent 27% of all settlers included in the survey. Four households (13% of all households surveyed), drew a pension from Bosnia that was often lower than the pension from the Croatian state. War invalids, however, received a relatively high pension of around €450 or more. One family in the survey relied primarily on financial assistance granted by relatives.

The high percentage of people receiving social assistance compared with the low percentage of those employed in wage labour indicates that many Croatian settler families were unemployed. Comparing the data with those of local Croats, it can be argued that unemployment among Croatian settlers was even higher than among local Croats. This was a view also put forward by the settlers themselves. However, when analysing the data it must be noted that the average age of Croatian settlers was significantly lower than the average age of local Croats and Serbs (see chapter 4). This

explains why the percentage of settlers receiving social assistance was very high, while the percentage of people receiving pensions was very low.

It is important to note too that the population in the Knin region often relied on a variety of income-generating sources to cope with the difficult economic situation after 1995. Beside those income sources listed above, returnees – Serbs in particular, but increasingly local Croats also – received humanitarian assistance from international organisations in the form of 'starter packs'. These included beds, mattresses, stoves, kitchen utensils, food, livestock, agricultural tools and seeds. Another form of assistance from international organisations was economic incentives, such as loans.[156] Receipt of humanitarian assistance was based either on socio-economic criteria, such as a monthly income of less than €125, and/or on a prerequisite of pre-war residence and ownership of land or other real estate in the locality. Ownership was an especially important requirement for receipt of a loan for starting a business or enterprise. In this respect, international humanitarian organisations applied capitalist criteria when granting business loans and excluded Croatian settlers who did not own property in the locality. Croatian settlers also received some humanitarian assistance organised by the Catholic Church and other private Croatian institutions, but this was meagre compared to the assistance offered by international organisations.

A significant section of the population, primarily men and primarily settlers from Bosnia, became active in the informal 'grey' economy. Their activities included the trading of foodstuffs and a range of other goods bought tax-free in Bosnia and sold for a higher price in Croatia. Labour in the grey economy also included employment in local businesses, without formal worker registration. This was particularly the case with seasonal work such as construction, which was one of the main sectors of private employment in the region of Knin. Because reconstruction was funded largely by international sources in 2000 and 2001, it was mainly Serbs who were employed in this sector.[157] Many workers were not offered registration

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[156] Between 1995 and 1998, the European Union's humanitarian aid organisation (ECHO) spent €49.1 million on humanitarian aid in Croatia. Between 1996 and 2000, the EU spent €62.45 million on reconstruction and technical assistance for the region, including some economic revitalisation projects (European Commission external relations, June 2001).

[157] There were two main reasons why Serbs were employed: first, international organisations tended to support Serbs rather than Croats, as they advocated the return of the Serbian section of the population. Secondly, Serbs often worked for a lower rate than their Croatian counterparts. However, there were also Croatian settlers who worked in reconstruction of Serbian houses.

by their employer but instead were offered a higher amount of money in cash (though paid irregularly) to supplement the more regular payments from social benefits. The grey economy thus allowed people to pursue a combination of jobs, spread over the course of a day, week, month or year.

A small section of the population from all three groups, again predominantly men, relied on migrant work, chiefly in Germany or in other areas of Croatia, sometimes even in Bosnia.[158] Like others who worked in the grey economy, many migrant labourers were registered as unemployed in Croatia and received social benefits while they worked in other regions or countries.

Finally, a large percentage of the rural population, especially local Croats and Serbs, but also some Croatian settlers, relied on small-scale subsistence agriculture. In the village of Biskupija, 81% of the surveyed households of local Serbs, 75% of local Croat households, and 43% of settler households practised some form of subsistence agriculture. However, such agricultural activities were generally limited and provided only a small supplement to the main household income. Many households restricted their agricultural activities to gardening and/or work in the vineyard. Importantly though, a small but increasing number of families were seeking to expand their agricultural activities and had begun to engage in commercial farming.[159]

Families were often forced to combine various economic strategies to make a living. A family's income was thus often reliant on a combination of subsistence (and even commercial) agriculture, formal and informal wage labour, and the receipt of social assistance and/or pension payments. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that these various economic practices and strategies were based on the different 'commons' of the community.

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[158] There were a few cases of Croatian settlers from Bosnia who were (still) employed in Bosnia. This came about, for example, if they remained employed by the Bosnian Croat Army (HVO). Some settlers from Bosnia worked in private businesses in Bosnian border towns or in the economically booming centres of Western Herzegovina.

[159] Both subsistence and commercial agriculture were usually family enterprises, engaging both partners and often all household members. Although women performed a range of agricultural tasks, and were often largely responsible for the livestock and gardening, it was usually the male head of the household who took the decisions concerning agriculture. Generally, the effects of unemployment were more severe for women, because men were far more active in informal wage labour and managed the agricultural work (even when the work was shared). One can argue that the complete shift from stable, registered wage labour during socialism into unpaid agricultural labour and housework in the postsocialist, postwar era as experienced by many women represented a re-traditionalisation of gender relations.

First, there was solidarity with one's own national group, and discrimination against or antipathy towards the other national group. For example, many Croats did not welcome the return of Serbs because they believed the town's economic problems would worsen as a result. Croats, especially those who had settled in the region, found themselves less advantaged than the Serbs. The Serb population received humanitarian assistance and was supported by international organisations, while Croats and especially Croatian settlers tended to be ignored by them. At the same time, Croatian national solidarity was fragmented. There was also competition and envy among Croats, especially between newcomers and local people, over state jobs and other entitlements (see chapter 5).

Local Serbs, on their part, also differentiated between local Croats and Croatian settlers. Many Serbs believed their own economic situation to be similar to that of the local Croats, who had returned to their own property and not profited significantly from the war. At the same time, opinions about Croatian settlers were very diverse. According to my survey in the village of Biskupija, a small majority of Serbs was convinced that settlers were better off than they were. Others among the Serbs believed their situation did not differ greatly, while most interestingly, nearly 25% of Serbs said that Croatian settlers were worse off, because their housing situation was unresolved, and because they had many children and little work. Again, access to and ownership of property were the determining factors that differentiated the groups, as well as age composition.

Economic practices were also based on informal networks of kinship, which extended beyond the respective hamlet, village, town or region and often beyond state borders, to family members who had emigrated. Informal networks based on neighbourhood, friendship and patron-client relationships among locals partly transcended national boundaries and built 'cross-cutting ties' between national groups (Gluckmann 1965; Schlee 1994). They were built on everyday activities and shared experiences, norms and values, as well as on inter-ethnic marriages which dated back to socialist and pre-socialist times. In the following sections I look in more detail at the way in which these different 'commons' had a special impact on relations with the land as well as on agricultural activities.

6.3 Private agriculture

6.3.1 Agricultural activities, constraints and opportunities

A discussion of constraints and opportunities in the agricultural sector, with special regard to the 'commons' on which the agricultural activities were built, requires first of all a comparative investigation of the agricultural

activities of local Serbs, local Croats and Croatian settlers respectively. By differentiating local Croats and Croatian settlers, differences can be highlighted that would be lost if looking at national categories only. The investigation considers crops and livestock, as well as both subsistence production and production for the market.

According to the survey conducted in the village of Biskupija in 2001, most Serbs grew garden produce and maintained a vineyard. Only a small number of Serbian households grew maize, wheat or produced hay, and then only in small amounts. The larger part of the yield of these crops was used as fodder for the few animals they kept, and none of it was sold. In many cases, extra fodder needed to be purchased.

Garden produce comprised mainly potatoes, onions, beans, salad, cabbage and other vegetables grown on a smaller scale, such as tomatoes. In most cases, as with the animal feed, this was not enough to cover a household's needs, and had to be supplemented with vegetables bought elsewhere. These sources included shops, itinerant traders who sold vegetables from their vehicles, the market in Knin, and neighbours. Of the 43 households surveyed, only two sold peppers, two sold tomatoes and cabbage, and another two sold potatoes. With the exception of one family that specialised in pepper production, described later in more detail, average household earnings from agricultural activities were very low (barely €100 per year).

The vineyards generally contained between 200 and 1500 vines. Most Serbian households had between 300 and 600 vines, from which they mainly produced wine and *raki* for their own consumption. Only two of the Serbian households in the survey sold both grapes and wine. Three households sold *raki*, largely because they consumed less than they produced. One reason why wine was not widely sold was that investment costs (particularly for pesticides, fertilisers and paid labour for the ploughing of the vineyard) were relatively high. In order to produce 180–200 litres of wine and 20–30 litres of *raki* from a vineyard of 600 vines, for example, a household had to invest between 1,600 and 2,500 Kunas (€200–310). Additionally, household members were expected to spend many hours tending the vineyard.

The main agricultural activities of local Croats, like the local Serbs, also centred around the vineyard and the production of garden vegetables and crops. Vineyard size was similar, with an average of 600 vines per household, and they too produced wine and *raki* largely for their own consumption, but also had to purchase additional vegetables. The use of land for crops like maize, hay and wheat was on a slightly smaller scale which correlates with the fact that they had fewer animals to feed (see below).

The agricultural activities of Croatian settlers differed significantly from those of local Croats and Serbs as most of the settlers maintained only garden plots. Of 30 households investigated, only two settler households had a vineyard, and only two used meadows for the grazing of cows.

Across all groups, livestock ownership was fairly widespread, but numbers were small, and the animals were kept almost exclusively for household subsistence. Of Serbian households, 70% had chickens (an average of 10 birds), about 50% of them had one or two pigs, and about 25% of them owned a cow. In contrast, only about 25% of local Croat households kept animals, with cows and chickens being most common, followed by pigs and sheep, with the number of animals owned per settler household being generally much smaller again than for local Serb and Croat households. Chickens were the most widely owned animals, followed by pigs, cows and other kinds of poultry. A few households had chosen to concentrate on one type of livestock, such as poultry in one case, and pigs in another.

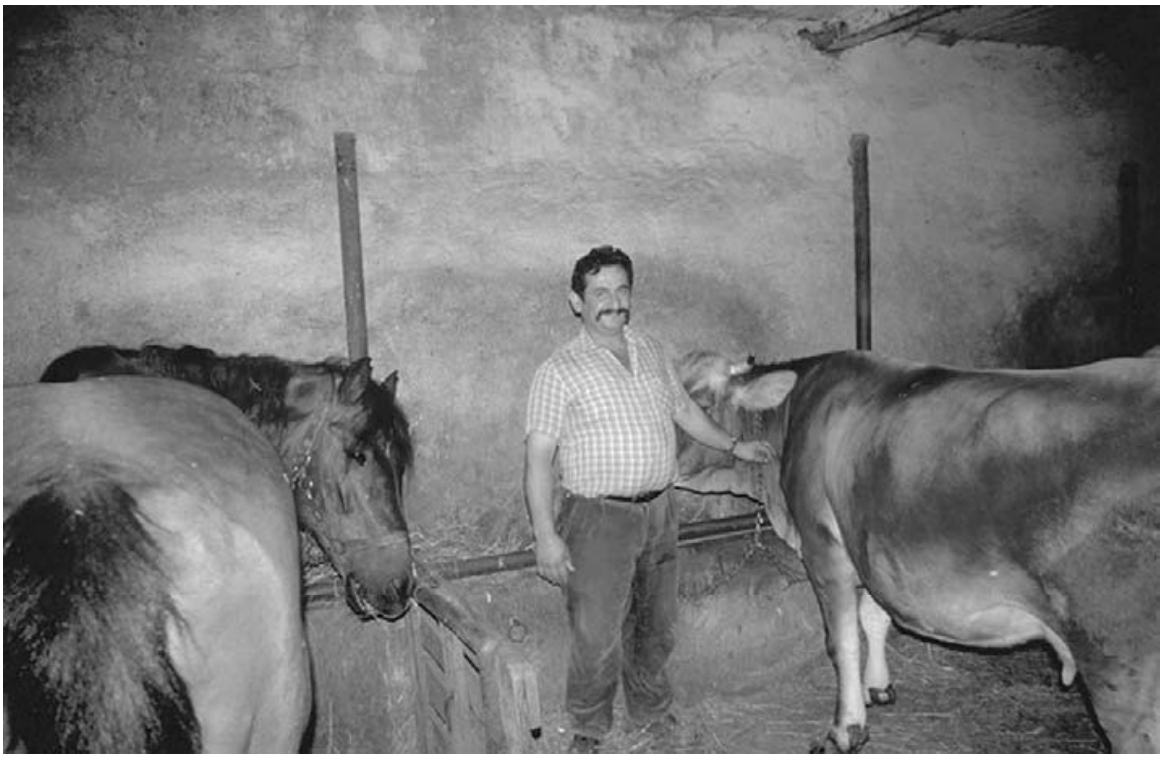


Plate 14. Local Croat with his livestock (spring 2001).

Only rarely did any member of the three groups sell livestock products, and any income from this source thus tended to be small. Some sold milk and cheese, and households with sheep or calves occasionally sold these to neighbours. Again, any profits were limited, as households usually had only one calf and/or a few lambs to sell per annum. Other households did not sell their lambs or calves at all, but kept them to increase their own stocks.

The comparison of land use and animal husbandry by the three groups shows that local Croats, Serbs and Croatian settlers alike restricted their agricultural activities to subsistence farming on a very small scale. However, the comparison reveals differences between the local population and the settlers, rather than divisions along national lines: local Serbs and Croat returnees often concentrated their activity on the vineyards, a traditional form of agriculture in the Knin region. In contrast, very few settler families had vineyards and many did not use their land at all. While some local Serbs and Croats owned sheep, no settler households did so.

In the following I will discuss the factors that served to constrain agricultural activity and the differences between the population groups. The key factors include access to land and agricultural machines, irrigation, marketing and the labour force, and also the socio-cultural values that impact on agriculture.

As we have seen, many Serbs, and also local Croats, owned land, but the average property size was small (often less than 2 hectares) and was usually fragmented into numerous small plots, which impeded market-oriented agriculture (see chapter 3). Croatian settlers were granted use-rights to land from the state as soon as they applied for it. These rights were either bound to the use-rights of the house they occupied (i.e. they were entitled to use the land belonging to the owner of the house), or they were independent of the house. In the latter case, use-rights were usually limited to three years. Neither form of use-right was secure as house and land could be reclaimed by their original owner (although this was in practice difficult, as explained in chapter 5), and a period of three years was too short to allow any long-term investment. Owing to the character of landed property in the region of Knin, Croatian settlers were often granted use-rights to dispersed parcels of land whose boundaries were seldom marked. While local people were familiar with the historical and current patterns of ownership and allocation, it was often unclear to settlers where the land was located. Furthermore, unlike the local Serbs, only a small percentage of Croatian settlers lived in villages, and the majority who lived in the town of Knin rarely had access to a plot for gardening.

Still, some Croats had better access to land than others. Depending on their respective role in the Croatian 'homeland war' against the Serbs, Croatian war veterans were entitled to apply for 10 hectares of agricultural land owned by the state. This was intended as compensation for their military service, and a means of making a living following demobilisation. Successful applicants gained full ownership of the land granted to them. In the Knin region, 10 hectares was a large amount compared with the average of one or two hectares per family (the largest private land holding in the

village of Biskupija was approximately 7 hectares). The 10-hectare plots had even greater value because the land was in one piece rather than fragmented, as was customary in this region. Croatian war veterans who received state land for agricultural purposes thus had a significant advantage over the local population in terms of ownership, as well as over other settlers. In practice, however, obtaining such land was a difficult process, because distribution was poorly organised and legal procedures were lengthy. Applicants were expected to identify suitable land without the help of the municipality or the state, and this meant searching the land register for an appropriate plot. Most of the state-owned land was situated on mountainsides, in very dry and stony terrain. Further difficulties arose from the slow process of obtaining ownership papers. By 2000, only two of the discharged soldiers who had settled in the region had managed to obtain full ownership of the high quality agricultural land allocated to them. Their access to and use of the land will be discussed below. Others continued to struggle with the formal procedures. This situation mirrors the difficult procedures facing Croatian settlers in obtaining permanent rights to housing, as described in the previous chapter.

Because few landowners had returned after the war (mainly Serbs, but also some Croats), a large part of the land in the region of Knin remained unused.[160] But purchasing or renting this land proved to be very difficult. As discussed in relation to the selling of houses, many owners did not wish to sell or let their land, even if they had emigrated long before and had no intention of returning (see chapter 5). By owning land one was perceived as having local roots, and thus as having both a home and a homeland (see chapter 3). People were proud of their ownership of land and felt it connected them to the region. Because of this strong emotional attachment, little land was made available for purchase or rent.

A further problem was that legal ownership could be quite unclear, as most registered plots of land were the property of several, often long-deceased or otherwise absent owners, each with a right to a share of the land. This was a legacy of the centuries-old partible inheritance system and the social organisation of agriculture, in which brothers had shared ownership rights to agricultural land. It was also a legacy of socialism, because ownership rights had not been documented in land registers (see chapters 2

[160] The fact that large parts of the arable land in the region remained unused came to the attention of politicians and agricultural experts. One proposal to improve the situation was to put a higher tax on arable land that had been left fallow. Some believed this would create an incentive for people to either work their land themselves or lease or sell it. However, agricultural experts objected, pointing out that in many cases it would be impossible to reach owners in order to claim taxes, due to a lack of clarity of ownership.

and 3). After the war in the 1990s, people who wanted to buy land were obliged to identify the rightful owners, to contact them, and then to clarify the issue of land ownership in court, a procedure that involved considerable time and cost.

However, access to and use of land was not just restricted to land for which the user held legal title in the form of ownership or use rights. Local people, for example, sometimes used the land of relatives who had not returned. Rural-based Croatian settlers who had engaged in some form of agriculture often made use of the land situated next to their houses. This was a matter of convenience, but was also a reflection of the difficulties they experienced in locating the plots for which they had been granted use-rights. They did not necessarily have the use-rights for the land next to their homes, but as these areas were often lying unused, the settlers simply made use of them. This practice regularly gave rise to disputes between returning Serbs and settlers. In these disputes it became clear that settlers and owners followed different rationales in legitimising the use of land.

On finding their land worked by settlers, returning Serbs accused them of illegally using the land, claiming to have been the owners for generations. Serbs were especially outraged when settlers had occupied a vineyard. For Serbs, maintaining a vineyard had special significance related to the strong social and emotional attachment bound up with making homemade wine and *raki*.[161] In such land disputes, settlers frequently proceeded to show the owner a document listing rights to certain plots, and maintained that this referred to land next to the house. They ignored the Serbian owners' claim that the plot in question was not listed in the document. However, settlers did not rely only on legal documents to claim land rights. Between 1995 and early 2000, when the HDZ was still ruling at the national level, numerous Serbian owners reported having been shouted at and pejoratively referred to as *Četnik*s by settlers as soon as they had approached their fields. The intended implication was that the Serbs had lost their rights to the land because, in the eyes of the settlers, *Četnik*s had been the aggressors in the war against Croatia before their eventual defeat. In this way, the Croatian settlers' legitimation of the use of land followed similar patterns to that of housing. In the formerly Serb-occupied regions of Croatia, where the use-rights of Croats often had precedence over ownership rights, the situation was similar to that described by Julie Scott for Cyprus in the early 1990s: 'As legitimating systems, rights of conquest and rights of original ownership stand in opposition to each other; the former gives a moral underpinning to

[161] However, in the village of Biskupija, land disputes between Croatian settlers and Serbian owners concerning a vineyard occurred in only two cases and stemmed from the fact that the settlers were not familiar with such work.

the rights of the newcomers, whilst the latter emphasizes the continuous historic existence and rights of the island's "original" inhabitants' (1998: 146).

When the rights to an area of land were disputed, Serbs usually chose not to pursue their claims but worked another plot instead. If Serbs insisted on using a disputed piece of land, conflicts easily escalated, often to the disadvantage of the Serbian owner. But with the increasing involvement of the international organisations, the settlers did not always get their way. In 2000, some settlers claimed they had not used the land at all in order to avoid being accused of appropriating it. Others reported incidents of settlers confronted by Serbs who claimed that a particular piece of land belonged to them. The following comment from a 30-year-old female settler, who gave up using land after she had been in conflict with Serbs on several occasions, neatly expresses the frustration this situation generated: 'Wherever you turn, someone will approach you and tell you that the land belongs to him.'

Problematic access to land was not the only limiting factor in agriculture. Access to machinery was proving to be difficult because most privately owned agricultural machinery had been stolen during the war and were generally in short supply. This situation did not affect all households in Biskupija equally, as is shown in table 6.1.

Table 6.1. A comparison of agricultural machinery owned by Serbs, local Croats and Croatian settlers in Biskupija, 2001

	Machines owned by local Serbs		Machines owned by local Croats		Machines owned by Croatian settlers	
	Tot-al No	Percentage in relation to 43 households	Total No	Percentage in relation to 8 households	Tot-al No	Percentage in relation to 30 households
Tractor	5	11.5	1	12.5	0	0
Trailer	5	11.5	1	12.5	0	0
Small tractor	13	30	1	12.5	0	0
Plough	3	7	1	12.5	0	0
Cutter (for grass)	3	7	1	12.5	0	0
Sowing machine	1	2	0	12.5	0	0
Hay baler	0	0	1	12.5	0	0

Plastic-mulch-machine (for vegetables)	1	2	0	0	0	0
Electric saw	4	10	1	12.5	0	0
Greenhouse	1	2	0	0	0	0
Water pump	3	7	1	12.5	1	3

Source: Questionnaire.

The table shows that local Croats households had a higher ownership of agricultural machines in relative terms, with the exception of electric saws and small tractors, which were mainly owned by local Serbs who had received them from international humanitarian organisations. However, compared with the pre-war situation, in which nearly 50% of households in the village had owned a tractor and other agricultural machines, the number of machines at the disposal of local Croats and local Serbs was very small in 2001. Croatian settlers neither owned agricultural machinery themselves nor received them from the international organisations. Furthermore, they were not eligible for loans granted by international organisations to the local population for agricultural machinery.

Irrigation presented an additional problem for many villagers – Serbs as well as Croats, and locals as well as newcomers. In large areas of the municipality of Biskupija and the wider Knin region (outside the town of Knin itself), no water pipelines existed. Well water was also limited because of high temperatures and dry conditions over the summer. The karst terrain meant that the area was rich in water reservoirs in the form of springs and rivers but access to these sources was difficult because of a lack of water pumps after the war.[162] In some respects, the shortage of water impacted on settlers more than it did locals. While locals were used to the scarcity of water in summer and had strategies to cope with this, most settlers were unprepared for the dry summers when choosing to work the land. Many became quickly frustrated, realising that use of their gardens was almost impossible over the summer months. One settler put it this way:

[162] The problem of water shortages in the dry season had existed well before the war. Few fields were located next to springs or a river and so could be irrigated with the help of a water pump. In the early 1980s, people in Biskupija had started to build an irrigation channel to water their fields but this project was never completed.

> If I had known that there is no water, I would not have moved to this place. I recognised that there is no water only after I had registered the house and received a use permit ...

All three population groups were faced with difficulties when it came to marketing their products. In pre-war times, individual farmers could sell their products to the cooperative, but this was no longer the case. In general, there were now fewer state purchasers, and the sale of produce was more difficult to organise. Under socialism, milk, for example, was collected every morning from individual households, transported to Knin and processed there. After the war, this was impossible as there was no-one to collect the milk, and the milk-processing plant in Knin had stopped operating. The next plant was about 90 kilometres away in Split. Thus dairy cow owners often found it difficult to secure buyers for their milk. Similar problems occurred with the marketing and processing of other agricultural products. Grapes and wine, as well as milk, cheese, eggs, meat and vegetables were generally sold privately to friends and neighbours, and sometimes to other individuals, such as Croatian traders or restaurant owners who bought directly from the villagers or at the market in Knin. The organisation of the sale of produce was time-consuming and relied heavily on personal connections.

The availability and cost of labour also became problematic following the war and presented itself differently to each group. The great majority of local families, especially the Serbs, were faced with a reduced workforce, as many young family members had not returned (see chapter 4). This meant that elderly people often had to work their fields alone. Unlike the local population, however, most of the Croatian settler families were relatively young, had several household members, and therefore a larger workforce at their disposal.

A further agriculture-related issue was the low expectations that most families (locals and settlers alike) had of agriculture as a reliable way of making a living. Engagement in agriculture was treated more as a survival strategy for times when employment in the wage sector failed. This attitude was based in part on years of experience of socialism, when agriculture was never more than a supplement to a household income, and perhaps even on experiences of pre-socialist times, when people eked out a meagre existence from agriculture (see chapters 2 and 3). This belief inhibited some from investing in agriculture as they feared that the returns would be so small that they would never repay the loan. Many households chose to stick with the traditional way of farming – cultivating a garden and in many cases a vineyard, growing some maize and wheat, and keeping various animals.

Most families did not want to specialise, lacked any business plan for future agricultural activities, and continued to hope instead for a state job.

Nevertheless, for Serbian returnees in particular, subsistence agriculture gained in value after the war in certain respects, especially compared to socialist times when many people had relied on wage labour It was also a means of re-establishing social networks with kin and the wider village community, and thus contributed to a sense of social security.[163] On occasions, nationalist boundaries were even overcome when agricultural activities encouraged cooperation between Croats and Serbs.

Furthermore, in some settler households the view of agriculture was not as negative as outlined above. This was particularly so where the settlers originated from regions with a strong agricultural base, such as in Slavonia. It was therefore the settlers who were numerically strongest in developing commercial agriculture.

In order to explore the significance of agriculture and differences between subsistence and commercial farming in more detail, it is helpful to look more closely at the social and economic dimensions of agriculture, as well as the role of social networks, trust and cooperation in the postwar period. Beginning with a Serbian returnee perspective, several cases are presented in order to explain the social and economic significance of land and agriculture in postwar Knin, and the impact of national and international policies.

6.3.2 Family farming and community networks

During the socialist era, Milan, a Serb aged about 60, had worked for some 25 years as a cook in a restaurant owned by an agricultural cooperative. Before the war in the 1990s, he lived with his adult son and daughter in a private family house in a village near Knin, next door to his three brothers. His wife had died, and his daughter and son worked in the largest factory in Knin. Together with his brothers, Milan owned about two hectares of land, on which the men planted wheat, corn, potatoes and grapes, assisted by Milan's children. In addition, Milan had 40 sheep. This form of domestic agriculture served as a means of subsistence for the household as well as a source of extra income. Agriculture also had a social dimension, as their home produce was valued highly and offered to relatives and guests on special occasions.

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[163] In his analysis of property relations and the market economy in Southern Xinjiang, China, Hann (1999: 198) also refers to the attachment to land within a subsistence-oriented peasant economy and its link to sentiments of group identity and belonging.

During the Croatian military operation of 1995, Milan, his children, and his brothers fled to Belgrade. In 1997, he returned to his village with one of his brothers and lived on a small pension drawn by the brother. The other brothers, both younger, and Milan's son were still in Belgrade in 2000. One of the brothers had found a good job and managed to build a house in Belgrade. He did not plan to move back to Knin, but did not want to sell his house and land there because of an emotional attachment to his home. Milan's daughter moved to Canada and also had no immediate plans to return. She had a relatively well-paid job, and showed no intention of claiming a share of the family property in Croatia. Milan's third brother and Milan's son found only occasional work in Belgrade. They hoped to return home as soon as they could find jobs in Knin.

Until 1995, this family had lived and cooperated closely in a rural environment. Now it was dispersed, with its members living in three different countries. Only Milan and one brother returned to the village and worked their land and vineyards together. They owned a horse, which allowed them to offer ploughing services neighbours, but apart from this small cash supplement, agriculture was primarily a subsistence activity. They occasionally sent homemade wine and *raki* to their relatives in Belgrade, and even to Milan's daughter in Canada. On her part, the daughter occasionally sent cash to her family members in Belgrade and Knin.



Plate 15. A Serb returnee couple produces *raki* (autumn 2000).

This example serves to illustrate that although family structures, sources of income and ways of life changed considerably after the war, agricultural work and the household economy heavily relied on kinship relations that reached beyond the nuclear family. This applied mainly to Serbian returnee families but also, to a lesser degree, to Croatian returnee and settler families. Before the war, and even more so during and after it because of forced migration, these kinship networks encompassed translocal and even transnational relations: village-based family members sent agricultural products to their relatives in the towns, as well as to more distant locations, even when state borders divided them. Although the quantity of agricultural products sent was now smaller than in pre-war times – because agricultural production was limited and transportation could be costly and difficult to organise – most people found ways of sending their agricultural products cost-free, or for a small fee, to their relatives abroad. They sent packages to family members via visiting relatives, or paid for the transport of parcels on regular buses or private taxis. With these packages relatives helped to support the household economies of their families living in exile in Serbia. As described by Konstantinov (2003) in the context of postsocialist Bulgaria, in postsocialist, postwar Croatia, relations between relatives in villages and towns continued to function and were cemented by these cash–produce exchanges. The concept of (unbalanced) reciprocity between relatives when it came to these transfers stabilised social relations (see Sahlins 1972), created sentiments of and connections to home in places of exile, and (re-) established ties with the home community.

Agricultural work itself extended beyond the household and depended on networks of kinship, neighbourhood and friendship. For labour-intensive work that had to be done quickly (such as the slaughtering of a pig or the harvesting of grapes or hay), relatives, neighbours and friends participated, as was the habit before the war. A family in need of assistance would announce which day the activity was planned for and coordinate with potential volunteers to ensure their availability. When the work was finished, the housewife would offer the workers a rich meal, usually consisting of soup, salad, roast potatoes and plenty of meat. This was generally done without special announcement, as volunteers expected to be supplied with food in return for their labour. Furthermore, the volunteering guests could expect the help of the host family when the time came to harvest their own fields. Apart from being an economic necessity, this sharing of tasks based on reciprocity was a reaffirmation of personal bonds between families and individuals. It served not just an economic purpose, but a social one, re-creating personal networks and trust within and beyond the village, and thus supplying people with a level of social security. This again was widespread

throughout the former Yugoslavia in socialist times (e.g. Bringa 1995: 70–1) and in other postsocialist countries as well, as has been reported, for example, by Torsello for Slovakia (2003: 138).



Plate 16. Relatives and neighbours sharing a meal after the grape harvest (autumn 2000).

After the war, this practice in the village of Biskupija continued to involve people of different national affiliations who were long used to sharing work.[164] Cases of Serbian or Croatian returnees lending their services on a reciprocal basis to Croatian settlers were, however, very rare. It seems to have been easier for locals to revive the tradition of reciprocal support among themselves than to establish new ties with the settlers. In the eyes of the locals, settlers had neither a local (family) history, nor shared their values, traditions and practices in respect of the sharing of tasks and labour. These shared values were seen as a condition for sharing work and relying on reciprocal help. As Gudeman (2001: 27) states, 'without a commons, there is no community'. One local Serbian woman put it this way:

> The Bosnians do not even get along with the local Croats, because they have another mentality and they cannot live the way we do. It is

[164] It must be remembered that this was not the rule for all villages in the former war zone. In villages where extensive ethnic violence occurred against neighbours, reconciliation was far more difficult to achieve.

> another way of life. They will kill you for a glass of water. Then they will plead to God and say that God has forgiven them. We are not like that – neither the local Serbs nor the Croats. We are willing to invite people, and we will offer everything we have. People from Bosnia go to church today and in the evening they steal everything. There was a case in which Bosnians took all the grapes from a vineyard in one night. You have to realise how much work goes into a vineyard. As soon as they suffer a bad conscience, they surely think that God will forgive them for everything.

While this woman clearly maintained that local Croats and Serbs shared common values of hospitality and honesty, 'Bosnians', as she called the Croatian settlers, were presented as the 'other', who would be dishonest and deceitful.

In 2001, I observed another institution at local level that contributed to an increased sense of social security among local villagers as well as to community reconstruction. When the cow of a poor but highly esteemed Serbian villager died, a Croatian friend of his went from house to house, collecting money in order to assist him. He visited all Croatian and Serbian returnee households, and everyone able to make a donation did so. I later learned that no-one questioned this act, because it had been the custom in socialist and, most likely, in pre-socialist times. However, the local Croat who was collecting did not visit the Croatian settlers in the village. In raising money for his unfortunate friend, he revitalised a traditional village gesture of solidarity, for which national affiliation played no role, but where settlers were perceived as outsiders.

Cooperation between Serbian and Croatian returnees that excluded Croatian settlers was also promoted by international organisations. For example, a powerful international organisation in the locality of Knin aimed to strengthen the local economy and at the same time promote reconciliation between local Serbs and Croats. It promised to grant very favourable financial loans for the opening of enterprises to applicants selected by nationally mixed village councils, which were yet to be established. Based on the prevailing policies of the international organisations active in the region, Croatian settlers were not considered for these projects (at least until 2000) because they did not own land or were not registered in the locality before 1991. These policies were influenced by the underlying idea that refugees should be able to return to their homes. According to this view, the economic incentives directed at Bosnian Croats in Croatia, for example, kept them from returning home.

In Biskupija, the nationally mixed village council made up of Croatian and Serbian returnees was easily established. The council members

cooperated so effectively that the international organisation went on to grant seven loans of €10,000 each – a remarkably high sum for any family in the area – for the opening of local businesses. Three of the loans went to 'Croats' (one recipient had a Serbian wife, and another, a Serbian mother), the other four were allocated to Serbs. In this way, where both groups benefited from the programme, solidarity and cooperation among local Serbs and local Croats at village level were slowly re-established. The establishment of institutions that brought together various interests could thus be seen as a form of conflict resolution (cf. Elwert 2001: 2546). However, with the exclusion of settlers from the programme, as well as from the village board, the gap between locals and settlers, irrespective of national affiliation, was widened.

Despite these bridge-building attempts, there was generally less solidarity in the village than there had been during the socialist period. The lack of both agricultural machinery and younger household members may have created conditions for greater solidarity, but labour (especially in combination with machinery rental) often had to be paid for in cash since elderly inhabitants were unable to offer labour in return. Solidarity was bound to shared interests, and as soon as the younger members of the community saw that they could not profit from the help offered to the elderly (because the latter could not reciprocate), ties of solidarity were weakened. This decline in the reciprocity of work was therefore an indirect result of the war. It was coupled with a rise in the value attached to financial transactions and it placed additional limitations on agricultural activity. Only a few villagers could in fact afford to rent machinery. To avoid such expenses, villagers relied largely on their own manual labour and restricted their agricultural activities to a minimum.

Solidarity within the village was also hindered by the commodification of agricultural work. Local Serbs tended to buy services from Croatian settlers, rather than from local Croats, as the former offered cheaper rates. In their relations with the settlers, Serbs applied formal economic criteria only. Personal connections and an obligation to return favours did not play a role. For example, in the summer months, when household water tanks ran dry, people were regularly forced to organise a water tanker to fill up their cisterns. This affected all inhabitants in Biskupija alike. A local Croat who owned a tanker charged a relatively high sum of money for his services, and people often preferred to transport water in buckets from a nearby spring. Serb inhabitants observed that there was also a Croatian settler with a small tanker who supplied water to the houses of other settlers. Word soon got around that his service was cheaper than that of the local Croat and that he offered it to Serbs as well. Several Serbs offended

the local Croat by buying the less costly service of the settler. In this way, the transaction between Serbs and Croatian settlers could be placed in the realm of the market, which is often seen as being opposed to the community. However, at the same time, this transaction proved to be an important step in the improvement of relations between Croatian settlers and Serbs. As well as its economic dimension it also had a social one, as the Croatian settler and his Serb customers would chat together while waiting for the cistern to fill. For many, this represented a first-time extended conversation with someone 'from the other side'. Relating this to Gudeman's theory (2001: 11), it can be argued that no trade or market exists without a common base. Market transactions between local Serbs and Croatian settlers therefore contributed to the creation of a local community which included Croatian settlers, even when these transactions did not rely on values of shared reciprocity and solidarity.

6.3.3 Market-oriented agriculture

Despite the problems facing agriculture, a small number of families sought to intensify their agricultural activity and shift to specialised market production. In the region of Knin, there were only about 10 such farmers, most of them local Croats and Croatian settlers. On average, the Croatian farmers exploited larger areas of land than Serbs in the 2000–1 period, and generated a higher income.

However, the reasons for engaging in market-oriented agriculture were similar for all groups and inter-ethnic antagonism and mistrust did not play a crucial role in either creating or hindering opportunities in commercial agriculture. Nevertheless, access to land, loans and investments, as well as market opportunities, varied. Next to the group-specific factors described above, opportunities depended greatly on personal connections to people in key positions and knowledge of favourable loans and programmes. Few people in the Knin region, locals and settlers alike, were in the position to rely on such connections or information. As Bruno (1998: 183) comments in relation to postsocialist Russia, information was often treated as a secret that was only accessible through a network of friends and acquaintances, linking the availability of information to social connections and cooperation. This was also familiar to people in Croatia, where favourable connections had been the basis of economic success since socialist times (see Denich 1978: 32).

In her description of the postsocialist transformation of the agricultural sector in Russia, Hivon (1998) stresses that new forms of private farming tend to increase conflict inside the community. She argues that maintaining good relations and meeting the concerns of the community were

crucial in winning the acceptance of other villagers when attempting to start a new business successfully. In the Knin region, locals in particular experienced tension between family members and within the community, as commercial farming often challenged family roles, village solidarity and work reciprocity through increased contact with outsiders.

The following is a detailed analysis of the experiences of four farming families – two Croatian settlers, a local Croatian farmer and a Serbian farmer – all of whom became active in commercial agriculture. It serves to illustrate how each party managed to establish a commercial farming operation and how they coped with the problems that arose along the way. However, as the number of commercial farmers was very small, the data only hints at the kinds of problems and opportunities people faced. I begin with a brief description of the four farming families before turning to the issues of access to land, machinery and loans, workload and market opportunities, values and cooperation.

In 1996, two Croatian war veterans Mladen and Marinko (both aged about 40 in 2000) had moved with their families to Biskupija municipality from the Croatian towns of Karlovac and Bjelovar respectively. As both were unemployed following the war, they planned to make a living by growing and selling vegetables. During the socialist period, no member of either family had worked in agriculture but the men had been in steady employment, only losing their jobs in the early 1990s. By 2000, they had become the largest vegetable producers in the region of Knin. Each family planted 3 hectares with melons, peppers and cucumbers under horticultural fleece, a method new to Knin and to much of Croatia.

Ante was a 45-year-old local Croat who had returned with his mother, wife, son and daughter-in-law to his house in the municipality of Biskupija in 1995. Like other locals, Ante's family had not been intensively involved in agriculture under socialism, as Ante had had a job in the TVIK factory. However, following the family's return in 1995, he and the other household members found themselves unemployed, and they turned to agriculture as a means of earning a living. In 2000, the family produced crops from a vineyard and a vegetable field. The latter, covering an area of little more than one hectare, was planted with peppers, melons, tomatoes and onions, and also with cereal crops (maize and wheat).

Zoran, a Serb aged about 30, had returned to Biskupija from Belgrade in 1997 with his wife. The couple shared a household with Zoran's parents who had returned not long before with Zoran's grandmother. Before the war, Zoran and his father had both worked at TVIK. In postwar Biskupija, however, both men were unemployed and the household relied mainly on subsistence agriculture and a pension drawn by Zoran's grandmother. In

1999, Zoran was fortunate enough to find work as a driver for a local construction company that was financed by an international organisation. From 2000, Zoran's father was also partially employed in reconstruction. In 2000, Zoran began planting peppers as a cash crop on two very small fields, thus combining agricultural activity with a salaried job. After a successful first harvest, he had plans to further develop his vegetable production, with the goal of shifting to full-time self-employment in agriculture. This decision was motivated by the fact that Zoran's position with the construction company was becoming increasingly precarious as it depended on the unlikely continuation of international financing for Knin. He successfully applied for a European Union Economic Revitalisation Programme grant in 2000, and began planting and harvesting peppers and melons on a much larger scale.

Comparing access to land of the four farmers, it is clear that there is a disparity between the two locals (the Serb Zoran and the Croat Ante) and the two war veterans who settled in the region. The war veterans benefited from the law that allowed them to apply for a 10-hectare area of land from the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture as a form of compensation for their military service (*darovina*).[165] However, the application procedure proved more problematic and time-consuming than Mladen and Marinko had expected. They applied for the land in 1996, but did not finally receive it till 1999. The land the two men applied for was part of a 50-hectare area of fertile, unfragmented land situated next to the river Kosovičića in the *Kosovo polje*. The area was nationalised after World War II and until the 1991–5 war it had been under the management of the agricultural cooperative of Orlić-Markovac. Because the new, postwar management of the cooperative was opposed to land privatisation, it entered into a dispute with the two settlers.

Between 1996 and 1999, before gaining land ownership, Marinko and Mladen farmed areas of land belonging to Serbs who had not yet returned. However, as the two men were strangers in the area and unable to rely on ties of trust or friendship, this involved considerable insecurity. When the Serb owners returned and reclaimed their land, arguments ensued, and the two Croat settlers eventually decided to use other plots.

Unlike these two Croatian settler families, the local Croat Ante owned a small area of land, divided into numerous parcels, which he had inherited from his deceased father. Not all of his plots had access to water. He therefore farmed a section of land located near a water hole, which was owned by Serbian neighbours who had not yet returned. Because the Serbian

[165] It should be noted that Mladen and Marinko were the exception among Croatian settlers, rather than the rule. Other Croatian settlers obtained use rights only for Serbian land.

owners and Ante knew each other personally, he gained their permission to work the land by verbal agreement. In this case, it was not nationality but rather personal ties between locals that played a role in his gaining access to it. Nevertheless, Ante still felt his position to be vulnerable because his use-rights were not secured for a long period and the owners could decide to return at any time and make use of the land themselves.

To remove this insecurity, Ante was eager to obtain a share of the same 50-hectare area of fertile, unfragmented land that had been under the management of the Orlić-Markovac agricultural cooperative, which the Croatian settlers now farmed. He argued that the cooperative was likely to leave most of the land unused and that the municipality should divide it among private farmers; three to four hectares being sufficient for one family. Using the case of the two Croatian settlers who had received 10 hectares each, he maintained that the land should be given to local people and not to outsiders and newcomers. This suggests that the 'commons' Ante recognised were based not necessarily on his nationality, but on locality. He was competing for land with the cooperative's new Croatian management, as well as with the few Croatian settlers who had started commercial farming in the villages around Knin.

Of the cases presented above, the Serb Zoran used the smallest area of land and relied solely on family-owned plots. This land in fact belonged to his father and to his two uncles (his father's brothers) who were not living in Biskupija. One was in exile in Serbia and the other had already emigrated to Slovenia in the 1970s. In 2000, Zoran planted pepper seedlings in two small fields: one located close to the family house, and the other about 2 kilometres further along the valley, next to a small river. The more remote field, accessible only by tractor, proved nevertheless to be more practical because of of its proximity to water. From June onwards, Zoran had to irrigate the pepper plants every second day. For the more distant field, Zoran could pump water directly from the river. For the field next to his house, however, he had to fetch spring water from about 3 kilometres away using a small truck. This was a very time-consuming activity. With plans to extend his production and to reduce time and labour spent on irrigation, Zoran was also eager to obtain a plot of the cooperative's land located beside the river.[166] He also considered alternatives, such as asking relatives for the use of some of their land situated next to the river. But as was the case with Ante, he preferred not to rely on relatives for access to land. It seemed likely that the use of other people's land for market-oriented production would be a

[166] This was the only state-owned land with good access to water and was therefore attractive to all farmers in question. Most other state-owned land was situated on dry and stony terrain on mountainsides.

sensitive matter, and he feared that relatives might refuse him the right sooner or later.

Concerning access to machinery, none of the four farmers owned any machinery on their return or when they settled in the municipality of Biskupija. The machinery had either been stolen during the war, or the farmers had not owned machinery before. However, they each coped with the situation in different ways. As will become evident, the willingness to take risks and the ability to rely on connections and receive a loan or grant differed greatly among the four farmers.

Immediately after their arrival, the two Croatian war veterans each applied for a loan from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to buy a tractor and other machinery. However, their position was problematic as they did not own any property that could serve as collateral for the loan. When they finally received the loan in 1998–9, it was not paid out in cash but rather they had to place an order for the machines needed. This restriction caused difficulties as the two settlers needed money for seeds, greenhouses, employees' wages and other needs. When they finally received their 10-hectare plots of state land in 1999, it was not within their means to exploit the entire area, and they could only plant up 3 hectares each. In 2000, both households came under further economic pressure when faced with the necessity of paying back the high interest rates on the machinery loan.

Unlike the two former war veterans, the local Croat Ante was afraid he would be unable to repay any loan and he therefore did not put in an application. From his own resources, Ante managed to buy a pump in order to irrigate his vegetables, as well as a small truck to transport them to markets in the coastal towns. This truck replaced his old tractor which had been 'used' by a Serb during the war. These three machines enabled him to start vegetable production, although this remained on a small scale owing to reliance on a single pump and the resulting restriction on the amount of usable land. Like Marinko and Mladen, he struggled to afford the high investment costs at the beginning of each year without a loan.

In spring 2000, when the Serb Zoran started vegetable production, he bought a pump for irrigation, and purchased a tractor using income from his construction job. He was fortunate to be able to use his firm's truck, which he could take home after work, for transporting water. In this respect, Zoran's agricultural activities were dependent on his combination of occupations. The most crucial factor in Zoran's vegetable production was his successful application for a European Union Economic Revitalisation Programme grant in 2000. In the summer of 2001, he received agricultural

machinery worth a total of €25,000.[167] Zoran's knowledge of the European Union Programme and his submission of a successful application were the result of a number of factors. The most important were his key position as a driver distributing construction materials, his good working relationship with his (Croatian) boss in the local firm, and his familiarity with a network of people employed in international organisations in Knin. When Zoran decided to submit an application for a loan for his pepper production project, he received help in developing both the project description and the business plan from a friend employed in one of the international organisations. Zoran was advised to stress the project's potential for employing several other people.

In summary, with regard to access to machinery and loans, the two settlers were prepared to take higher risks and be innovative, while the two local farmers acted more cautiously. However, the latter were able to make better use of social connections. Zoran, for example, was able to rely on a network of acquaintances and established contacts with power-holders. They financed his business plan based on the fact that his project promised to benefit the wider local community rather than just his own family. At the same time, the loan from the international organisation enabled him to reach beyond the realm of the established agricultural practices in his local community.

Another key variable in the shift to commercial agriculture was labour. Like others who practised farming in the Knin region, all four farmers relied largely on unpaid labour provided by family members. Beyond the family, however, those helping and the way these helpers were 'paid' showed some differences.

In Zoran's case, relatives and friends helped very little, mainly on account of the small size of the plots he farmed in 2000. In the case of the settlers, Mladen and Marinko, they were helped at harvest time and other busy periods by friends, all of them settlers. Instead of an hourly wage, they worked in return for a small one-off payment, a supply of vegetables, and often a meal provided by the farming families. These helpers were unemployed and reliant on social welfare. The seasonal work in the fields gave them an extra source of income as well as a way of passing the time productively.

Ante, the local Croat, also required additional workers at harvest time and so employed neighbours and friends, most of whom were Serbs. Given

[167] Zoran's case illustrates how EU grants sometimes failed to take the actual need into account: because the grant arrived in early summer, as opposed to spring, Zoran lost an entire year of production, as he could only really use the machinery for planting in spring the following year.

this informal relationship, their work could not be measured in terms of euros per hour or per day. Instead, the value came from the rebuilding of social networks and trust through Serbs working in the fields of a Croatian neighbour. Apart from this social dimension, Serbs were more likely to be unemployed and therefore expected lower pay than the local Croats or Croatian settlers in the community. In general, then, it appears that despite some individual differences all farmers relied quite heavily on personal relations and to a much lesser degree on market criteria when organising their workforce.



Plate 17. Croat settlers harvesting peppers on former cooperative land for which they received possession rights (summer 2000).

The sale of their produce was a difficult and time-consuming undertaking for all four farmers. At the local market in Knin, the three Croatian farmers were allocated a poor location for their stall and had little chance of competing with traders who sold products bought in other Croatian towns or in Bosnia. They therefore turned to alternatives such as selling directly to traders and individuals, supplying a shop in Knin, and taking their produce to the market in Šibenik. In 2000–1 Zoran still relied on this mother who went from one village household to the next selling peppers. This was a very time consuming and exhausting job and his mother struggled with health-problems at the end of 2001. With his plans to increase his production Zoran therefore also considered selling his produce at the market in Šibenik.

A further interesting difference between the four farmers can be observed in the values they attached to agriculture. As newcomers to the region, Mladen and Marinko did not have to confront the negative views on agriculture that prevailed locally within families and the wider village community. In Mladen's home region in the Croatian Pannonian Plain, vegetables had been produced for the market for decades, and attitudes towards agriculture were more positive. Furthermore, in both cases, their spouses worked with them as partners, sharing the responsibility for agricultural production and participating in decision-making.

In Ante's household, father and son were responsible for decisions relating to agricultural matters. It was understood that the role of Ante's wife and daughter-in-law was essentially as helpers. Because the two men shared the goal of getting started in commercial agriculture, attitudes to agriculture were very positive within their household.

In contrast, Zoran's plans to develop commercial farming had been met with great scepticism by his father. He had taken on temporary work in reconstruction and was less involved in the agricultural labour, but nevertheless rejected Zoran's plans for making a living from farming. He insisted that no-one had achieved this under socialism let alone in pre-socialist times. In his experience, farming was associated with the exploitation of family labour for poor results. Furthermore, Zoran's wife and mother were not happy about their large share of the work in vegetable production. His wife disliked the idea of a full-time farming household as farming as an occupation held no prestige. Agriculture had been looked down upon in socialist times when the state promoted industrialisation (Žimbrek 2000: 4; see chapter 3) and this view still prevailed in postsocialist times.

The local villagers also responded to Zoran's ambitions with reserve. Unlike most of the local men, who were unemployed and passed the time playing cards and drinking beer or wine, Zoran had little time for such social activities. As a result, he was considered unsociable. Only when Zoran's efforts were successful and he became *the* agricultural entrepreneur in the village, did he gain any prestige. He was admired within the local community for his achievements and his determination to find a way out of the generally miserable economic situation. Changes in attitude towards Zoran also lay in the fact that he had become a potential employer.

Comparing the social embeddedness of the agricultural activities of the four farmers, including values and family and gender roles, it can be said that Zoran had to cope with the greatest difficulties, as he had to rebel against the authority of his father as well as against the historically rooted values in the community. At the same time, he had the greatest chance of

increasing his social status in his family and in the local community once his actions proved successful. The loan he received from the EU, together with his hard work, eventually accorded him this high social status.

Faced with difficulties in securing credit and selling their products, the settlers Mladen and Marinko, and the local Croat Ante, expressed an interest in joining an agricultural cooperative which would reduce their financial risks and open up new economic opportunities. All three expressed a willingness to cooperate with Serbs. Zoran, on the other hand, had no interest in joining such a cooperative after receiving the agricultural loan from the EU. This loan enabled him to buy all the machinery he needed to start commercial farming, and so he saw no need to share machines, and preferred to work independently, hiring people for specific services as necessary. The EU loan had therefore effectively inhibited collaboration by favouring one farmer at the expense of good social relations with the others.

The following section considers the opportunities and challenges of the Orlić-Markovac cooperative, which played an important role during the socialist period, and of a newly founded agricultural association. It takes a more detailed look at the views of villagers towards the two agricultural associations in the postwar period. As well as differentiating the views of Serbs, local Croats and settlers, this section also considers the way in which individuals are involved in agricultural activities, whether on a subsistence basis or commercially oriented.

6.4 Agricultural associations

6.4.1 The disputed appropriation of the agricultural cooperative

In the aftermath of *Oluja*, many former socially owned factories and firms suffered looting and devastation. At about the same time, restructuring efforts began and some enterprises were privatised. The official motivation was to revitalise them under new market conditions. However, in practical terms, privatisation often led to the further exploitation of the factories by people in positions of power, mostly high-ranking HDZ members, and accelerated the decline of the regional economy (Weckbecker and Hoffmeister 1997: 178). The Orlić-Markovac agricultural cooperative in the municipality of Biskupija was no exception. After the flight of the Serbian population in 1995, the cooperative was looted, and then taken over by four Croats who had not been cooperative members. The take-over of the Orlić-Markovac cooperative occurred against a background of postsocialist privatisation and transformation in a postwar environment in which Croats dominated the political and economic scene. Only one of the new cooperative's managers was a local Croat from Knin; the rest were not

permanent residents of Knin region. Furthermore, only the local Croat had qualifications relevant to their new positions (he was an agronomist). Nevertheless, the take-over in early 1996 had caused little immediate controversy. The group simply announced in a Croatian newspaper that it wished to re-establish the cooperative, and asked any pre-war members to respond and voice any objections. The vast majority of the approximately 200 pre-war employees and the 470 members of the socialist cooperative were Serbs who had fled the country in 1995. They therefore had little access to Croatian newspapers and most of them remained ignorant of these developments, or were too intimidated to put forward objections. As a result, no-one responded to the 'public' announcement. The subsequent legal transfer of management rights to the group of Croats included management of a considerable number of buildings and land holdings. Among these was the 50-hectare area of former socially owned land in the *Kosovo polje* that belonged to the cooperative. A further consequence of the take-over was that all members of the cooperative under its previous management lost their membership status.

Agricultural operations between 1996 and 2000 failed to make a profit. Only part of the cooperative's land was used for the production of hay and grapes. Most significantly, collaboration between the cooperative and the villagers was poor. In the 1996–2000 period, an increasing number of Serbs had returned to Biskupija municipality and they soon made up the largest population group. This lack of cooperation between villagers and the new management was largely a result of the war that had split parties along ethnic or national lines. But it was not only the former (Serbian) members who were reluctant or even hostile towards the cooperative's new management; the commercially oriented farmers – Croats and Serbs alike – also rejected the new leadership.

The reasons for the hostility of villagers towards the cooperative's new management were manifold. As mentioned previously in this chapter, some commercially active farmers had received, or hoped to receive, a share of the cooperative's land. This led to a number of disputes with the cooperative's management. The Croatian applicants for land received support from the Croatian municipal council of Knin and the nearby municipal council of Biskupija (in which most of the land and some of the buildings belonging to the cooperative were situated). It was thanks to a council decision that a 20-hectare parcel of the cooperative's land was finally granted to the two Croatian war veterans.[168] However, this transaction

[168] There were even grounds for speculation that the municipalities had an interest in dissolving the cooperative. As a result, they would have been responsible for

caused open conflict between the Croatian municipal council and the new Croatian cooperative leadership, and the latter took legal action against the municipality of Knin. Croatian solidarity, which had until recently united Croats against the so-called Serbian aggressor, appeared to have lost its significance. The only villagers who made use of the cooperative's services, albeit to a limited extent, were subsistence Croatian settlers who had no machines of their own and no access to larger areas of land and so purchased hay from the cooperative to feed their animals.

Those locals who had been members of the socialist cooperative also criticised the new membership practices. Following the new management take-over, former members had to pay an 'introductory contribution' of about €250 in order to rejoin the cooperative.[169] It became apparent that the new managers, in their quest to appropriate all decision-making powers, sought to exclude former or new members from any role in running the cooperative, irrespective of their nationality. Villagers further speculated that the new management had little interest in agriculture and instead intended to use the cooperative's property as collateral for other private business-related negotiations.[170] Therefore, villagers did not react positively towards the cooperative and perceived the new management as competitors for land, labour, machinery and other resources.

Another criticism lay in the treatment of the few so-called cooperative 'employees'. Unlike the former socialist management, the new managers viewed the cooperative as a profit-driven operation, which resulted in what many regarded as the exploitation of employees. In pre-war times, cooperative workers received a regular income, had fixed working hours and holiday entitlement, and enjoyed additional benefits. Under the new postwar management, they were neither permanently employed nor was their work registered. The only Serb working for the cooperative was responsible for the vineyards. In fact, he worked the land on the basis of a lease contract constructed on somewhat feudal terms. The Serb farmed the vineyards independently and had to finance all investments personally. Instead of receiving cash for his work, as was the case in pre-war times, he had the right to 50% of the harvest, while the other half belonged to the cooperative. This arrangement was not advantageous, as the Serb carried the entire risk of

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administering the cooperative's buildings and land within the municipalities' jurisdiction.

[169] They were treated as potential new members, irrespective of the fact that they had made a financial contribution when they joined the cooperative in socialist times. This led many to refuse to pay a second contribution.

[170] This impression gained weight in 2000 when the cooperative director spent a period in prison for alleged involvement in illegal financial transactions.

the outcome of the harvest, and his earnings were minimal in relation to the workload and investments.

Local Serbs who had been members of the cooperative in socialist times initiated a new phase of resistance to the cooperative's management in 2000 by forming a group of 'activists'. Their goal was to regain control over the cooperative and to re-establish the operation according to socialist practices.[171] The group was made up of representatives of the approximately 50 former cooperative members who had returned to the region by 2000, all of them Serbs, and most of them elderly. Among them were five engineers and the manager of the former, socialist cooperative, who was spokesman for the group. They claimed that under socialism, the cooperative had been very successful in the production of high-quality *pršut*, wine and trout. These products had been sold to local restaurants and shops in the Knin region, as well as in the larger towns across Yugoslavia. Furthermore, the cooperative had supported private sector agriculture by offering family-run farms such advantages as the loan of agricultural machines, marketing opportunities, and guarantees for the sale of produce (see chapter 3). Based on the claimed successes of the cooperative in the socialist period, the activists planned to re-open a cooperative that would support this type of 'regionally traditional' production and farming. They were convinced that in the long run, at least 10 people could be permanently employed by the cooperative to manage the agricultural activities and develop marketing strategies and trade links, which would be of benefit to the wider rural community.

The activists received strong support for their plans from many Serbian villagers. They saw the proposed reopening of the cooperative as an incentive for their younger relatives to return. In pre-war times, more than 200 villagers had been employed by the cooperative, and now the villagers' greatest hope was for it to recreate permanent positions of employment with a regular salary. Although most of the rural population may have been sceptical about the entrepreneurial nature of family farming and were not willing to start commercial farming themselves, this did not alter the common conviction that the cooperative could create more favourable

[171] In the socialist period, Serbian villagers were split in opinion as to the effectiveness and productivity of the cooperative. These opinions shaped attitudes in the postsocialist, postwar period. Reliable information about the cooperative was not readily available, as cooperative documents were difficult to access. The activists saw the cooperative as having made a key contribution to the development of the village in the socialist period, while others were more critical regarding its agricultural productivity (see chapter 3).

conditions for private sector farmers.[172] The few commercially oriented farmers, Croats as well as Serbs, were rather critical of these aims for the cooperative, arguing that a socialist cooperative model would not be viable under market conditions.

The campaign to re-establish the cooperative faced other difficulties beside the divergent ideas and expectations of the population. Here, the national or ethnic question once again played an important role. In order to reclaim management rights over the cooperative, the activists argued that the cooperative had been illegally taken over by its new Croatian managers, who had taken advantage of the postwar situation. Furthermore, based on experiences of nationally motivated discrimination in the postwar period, the Serbian activists claimed they were fighting for 'national rights', and that the 'new' cooperative would secure the return of younger Serbs to the area by supporting economic revitalisation. This strategy had the backing of the Serbian Democratic Forum, a civil society association, as well as locally active international organisations that assisted in the re-establishment of pre-war cooperatives to support the sustainable return of Serbs. However, the plan proved unsuccessful in winning over the power-holders in the municipalities of Knin and Biskupija. The municipality representatives, most of them Croats, were still opposed to the idea of handing over management rights to a 'Serbian' organisation. The question of legal management rights in the case of the cooperative was still unresolved in 2001 and was a serious impediment to any revitalisation of the cooperative. While the new management team held on to its control of the cooperative, it remained relatively inactive. The inability to create a 'commons' on which economic progress could be built affected both Serbian and Croatian villagers alike.

6.4.2 Teaming up with an agricultural association

In 1999, the American international organisation FLAG (Firm Level Assistance Group) arrived in Knin with the aim of promoting entrepreneurship and contributing to the region's economic revitalisation. After conducting an assessment of the economic landscape, it decided to focus on supporting agricultural projects despite the relatively unfavourable conditions. FLAG recognised that the area was suitable for sheep and cattle breeding, and planned to support the reopening of a milk-processing plant near Šibenik, a town on the Croatian coast about 60 kilometres from Knin. It also considered organising the collection of milk from individual farmers along transport routes. However, the organisation soon realised that few

[172] This was not an ethnic phenomenon but could be found in other parts of Croatia as well. Compare, for the Zagreb area, Kovačić, Juračak and Žutinić 2000: 6.

households owned more than one dairy cow. This was due not only to the unreliability of milk sales but also to a lack of fodder, as the majority of farmers neither owned nor used machines for producing hay.

The staff members at FLAG were also quick to recognise the local population's rejection of the agricultural cooperative on account of its failure to contribute positively to the development of agriculture in the region. Therefore, they planned to set up a new agricultural association which would encourage farmers to cooperate by sharing machinery and selling their products. In order to address the lack of fodder for dairy cows, sheep and cattle, FLAG intended to buy a modern hay baler to produce high-quality hay,[173] as well as some additional machines which association members could take turns to use (FLAG Croatia 2000). Members without the necessary tractor to use the hay baler would hire a tractor from another member. All members would be required to pay a small yearly contribution for replacement purchases. FLAG's proposal was a cooperation project with a clearly developed market-oriented production chain. It also had the potential to integrate farmers working at a lower level of production. In order to avoid discrimination against any one group, particularly the exclusion of Croatian settlers, the association was to include local Croats, Croatian settlers and local Serbs, thus promoting inter-ethnic cooperation, community building and the rebuilding of trust.

FLAG advertised plans for the new agricultural association via Croatian Radio Knin (*Hrvastki Radio Knin*), regional newspapers and local agricultural advisors. More than 80 people attended the first two meetings. Most participants were local Croats, but some Croatian settlers and a few Serbs were also present. The small number of Serbs possibly reflected the national bias of Knin's one local media institution. According to Wallace (2003), Croatian Radio Knin planted an 'aural flag' that symbolically marked its ethno-national presence in the territory, and the station had few Serbs among its listeners.[174]

However, with time, it became evident that national group membership was not the only obstacle to the association's establishment, but rather the differences in the practices, notions and values attached to agricultural activity, which have been discussed in the sections above. It also became clear that the expectations of potential members were very different

[173] The hay baler would roll the hay into plastic-wrapped bales – a complete novelty in the region.

[174] Serbs in the Knin region tended to listen to Radio Free Europe, which was broadcast from Prague. Furthermore, most Serbs (but also many Croats) in the region of Knin lacked the money to buy newspapers.

to those of the association.[175] Most of the farmers who showed an interest in the association worked at a subsistence level only, as was symptomatic of the agricultural situation in the postwar region of Knin. They focused on small-scale, non-specialised, 'traditional' agricultural activities such as sheep breeding, wine production, and the cultivation of maize and potatoes, and were rather reluctant to modernise their methods of agricultural production. Most had little interest in an elaborate method of hay production.[176] They did not own enough cows, sheep or indeed land to make the use of the hay machine economic. In fact, it appears that FLAG did not adequately consider the implications of such small land-holdings – the machine proved to be too large to be employed economically on such small plots. Nevertheless, the farmers hoped to profit in one way or another by joining the association – for example, through the joint purchase of fodder and fertilisers, easier access to the market, and the possibility of receiving a loan. The few commercial farmers who considered membership, including the two war veterans as well as the local Croat Ante, also had little interest in the hay-baling machine since their main focus was primarily vegetables and they owned little, if any, livestock.

Under pressure to implement the project within the proposed timeframe, FLAG pushed on with launching the association. The hay baler was stored at a former collective sheep farm, about 20 kilometres from Knin town, occupied by a war veteran who had moved to the region with the intention of farming. In the association's first year, the hay baler was used by only three of the 80 farmers. Besides the limited demand discussed above, some members complained of lack of access to the machine. It was claimed that certain settlers active in vegetable production had become very influential in the association and had restricted the use of the machine. Given that the machine had cost over €25,000 but was hardly ever used, the project was deemed a failure despite having had a clear business plan. When FLAG subsequently moved out of the region, it was unclear what would become of the machine.

[175] For an analysis of the difficulties of development aid projects and particularly the failure of international practitioners to rely on facts in order to be informed about local knowledge, see Rottenburg 2002.

[176] Compare the motives of farmers in joining associations as described by Kovačić, Juračak and Žutinić (2000: 6).



Plate 18. Meeting of the agricultural association in Knin (spring 2001).

The agricultural association was not dissolved, however. Croat members of the board who were active in vegetable production applied to an incoming international organisation for support. They received a grant for the financing of greenhouses, from which Ante, Marinko and another settler family benefited. The loan enabled them to extend their vegetable production. However, as only a few members had profited from such international assistance, arguments ensued within the association. There was a clear gap between the interests of the subsistence-oriented farmers and those producing vegetables for the market. Further competition arose among those members active in commercial farming, as not all of them had benefited from the loan for the greenhouses. When, in a later meeting, a settler couple on the board proposed that the association be transformed into an agricultural cooperative, the divergent interests of members only led to more disagreement over the association's management and goals. Despite a pressing need to cooperate on several fronts in the agricultural sector, the farmers appeared to find little common ground for doing so in the postwar period.

6.5 Conclusions

In the postwar Knin region, involvement in farming was used as a strategy – if a problematic one – for coping with the severe economic crisis. To apply

Stephen Gudeman's terms (2001), the domains of the commons were fragmented and had to be reactivated, while the market had to be recreated under new, 'liberal' conditions. In general terms, the equilibrium between the commons and the market found itself shattered in the postwar period. This situation was aggravated by land ownership problems, as well as problems of access to land. However, while one might expect nationality to have been decisive in determining access to and use of land, this factor appears to have become increasingly irrelevant in the postwar period.

Despite the legacy of claims to land based on Croatian nationality, which generally gave Croats temporary use-rights to Serbian land (as was the case in the housing sector), the private property rights of Serbs to agricultural land were usually recognised. For Croatian settlers, the absence of enduring use-rights, as well as a lack of financial support, meant that using land for agriculture was very problematic. Their situation was not helped by the policies of international organisations active in the region. These tended to promote the agricultural activities of local people who owned land in the locality (Serbs and Croats). They therefore supported the rebuilding of community ties between local Serbs and local Croats, but at the same time they excluded settlers from this community and hindered their agricultural ambitions.

Despite the efforts of international organisations, the large majority of local people did not choose to engage in commercial agriculture. Most inhabitants, Croatian and Serb returnees alike, were convinced that family farming could not be successfully integrated into the market economy or serve as a main source of income. This attitude stemmed partly from difficult agricultural conditions caused by the prevalence of small, fragmented plots of land. It was also based on people's experiences of socialist and pre-socialist agriculture, and on the daunting realities of economic insecurity in postwar, postsocialist Croatia.

Most family farming was thus practised in a traditional fashion. This small-scale agricultural activity fulfilled several functions. It first of all served as an income supplement to wage labour and as a survival strategy in times of economic crisis. By reactivating forms of mutual help and reciprocity within the family, neighbourhood and local village community, it recreated networks of trust and social security, which sometimes transcended national group boundaries. Sending homemade agricultural products to relatives outside the region and abroad served to strengthen family networks, and reinforced feelings of belonging to one's home locality. These strategies were not market oriented, remaining exclusively on a subsistence level.

Despite difficult conditions for agriculture, and a general mistrust of agriculture as a well-respected means of obtaining regular income, a small

number of households from all groups endeavoured to develop market-oriented agriculture out of the need for a stable job. They faced much the same conditions, irrespective of their group, in terms of investment strategies, marketing and access to machinery. Ownership of and access to land were essential for the development of commercial farming but were difficult to obtain. Even war veterans who had the legal right to 10 hectares of state land if they wanted to start farming faced severe problems in securing ownership. The success of market-oriented production was more dependent on individual entrepreneurship and personal connections than on shared values within the (local and/or national) community. These farmers were keen to use links with local power-holders and international organisations to their advantage, and often crossed national group boundaries in doing so.

Within market-oriented agriculture, cooperation still proved difficult. The former socialist agricultural cooperative, which had been the foundation of several, largely Serbian village communities and their economic development in socialist times, was taken over by a small group of Croats. These exploited Croatian nationalist sentiment in their pursuit of private economic interests, but failed to successfully implement agricultural projects as they did not meet the needs of the local agricultural community. Among the critics of the cooperative's new management were the commercially oriented Croatian farmers and the Croatian municipal council. A group of Serbs, members of the pre-war cooperative, failed in their campaign to win the management rights, due in part to a re-emergence of ethnically motivated debate. Attempts at establishing a new form of agricultural association were equally hampered by the divergent interests of market-oriented and subsistence-oriented farmers.

In the postwar Knin region, the 'commons' on which agriculture was based were shattered by various conflict lines: while it was in some respects still nationality that divided Serbs and Croats and controlled access to and use of land, in other respects it was historically rooted local values that divided locals (Croats and Serbs) from newcomers and inhibited a market production. The emotional, social and national dimension of people's relation to the land influenced its economic use. In the next chapter, the focus switches to the national and social dimensions of land as 'homeland' and on the impact of 'homeland' on the establishment of communities in postwar Knin. As both property relations and social relations are very much determined by rituals and symbolical expressions, the chapter will explore the extent to which notions of home and 'homeland' are expressed in festivals, and how far these festivals create communities built along national lines or along lines of 'locals' versus 'settlers'.

Chapter 7
Religious Celebrations and the (Re)creation of Home and Community

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have shown that access to property – both houses and land – as well as its use, were closely dependent on social relations. In postwar Knin, these relations were strongly influenced by national identities, but were also locally defined and were based on relations between family, friends and neighbours. Houses and land also had symbolic meanings: they could represent a nationally or locally defined 'home' or homeland. In this way, they could be used to legitimise property and/or territorial claims, or symbolise the longing of different national groups to live peacefully together.

Until now I have not reflected at any length on the impact of religion on individual and national property claims. Although religion lost importance under socialism, it continued to shape familial and communal relations. Furthermore, from the end of the nineteenth century, religious affiliation had been the most important marker of nationality in the former Yugoslavia. Catholicism was seen as a necessary condition for being a Croat; Orthodoxy for belonging to the Serbian nation (see chapter 2). These categories did not change under socialism.[177] In the course of the late 1980s, and more particularly at the beginning of the 1990s when nationalism once again became a dominant political concept, the interlinkages between religion and national identity were heavily reinforced (see chapter 3). In Croatia, Serbian forces destroyed several hundred Catholic churches during the war, mainly because they symbolised a claim for status and territory by one national group. In Bosnia, more than a thousand mosques and many hundreds of Catholic and Orthodox churches were destroyed or damaged (Riedlmayer 2002). After the 1991–5 war, religious and national

[177] On the role of religion as a marker of national identity in socialist Yugoslavia, see Bringa (1995: 20–3).

celebrations, often in connection with the reopening of a reconstructed religious building, became central public events in Bosnia and Croatia, as well as in the region of Knin, both in terms of their numbers and popular appeal.[178] Depending on the festival in question, they attracted different population groups in a range of combinations.

In this chapter, I focus on festivals and rituals – mostly religious ones – and their meanings in the context of property and community in the Knin region. In order to draw out their specific relationship to property claims, I investigate how the recent war was commemorated in these festivals and the impact this had on the different population groups in Knin – the Croatian settlers, local Croats and local Serbs – in terms of the inter- and intra-group processes that were set in motion.

From an anthropological viewpoint, festivals and rituals are important media through which people experience community. They create a point of common identification for a group of people, even if the individuals in that group identify themselves on the basis of other social categories (Turner 1969; Cohen 1985: 50, 55; Kertzer 1991: 87). Cohen (1985: 50–1) states that in the case of communities whose members have been dispersed, rituals provide occasions when which the community is reconstituted: in times of crisis, the 'symbolical expression of community and its boundaries increases in importance'. Through rituals, feelings of 'home' are (re)created and negotiated, based either on local or national imaginations. As notions of home and 'homeland' can only be expressed symbolically, ritual and festivals provide an important means through which these sentiments can be constructed and legitimised. Linking this to the four layers of property relations proposed as an analytical concept by Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (2000), festivals and rituals can clearly be linked to the ideological layer of property relations. At the same time, people's participation in festivals and rituals shapes the social relations of those who take part, and can therefore influence property relations, too.

Based on these theoretical considerations I argue that in a nationalist political climate such as in postwar Knin, in which public representations and discourses relied heavily on national categories and symbols, such public celebrations and festivals served as an important means of justifying territorial claims, of promoting a sense of national community and of encouraging efforts to create a national homeland. In this way, rituals and

[178] Although I agree with Creed (2002) who states that in postsocialist times economic crisis was paralleled by a decline in ritual, I want to stress that this did not include religious and national celebrations. It would be interesting to investigate in how far public celebrations that offered an alternative to socialist ideology boomed in different postsocialist countries, as was the case in postwar Croatia.

festivals publicly endorsed the separation of the communities along national lines. As Hayden (2002: 160–1) argued in relation to the meaning of religious sites in postwar Bosnia, religious festivals represented symbols of the return of one (nationally defined) population group and its claims to political authority.

At the same time, however, I argue that festivals and rituals also took place in more private, intimate circles created partly by notions bound to the locality, the local community or the local homeland, which did not necessarily comply with national notions. When attempting to locate such alternative notions in popular postwar celebrations, it is important to consider that most of the festivals in the locality of Knin had a long pre-war history. In the Knin region, religious sites as well as religious festivals had certainly been used as national markers prior to the 1990s, and a certain degree of competition between the various religious groups in the locality had long existed (cf. Hayden 2002 for Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia in general). However, these festivals often had alternative meanings for the local population in that they served as platforms for community events and fairs (see chapters 2 and 3). At many of these festivals, people had celebrated with neighbours, relatives and friends irrespective of national and religious allegiances, simply because the 'national' aspect was not seen as important. In postwar times, some local people in the Knin region were able to construct an additional or alternative meaning to the national(-ist) character of festivals by recalling earlier experiences that crossed national borders and so revitalised joint celebrations.

Hayden (2002: 160–1), writing about postwar Bosnia, has argued that friendly contacts between members of different religious and/or national groups were based on their spatial proximity and on feelings of duty rather than intimacy. For this reason, structural differences between national groups remained strong. I argue that celebrating together was nevertheless important in creating common identity at a local, private or individual level and therefore important in building a local community rather than a national one. These festivals allowed people to shift from one level to the other. With the changing political climate, and the passing of the years after the war, local meanings sometimes even dominated national ones and in this way also influenced ideas concerning property rights.

A number of festivals, like the *Dan domovinske zahvalnosti* – the Day of Homeland Gratitude – were specifically introduced after the war and drew heavily on wartime memories. Those festival participants who had settled in Knin after the war lacked any common memory of pre-war, socialist, inter-ethnic communication and cooperation and so identified mainly with the broader national symbolism. It must be remembered too that not all the

locals shared the same memories of the pre-war festivals, and for some the national meaning had dominated even then. There were also those individuals who deliberately decided not to resume pre-war ties and habits because the war had severely ruptured their inter-ethnic relationships. It is important then to realise these religious festivals carried different meanings for different people and it must not be thought that the festivals necessarily formed a bridge between local and national concepts of community. Still, as Cohen (1985: 55) put it, 'people can participate within the "same" ritual yet find quite different meanings for it'.

My description of various festivals and rituals focuses on community-building processes as well as on implicit property claims relating either to inclusive or exclusive notions of a locally or nationally defined 'homeland'. I concentrate on festivals and events that took place in the Knin region in 2000–1. By comparing them with interpretations of festivities in earlier years, I aim to shed light on the dynamics of festivals and rituals in relation to inter-ethnic and intergroup processes. I will thus draw both on descriptions of festivities given in narrative interviews and on historical sources.

7.2 Croatian national and religious festivals

7.2.1 Dan domovinske zahvalnosti – The Day of Homeland Gratitude (5 August)

Dan domovinske zahvalnosti – The Day of Homeland Gratitude – was undoubtedly the festival imbued with the strongest Croatian national sentiments in the Knin region. It commemorated the successful Croatian military operation in 1995 and the reintegration of the Serbian-held territories into the Croatian state. After the military operation, the town of Knin was reincorporated into Croatia not only on a political level, but on a symbolical level as well. This was demonstrated by the raising of the Croatian flag over the castle of Knin by a Croatian army officer on 5 August 1995, the day on which the capital of the separatist Republic of Serbian Krajina was reconquered by the Croatian army (see chapter 4; Žanić 1996: 56). Subsequently, 5 August became a national holiday, the Day of Homeland Gratitude.

While Croatia was ruled by President Tuđman and his nationalist HDZ party (i.e. effectively until January 2000), the Day of Homeland Gratitude in Knin was celebrated with great public fervour. The celebrations started with a Catholic mass followed by a ceremony beneath the flag at the castle, attended by high-ranking national politicians. This ceremony

symbolised the victory of Croats in the 'homeland war' and the liberation of the 'homeland'. It also celebrated the unity of the Croatian nation, the state and the Catholic Church.

During the day, *janjetina* (lamb) and *odojak* (sucking pig) were roasted on huge spits all over town in preparation for the main celebration in the evening. Several thousand people came, mainly Croats living in Knin but also many from outside the Knin region. A stage decorated with the Croatian coat of arms and other national symbols was erected in the main square. In the evening, the local HDZ mayor, high-ranking HDZ politicians as well as army generals from outside Knin, delivered speeches in honour of the glorious victory of the Croatian army in 1995. This was followed by a folk festival that mixed traditional Croatian folk music with Croatian pop hits. The main square and all the cafés on the main street were crowded during the festivities. Visitors happily waved Croatian flags, while others carried free balloons emblazoned with HDZ slogans. Some people wore T-shirts printed either with the letters 'HDZ' – expressing their gratitude to the party for the victory over the Serbs – or with slogans and symbols proclaiming the region as Croatian. The festivities on the main square were broadcast live on the national TV channel HRT-1, allowing other Croats across the country to take part. The festivities were matched by a ceremony in the capital Zagreb, during which President Tuđman gave a speech and laid a wreath in honour of the 'homeland war'.

During the Day of Homeland Gratitude, the symbolic reintegration of Knin into Croatian territory was re-enacted over and over again, even years after the military victory of the Croatian army. The official Croatian national view of history declared that on that day Croats had happily 'liberated' (*oslobodili*) the territory from 'Serbian occupatory forces and Serbian aggression'. The associated discourse reiterated the historical rights of Croats to live in the region and govern the territory. Not surprisingly, no mention was made of the experiences of the Serbian population, for whom this day symbolised expulsion, dispersal, the loss of home and property and sometimes even the loss of close relatives and friends. The Serbs who had returned to their homes in the Knin region (chapter 4) could hardly have been confronted with a more one-sided and more divisive approach to recent history.

In 2000, however, this line was slightly modified, reflecting the changing power relations in Croatia and the diminishing role of war and nationalism in politics. After President Tuđman's death at the end of 1999 and the HDZ's fall from power at the national level early in 2000, the delegation that visited Knin on 5 August 2000, was not as high-ranking as in preceding years. In fact, because Tuđman's family was present at Knin

castle, the ceremony resembled an act of commemoration of his presidency rather than a demonstration of power in a new era. At the castle, the Croatian flag that was raised by Foreign Minister Goran Granić (the main founder of the party Demokratski Centar (DC), which was a splinter party of HDZ founded after Tudman's death) was considerably smaller than the old one, and no government member laid a wreath in honour of those who had given their lives for the 'liberation of the homeland' (*Vjesnik* 6 August 2000: 1). This was indicative of the diminishing role of the 'Croatian Homeland War' and inevitably also of the town of Knin as the imagined cradle of the Croats in present-day Croatia. In a novel gesture, Foreign Minister Granić later visited the Orthodox monastery of Krka near Knin, thus opening a door to reconciliation. Extremist Croats saw this as a denigration of the 'homeland war'.

Other Croats living in Knin criticised the way in which the 'liberation' of Croatian territory and nationhood was celebrated for other reasons. They argued that the Croatian state had neglected the growing social and economic problems of the region in the postwar years despite the important place that Knin occupied in the national consciousness of the Croatian people. It was commonly held among most Croats, especially those living in Zagreb, that Knin was one of the last places they would choose to live, and indeed one of the last places they would want to visit.

It was also striking that some Serbs, especially those in mixed marriages, participated in the evening concert along with their Croatian relatives or friends. Having decided to return to Knin after the war, they very much wanted to normalise their relations with local Croats. They tried to block out the national dimension of the concert and see it only as entertainment in the otherwise dull routine of everyday life (few other cultural events took place in Knin during the year). Most Serbs, however, just stayed at home and ignored it all. By retreating in this way, they avoided open conflict. However, according to Elwert (2001: 2546), people with divergent points of view only have the chance to cooperate when they can rely on institutions through which they can express their positions as a first step to finding a compromise. The way Croats and Serbs dealt with this situation therefore reduced their chances of reconciliation. For Serbs, every reference to their own suffering expressed in front of Croats provoked stories and accusations about the suffering of Croats from 'Serbian aggression'. In intimate conversations among Serbian compatriots, Serbs discussed their victimisation during and after the war and often blocked out the crimes committed by their own people, such as the expulsion of Croats from the region earlier in the war and the destruction or occupation of Croatian houses (see chapter 4).

In 2001, the Orthodox priest of Knin finally took the initiative to publicly recognise the Serbian victims of war. On 5 August, he began the Croatian Day of Homeland Gratitude by publicly blessing Serbian soldiers and civilians who had been killed or had gone missing during the war. He did not dare hold the memorial service in Knin but conducted it instead in the village of Biskupija where Serbs once more were in the majority. Thus, the Serbian commemoration took place in the rural periphery, while Croats occupied the centre (Knin). On the emotional day of 5 August 2001, Croatian and Serbian perspectives on the war were still divided and each group was still preoccupied with its own suffering. However, in his sermon the priest seemed to be aiming for reconciliation with the Croats. He reminded the Serbs that they had lost everything due to the mistrust and strife between the national groups, and encouraged them to seek peace and come to terms with each other (see also Parochismo Pismo 2001: 2, 6). In doing so, he eased tensions between both national groups over territorial claims. While the official one-sided presentation of history served to support claims for exclusive rights to the territory, the priest instead stressed inter-ethnic cooperation and the giving of space to both groups in the region. This was especially important for Serb aspirations, as it was clear that the Serbs could only re-establish themselves in Croatia if they were accepted by the Croatian population.

I now turn to another Croatian festival in the region of Knin, which shows in more detail how festivals constructed a one-sided view of history and supported conflicting territorial claims along national lines. This monolithic view made it difficult for multi-ethnic local communities to cope with publicly celebrated festivals and to find reconciliation with their neighbours with whom they had been at war.

7.2.2 Proslava Naše Gospe (Celebration of Our Mary)

After the reintegration of the Knin region into the Croatian state and with the return of local Croats and the arrival of Croatian newcomers, the Catholic Church began to renovate the church of Sveta Maria in the village of Biskupija. The church had been built in the 1930s next to the ruins of a medieval Catholic church built by the 'Croatian' King Zvonimir (chapter 2) and destroyed by Serbs during the 1990s war (chapter 3). In September 1995, the festival of *Naša Gospa*[179] was celebrated for the first time since the war by about 2,000 pilgrims. In contrast to the Day of Homeland Gratitude, this festival was not a postwar construction but traced its roots back to the

[179] The full name of the church festival is *Proslava Gospe Velikog Hrvatskog Krsnog Zavjeta.*

late 1930s and had been celebrated under socialism, too (chapter 3). Owing to the numbers of people taking part in 1995, the ceremony was held outside the small church rather than inside it. In his prayers, Bishop Srećko Badurina remembered the suffering of the Croats during the five-year 'Serbian occupation', as well as the devastation of the church by 'Četniks' in 1941 and again in 1992. The pilgrimage to Biskupija and the festival celebration were seen as living signs of Croatian heritage in the region of Knin and consequently legitimised the incorporation of the region into the Croatian state (chapters 2 and 3). The fact that the 1995 festival took place in a 'ghost village' – almost the entire population of Biskupija had fled during *Oluja* and looting was still going on in the area – was not mentioned by the bishop (Žanić 1996: 59). The *Naša Gospa* festival, which in socialist times had been a Croatian national event that attracted local Serbs as well, became linked exclusively to the official Croatian view of Knin's recent history.

This was reinforced when the image of *Naša Gospa* (Holy Mary) found in Biskupija was declared the guardian of the military diocese created in 1997, to which all Catholic soldiers and the police force would belong (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2000: 18–19; Perica 2001: 55). The intention behind the establishment of the military diocese was to give the Croatian army the opportunity to celebrate the Croatian 'liberation' of Knin in a religious way (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2000: 14). From 1999, the three-day festivities for *Naša Gospa* opened with a military procession from Knin to the Zvonimir memorial church in Biskupija. In 2000, the procession was led by soldiers bearing Croatian national symbols, such as the facsimile of a cross originating from Zvonimir's times, a replica of the medieval pediment showing the picture of the Holy Mary found in Biskupija, and the Croatian flag (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2000: 18–19). In the hands of the soldiers, these artefacts symbolised the concord between the Catholic Church, the Croatian state and the military, giving it a historical dimension.



Plate 19. The procession of members of the Croatian army on the occasion of the Catholic festival of *Naša Gospa* in the village of Biskupija symbolises the belonging and reintegration of the region into the Croatian state (autumn 2000).

The procession arrived in Biskupija at noon, and a church service followed. The military bishop of Croatia, Juraj Jezerinac, delivered the sermon. In addition to historical explanations of why the celebrations were held in this locality – for example, the fact that it represented the 'cathedral of the Croatian bishop built by the Croatian king Zvonimir in 1078' – the military bishop emphasised that it commemorated the Croatian army's defence of the Croatian state against Serbian aggression:

> Let us also pray for the deceased soldiers …of the Croatian army, and for all of those who gave their lives for the freedom of our homeland (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2000: 14).

Furthermore, the bishop did not neglect to mention some of the atrocities committed by Serbian extremists against Croats, and he cited the case of an old woman who 'during the beginning of the aggression against Croatia was nailed to her house by *Četnik*s and then the house was set on fire' (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2000: 14). This brutal case, which was taken as an example of the cruelty as well as the blasphemous nature of Serbian attacks during the war, collectively labelled Croats as victims forced to defend themselves and Serbs as aggressors. The bishop not only dwelt on Serbian aggression in his call for a new era, but he also took a stance against the socialist past in evoking Croatia's future path, saying:

> We are not indifferent as to whether the mental structure that dominated in Croatia for more than 50 years will remain or whether there will be a great turn towards God (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2000: 15).

Referring to the suppression of the Catholic faith during socialism, the bishop called for the revival of Catholicism and a spiritual return to God.

On the first day of the festival, the church service was primarily conducted by and for the Croatian military. Nevertheless, Croatian settlers in Biskupija joined the service. The only local Croats from Biskupija to participate in the mass were the two local municipal representatives who, because of their public position in the local community, were obliged to take part in the festivities. Sitting in the front row, behind them only soldiers in uniform, they looked quite alien, a perception reinforced by the fact that they were obviously not well acquainted with Catholic rituals and were uncertain when to stand up and sit down. Furthermore, during the festivities one of the Catholic priests openly accused the local mayor of 'helping Serbs to return'. It was well known that the two council representatives had tried to ease the tensions between local Croats, Croatian settlers and the majority of returning Serbs in order to bring greater unity to the municipality of Biskupija. Until 2000, this had definitely not been in accordance with the policies of the local Croatian Church, the local HDZ and the present military representatives who supported Croatian nationalist – and extreme nationalist – goals.

The second day of the *Naša Gospa* festivities was dedicated to the local Croatian youth, who were invited to take part in the pilgrimage to Biskupija. The third day, the Sunday, saw the culmination of the festival with a day of national pilgrimage (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2000: 12). Some 2,000 Croatian Catholic believers and numerous members of the clergy from Knin, Šibenik, Split, Zadar, Gospić and other towns in Croatia as well as from abroad, all descended on this predominantly Serbian village, which for the rest of the year lay quietly on the outer margins of the state (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2000: 13).[180]

As on the previous two days, the bishop of Šibenik, Ante Ivas, stressed the historical meaning of the locality for the Croatian nation as well as the role of the church in times of trouble and unbelief. Emphasising the importance of national unity, he made an appeal to the unity of the family and the Croatian people (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2000: 16, 17). He declared the locality of Knin to be Croatian national territory, addressed the Croatian settlers from Bosnia as part of the 'family' of the Croatian people and encouraged them not to lose faith in the settlement project.[181] For the Croatian settlers, this day was an acknowledgement of their efforts to settle in Knin, as well as confirmation of their membership of the Croatian nation. The fact that Croatian bishops highlighted the importance of Biskupija as a Croatian religious site restored the settlers' belief in their decision to settle in this region despite the economic hardships they had suffered.

As on the first day, however, the festival seemed to have little connection with the local village population, whether to the increasing number of Serbian returnees or to the few Croats who had returned after 1995. Some of the local Croats even stayed at home during the main celebration on Sunday, although they – as well as some local Serbs – had expressed pride over the size of the festival and the remarkable history of their home village when speaking about the festival in advance. A group of young local Croat men living close to the church used the occasion to try and earn some money by opening a café and offering grilled food to the pilgrims instead of joining the church mass themselves. To furnish the café, they borrowed chairs from their Serbian neighbours. On the evenings before the Sunday service, they sat together in the improvised café with their male, and a few female, Serbian friends. Expecting to make good money on Sunday, they invited their friends as well as others from Knin and the surrounding

[180] At the beginning of the 1990s, Gospić was an ethnically mixed town on the border of the Serb-occupied territory in Croatia. It gained a bad reputation for war atrocities against Serbs conducted by the Croatian army.

[181] Duijzings (2000: 60). also stressed the supportive role of the Croatian Catholic Church in the resettlement of Croats from regions outside the Croatian state.

villages for drinks. It was clear that they were proud to show such hospitality (*častiti*): in this region, as all over the former Yugoslavia, the ability to invite others for drinks raises their personal status or honour (*čast*) in the local community (Bringa 1995: 69). The situation was, however, not without potential for conflict. On social occasions, it was normal that men would speak about one of the exclusively male domains of common experience: their time in the army. To avoid talking about the recent war – for which Serbs and Croats could find no common language – they instead talked about their military service under socialism.

Tension also arose when some Croatian friends from the nearby village of Potkonje arrived. After being welcomed by the hosts, they socialised in a group at some distance from the local Serbs and did not talk to them. Being 'outsiders' in the community, Croats from Potkonje had little in common with the local Serbs and could interact with them only in national terms, i.e. with reference to the recent war. It was difficult for the local Croats, as hosts, to bridge this gap.

The unease local Croats felt during the festival was intensified by the fact that on the main festival day, Sunday, the majority of visitors to the church mass left the village directly afterwards and did not stop at the café as the local Croats had hoped. It even seemed that the visitors were wary about buying from the locals, as the region was known to be mainly inhabited by Serbs. In addition, they had no personal links to the village and without such emotional connections this site of national pilgrimage seemed to dissolve once the church ceremony was over. The festivities did not develop into an all-embracing, communal festival.

In essence, the Catholic festival in Biskupija was more of a national than a local event. The lead was taken by the Franciscan monastery in Knin, together with bishops from other regions, most importantly the bishop of the military diocese. In their sermons, the clergy symbolically reappropriated and reintegrated the region into Croatian state territory, with a special emphasis on the historical 'roots' of the Croatian nation and the role of the Croatian army as 'defenders' and 'liberators' from 'Serbian occupation' and 'Serbian aggression'. The festival empowered the Croatian settlers in the region. It was proof of their belonging to the Croatian nation, of living in a part of Croatia, and it legitimised their settling there. Conversely, they were strengthened in the notion that Serbs had lost their right to the territory due to the war. This festival was not as important to local Croats as it was to the settlers, since the former took for granted their right to live on their home

territory. But it caused tension by straining re-established (friendly) relations between locals and their Serbian neighbours.[182]

I now describe a third Croatian festival, the Celebration of *Sveti Ante*, which, by contrast, had always had a local rather than a national significance. Yet, after the war this festival was strategically given national significance in order to provide a psychological boost to Croats who were struggling to cope with the postwar economic crisis. It also helped to reaffirm their national identity amidst the economic disappointments.

7.2.3 Proslava Svetog Anta (Celebration of Saint Ante)

The celebration of *Sveti Ante*, the patron saint of the Catholic church of Knin, was traditionally an important Catholic festival in the region. As the protector of livestock as well as of people's health, Sveti Ante was traditionally not only revered by Croats, but also by local Serbs as well. The day of Sveti Ante was also celebrated with a yearly stock fair (Milićević 1967–8: 483). During the 1990s war, however, when Serbs occupied Knin and expelled Croats, the Catholic church of *Sveti Ante* was not spared and was destroyed by Serb militia (see chapter 3). After the war, the church was renovated and the annual festival was held once more. Like the festivals mentioned previously, the celebration of *Sveti Ante* became a Croatian event attended by Catholic bishops from other parts of Croatia, by politicians from the Croatian national parties, and by local Croats and Croatian settlers originating from Bosnia and other regions of Croatia. In fact, the number of Croats taking part in the festival was vastly more than in socialist and even pre-socialist times owing to the immigration of settlers.

[182] It should be emphasised once again that in this village there had been few acts of physical violence during the war. This facilitated the recreation of inter-ethnic community ties. In other areas where inter-ethnic violence had been stronger, the re-establishment of relations between former neighbours was far more difficult.



Plate 20. Procession through the town of Knin for the Catholic festival of *Sveti Ante* (summer 2000).

In 2000, the festival began with a church procession through the town of Knin, ending at the church of Sveti Ante in the town centre. A sculpture of Sveti Ante was carried by local Croats wearing the traditional costume of the region. As with the festival of *Naša Gospa*, the mass was held outside the church because of the large number of participants at the blessing. The underlying national themes of the church festival became obvious in the sermons. The bishops addressed the Croats of Knin and encouraged them to stay in the region and bear their load through the difficult times they were facing. Again, the clergy remembered the elated time of the 'liberation' of the Serb-held territory in 1995. They stressed the importance of the Croatian home and 'homeland' as well as the (Croatian) Catholic faith, which offered moral support in difficult times. One of the priests pressed this point home by saying:

> What do we hope for today? From whom do we ask for help? Where do we place our hopes? After we finally got Croatia, no-one who asks 'How are you?' gets the answer 'Good'. It is difficult now, life is difficult, we cannot go on and we do not know what will come next. It is as though insecurity has entered the honourable and fighting Croatian people. I remember how our sons went along these streets after the *Oluja* military operation, how proud they were, and

> not only through this town, but also Vukovar and Dubrovnik.[183] They were sure [they believed] they were doing something good, that they had liberated their homeland, that they had saved their *ognjište* [stove or fireplace in a house, also used as a synonym for home], and what has happened to us in only a few years? Why did we lose faith and hope? I know that it is difficult, that the misery is pressing, but I fear that many Croats are now losing their faith.

The priest was addressing the insecurity which many Croats in the Knin region, especially the Croatian settlers, felt in the postwar years when living conditions became increasingly difficult. In contrast to this, he recalled the time of *Oluja* when people had been courageous and enthusiastic about having regained their homes. Reminding the Croats in Knin of these days, he called upon them to stay faithful and believe in God and the Croatian nation. Nevertheless, for most of the local inhabitants of Knin, the 'Croatian national' significance of the festival was not uppermost in their minds. The Church's care for family and close friends was more important, and many people were eager to get close to the sculpture of Sveti Ante, to touch it and give money to the Church in order to receive protection for themselves and their loved ones. Although Serbs did not participate personally in the procession, they showed respect for the Catholic festival and avoided working in the fields or hanging out laundry on that day. Several Serbs gave money to their Croatian neighbours to donate to the shrine as they had done in socialist and pre-socialist times, so that they would also benefit from the power and protection of the saint. However, the Catholic priests and the city council (which was dominated by members of Croatian national parties) did not necessarily appreciate this Serbian respect for a Catholic holiday. As one Serbian politician made clear, they took care to exclude Serbs from the public celebrations as far as possible. When, after the 2001 local elections, a small number of Serbs became members of the city council, the traditional council dinner, which in earlier years had been held in honour of *Sveti Ante*, did not take place. The Serbian politician suspected that the dinner had been cancelled because of the possible attendance of Serbs, indicating their deliberate exclusion from the Catholic town festival. In fact, the new head of the Franciscan monastery in Knin, who took over in 2000, refused to receive Knin's Orthodox priest, let alone invite him to take part in the celebration. On the political level, Croats and also some Serbs tried to imbue the festival

[183] The Croatian towns of Vukovar and Dubrovnik were heavily shelled by the Belgrade-directed, pro-Serbian Yugoslav People's Army at the beginning of war. In Vukovar, especially, many people, predominantly Croats, died. In the Croatian mindset, both towns serve as a symbol of Serbian aggression against the Croatian nation.

of *Sveti Ante* with national meaning; on a personal level, however, the majority of people simply wished to be blessed with personal protection from the saint.

7.3 Serbian Orthodox religious festivals

Compared with the Catholic Church festivals in Knin, which boomed in the postwar period with strong support from the local city council, the reinstitution of regional Orthodox festivals developed much more slowly. This was despite the fact that the Croatian army had taken care to save Serbian churches from destruction when retaking control of the area (chapter 4). The slow revival of festivals was closely related to the political and social situation in the former war zone. As explained above, Serbs who remained or returned were predominantly elderly and tended to live in remote areas and small villages because the urban areas were occupied by Croatian settlers. Furthermore, until 2000 there was not a single Serb on the local city council and public expressions of Serbian culture or Orthodox religion were still seen as an insult to the Croatian nation. Although in legal terms Serbs had the right to cultural expression, it was difficult for them to implement religious education in schools and to broadcast on local radio (Wallace 2003). According to Knin's Orthodox priest, Nikola Skorić, Radio Knin denied him the opportunity to broadcast a 30-minute weekly religious education programme. The director of Radio Knin had made it clear to him that this was a Croatian radio channel, not a Serbian or Orthodox one.

Having looked at three Croatian festivals in the preceding section, I will now discuss three Serbian festivals and their different meanings for the population in the region of Knin.

7.3.1 Vidovdan (28 June)

The celebration of *Vidovdan*, the commemoration of the defeat of a Serb-led Christian army by the Ottomans in a battle that took place on *Kosovo polje* (the Kosovo field) in today's Kosovo on 28 June 1389, is connected to one of the most important Serbian national myths. Although the defeat of the Serb-led army marked the end of the medieval Serbian state, the Kosovo battle is widely seen as a symbol of Serbian heroism and of the Serbs' willingness to make sacrifices for the national good. According to legend, Serbian Prince Lazar, who was killed in the battle, was a martyr and a divinely appointed ruler. *Vidovdan* is also seen as a symbol of the resurrection of the Serbian state. Moreover, the religious aspect of the festival derives from the fact that for many Serbs, nationality and Orthodox belief cannot be separated. Hence the *Vidovdan* festival has strong Serbian

national connotations that are often interwoven with territorial claims (especially to the mainly Albanian inhabited province of Kosovo) (chapter 2). Under socialism, the *Vidovdan* celebration in the Knin region, which took place in the Orthodox church of Sv. Lazarica, had essentially been a cultural event celebrating Serbian heritage at which local folk groups performed in traditional costume. This changed in the late 1980s, when nationalism was revived as an open political concept with religion as one of its pillars. In 1989, the festival commemorated the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo battle and became a nationalist event visited by several thousand nationalist hard-liners from Serbia who put forward Serbian territorial claims.

In 2000, five years after the end of war, the festival held in the Orthodox church of Sv. Lazarica in Knin's *Kosovo polje* was rather low key. Local Croats as well as Serbs could still remember the major local celebration of *Vidovdan* in 1989, which had triggered Serbian nationalism in the region. For this reason, and fearing that there might be clashes with Croats, many Serbs did not join the festivities. The few who attended, despite the national(-ist) character of the festival, included Serbs from outside the region, and some from abroad, who took the opportunity to visit their former homes. While many of the emigrants tended to be very interested in their national culture and practised their religion more fervently than their compatriots at home (see chapter 3), it seemed that they were either unaware of the social and political situation in Knin or did not particularly care about the tense atmosphere. However, their presence at the festival had a considerable influence on local affairs.

The Serbian Orthodox Church was represented by the Dalmatian *vladika* (the Orthodox bishop) Fotije, who had only recently arrived from Serbia to the Croatian coastal town of Šibenik, as well as by a few monks from the nearby monastery of Krka. No Croats were present during the festivities. Before the church service started, Croatian police were positioned to guard the entrance of the church and prevent possible nationalist clashes between Croats and Serbs. Despite – or because of – the police protection, the atmosphere was strained.[184]

[184] In 2001, when several hundred people participated in the festival, the atmosphere was much more relaxed (Krneta 2002a: 191–9).



Plate 21. *Vidovdan* celebration in the Orthodox church of Sveta Lazarica in *Kosovo polje* near Knin (summer 2000).

As expected, the Orthodox clergy gave the festival a national dimension by referring to the Kosovo legend and linking it to the outcome of the recent war. The bishop related the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ to the fate of the Serbs during the 1990s war and its aftermath: the Serbs had suffered during the war, they had fled their homesteads, and now they would rise again (Krneta 2002: 199). After the sermon, the priests concentrated on the rituals of blessing the *slava* bread and the *slava* cake (*kolač*), lighting the *slava* candles and breaking the bread. The service ended with a procession around the church bearing an icon of St Lazar, and finally Holy Communion.

The blatantly one-sided presentation of the intricate fate of Serbs in war and of their national home and homeland in the Knin region was used to strengthen the resolve of Serb visitors return here and repossess their homes. But at the same time it alienated them from concepts of reconciliation and integration necessary for the construction of an inter-ethnic postwar community in the Knin region.

As with the Catholic festival of *Naša Gospa* in Biskupija, most of the visitors went home immediately after the church service although some traders had set up a bar where people could order soft drinks and various kinds of alcohol. But only a few guests stayed on for a drink. A stall also sold sweets and toys for children, but this was not much frequented either as there were few children present. Memories of the nationalist *Vidovdan*

celebration in 1989, as well as of the war in general, were too recent and the inter-ethnic atmosphere in Knin was still too tense for a Serbian national celebration to attract crowds of returnees and become a relaxed, social event.

I now turn to another important Orthodox festival, which, as well as having national significance, also had wider appeal on account of its opportunities for socialising and celebration. In the postwar years, this festival has helped to re-establish the Serbian community and strengthen its sense of belonging in the region of Knin. However, it has proved difficult to attract Croats to the festival, and has therefore not made a major contribution to reconciliation.

7.3.2 Slava Preobraženja (Feast of Transfiguration) at the Krka Monastery

The Feast of Transfiguration is held at the Orthodox monastery of Krka, about 15 kilometres from the town of Knin and takes place in August. The monastery is situated on the river Krka close to the provincial town of Kistanje and is the home of a large theological school. Reflecting the historical importance of the monastery of Krka for the Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia and beyond, the Feast of Transfiguration was traditionally the biggest Orthodox festival in the region of Knin and attracted clergy as well as believers from other regions in Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia (see chapter 3). Even under socialism, the festival had commenced with a church service on the eve of the Day of Transfiguration and the many pilgrims would have spent the night at the monastery. Another church service was celebrated the next morning, attended by even more believers. The celebration ended with lively community festivals in the monastery and in the centre of the nearest town of Kistanje (Krneta 2002a: 35), which even attracted Croats from the region.[185] However, like the *Vidovdan* celebration, in 1989 hundreds of political hard-liners from Serbia had been among the guests and had promoted national claims by stressing the historical roots of the Serbs in Dalmatia, fuelling national conflict between Croats and Serbs in the region.

After the Croatian military operation in 1995 and the expulsion of the Serbian population, the monastery of Krka lay abandoned and devastated. The Feast of Transfiguration was celebrated for the first time after the war in

[185] According to some Serbs from the region, Croats from the village of Promina near the monastery of Krka visited the festival in the socialist period, as had been customary in earlier times. In fact, '*promina*' means 'change' in Croatian and the Croats of Promina were believed to have once been Orthodox but to have changed their religion due to political pressure in Venetian times.

1998, but with few participants. This reflected the small number of Serbs who had remained or returned to their homes in the region of Kistanje and Knin at that time. By contrast, more than 1,000 Croats from Janjevo in Kosovo, the southern province of Serbia, had settled in Kistanje in 1997, which before the war had been predominantly Serbian. The Croat settlers occupied Serbian houses making it impossible for many Serbs to return. Those few Serbs who had returned to the region often had no transport or were afraid of taking part in the festival. Perhaps because of the cultural distance between native Serbs and Croatian settlers from Janjevo, but also because of the conflicts over housing, the atmosphere between the two groups in Kistanje was especially tense. The American embassy in Zagreb had tried to resolve the conflict by providing funds to build new houses for settlers in 1998. The idea was that Croats from Kosovo would move out of the property they occupied, enabling Serbs to return and repossess their homes. However, the new housing only strengthened the conflict between the two groups. While some settlers did not want to move into the new buildings (not least because they formed a rather bleak kind of 'ghetto'), others used the new housing but did not vacate Serbian property. Others left the houses they had occupied in a completely devastated state, so that a lot of money was needed to make them habitable again. Serbs reacted angrily to this situation.

In 1999, a larger number of Serbs attended the Transfiguration festival, reflecting a rise in the number of returnees and the importance of the festival. Among the visitors were prominent members of the Serbian National Council in Zagreb (*Srpsko Nacijonalno Vijeće*) (Lunić 1999). But relations with the Croatian settlers remained rather tense and forced the Orthodox clergy to centre the festivities at the monastery, which was somewhat remote, rather than in the town of Kistanje as had been the custom in pre-war times. It was feared that the Croatian settlers, who made up the majority of the population in postwar Kistanje, would feel provoked by the presence of celebrating Serbs. Local Croatian officials and Catholic priests kept their distance, too. Although the Orthodox clergy had invited them to join the feast after the church service, they did not take up the invitation.

In 2000, after the political shift at the national level and apparent improvements in the situation of the Serbs, the festival attracted considerable attention. Up to a thousand visitors came for Transfiguration Day, and the festival was attended by prominent Orthodox church officials such as the Dabro-Bosnian *mitropolit* Nikolaj and the Dalmatian *vladika* Fotije, as well as by leading Serbian politicians from Croatia, such as Milorad Pupovac and Vojislav Stanimirović. The majority of the visitors came from within the region, and were Serbian returnees or Serbs who had stayed on. But a

considerable number also arrived from Western countries or Serbia, where they had either gone as refugees or migrant workers, or both. They used the festival as an occasion to visit their places of origin, sometimes for the first time since the war. The festivities therefore had an atmosphere of community and family reunion, where people exchanged news about life in exile or about life in the Knin region, as well as shared memories of pre-war times. In these stories, localised notions of home and 'homeland' were constructed which stood alongside national ones. In this way, the religious gathering was linked to the re-establishment of the Serbian nation in Croatia as well as the local Serbian community.

Serbian politicians and Church authorities publicly stressed the long history of the Krka monastery, which was seen as proof of strong Serbian 'roots' in the region. This served to legitimise the return of Serbs to the region and their claims of 'belonging' there and thus of repossessing their homes and land. The speeches opened up a front against the claims of the Croatian settlers from Janjevo in Kistanje, who had taken over the town not only in numbers but also symbolically. In the main town square, for example, beside the damaged Orthodox church, they had painted a huge Croatian coat of arms, and not far from the Orthodox church Croatian settlers had started to build a Catholic church that would be larger than the Orthodox one (cf. Krneta 2002a: 39). The public celebration of the feast of Transfiguration at the Krka Monastery was therefore also a way of making a display of resistance against the dominance of Croatian settlers in the region.

This was not completely without success. In contrast to other Orthodox festivals in the region of Knin, the Serbs gained recognition of the Krka *slava* from the Croatian national authorities. The national media reported the festival and it became a political event for the Serbs in Croatia, who saw it as supporting their claims for improved status and empowerment. Following the church celebration, Orthodox clergy as well as representatives of Serbian political parties were interviewed by reporters from national TV and asked about the situation of the Serbian minority. Although the interviewees criticised the Croatian state for not working hard enough to enable the return and social integration of Serbs, they saw the peaceful and cheerful festival at the monastery as an indication that Serbs were returning to the region and to Croatia in general. They stressed that with the help of this festival Serbian culture was being re-established (Krneta 2002a: 31–40).

The willingness of the Serbian Orthodox Church to integrate into and acknowledge the Croatian state was evident in the prayers and sermons held during the church service on Transfiguration Day, which also took account of the Croatian experiences of war and displacement. *Mitropolit* Nikolaj, for example, asked the people to pray for all those who had returned home and

for all the victims of war, and appealed to the visitors to show sympathy and respect for the settlers who themselves had been through war, exile and misery. This open approach to the Croatian settlers and locals was quite different to the stance taken in the Catholic sermons with regard to Serbs described previously. However, it must be acknowledged that the openness of the Orthodox Church and the Serbian community towards Croats was not necessarily as proactive as it might appear. After defeat in the war, Serbs were forced to struggle for recognition as a national minority and part of that effort required them to show respect towards the Croatian majority.

Despite the attempts at bridge-building, hardly any Croats joined in the festivities. The few who came were mainly drawn by commercial opportunities: they wanted to sell *janjetina* or other goods.[186] The main exceptions were the few local Croats who had married local Serbs. Two of them even sang popular songs from pre-war times. The Serbs were glad of their presence and the news that local Croats had joined the celebration spread fast and found a positive echo in the Serbian community. For Serbs, the participation of Croats in the festivities was a sign of the integration of Serbs into the local Croatian community.

However, such cases remained exceptional despite the political attempts of Serbian politicians and Orthodox priests to embrace the Croatian view of the war and create a platform for reconciliation with local Croats and Croatian settlers. For most Croats, the festival was seen first and foremost as being of Serbian national significance, as Serbs from all over the country and abroad had joined the celebrations. For most Serbs, the festival also had great significance for the local community in so far as it gave Serb returnees from neighbouring villages the opportunity to meet and celebrate together, while also attracting Serbs who had left the region during the war or earlier and who wished to visit their homes and families again.

7.3.3 Sveti Duhovi (Pentecost) at the Orthodox church of Sveta Trojica in Biskupija

Although Orthodox festivals like *Vidovdan* and the Feast of Transfiguration were used as political platforms at the national level, the significance of the *slavas* held at Orthodox village churches was highest at the local level. This is illustrated by the annual celebration of *Sveti Duhovi* (Pentecost) at the

[186] In fact, the Croats from Janjevo in Kosovo had been traders in their home region and so had established various shops in Kistanje. However, these were not very successful as Kistanje was not on any major transport routes and few people passed through the town.

Orthodox church of Sveta Trojica in the village of Biskupija, 50 days after Easter.

During the socialist era, and indeed before it, this festival had begun with a church service in the morning and developed into a lively festivity for the whole community lasting late into the night. Smaller celebrations were often held in individual homes. Lambs and pigs were slaughtered and guests from other villages, both Serb and Croat, were expected to visit and were entertained for the whole day (Bezina 1998: 108). The pious presented gifts such as money, fruit and flowers to the church and lit candles for the deceased (Ješaić 1999: 108–9).

In 1999, local Serbian returnees in the village of Biskupija began celebrating the village *slava* again. However, in contrast to earlier times it was quite low key, not least because few young people had returned. A year later, in 2000, the *slava* was celebrated with greater public attention, although it was still very modest. The church authorities and a group of villagers nevertheless made considerable efforts to make the festival as impressive as possible. In the morning, the festival began with the loud ringing of church bells that kept to a special rhythm all day long. The church service was led by the Dalmatian *vladika* Fotije, monks from the Krka monastery and the Orthodox priest of Knin, indicating that all the Orthodox Church representatives of the Šibenik–Knin area were present.

As with the Feast of Transfiguration, the festivities were attended not only by villagers but also by relatives from other regions and sometimes even by those in exile in Serbia or the Serbian Republic in Bosnia. Many returned to their home region for the first time since fleeing in 1995, an experience that overwhelmed many of them because, after years of longing, they were finally able to 'come home' and participate in this joyful celebration again. By participating in the festival they were able to acknowledge at last that the war was over and to come to terms with the trauma of expulsion from the region. Some people asked the priest to bless their family graves after the church service. Commemorating and honouring ancestors had a special meaning during this festival as it re-established personal ties with the kin group, the land and the home community. This was especially important for those people who left for their new homes soon afterwards.

However, as in socialist times when church services had been mainly attended by elderly women, not everyone visited the church itself. The young men tended to remain outside the church building chatting and playing games. For them, the main celebrations got under way after the service. In the morning, a group of male villagers would start to prepare two lambs that would be grilled for a communal meal in front of the church. The

Serbian returnees brought homemade wine and collected money to pay for the food that would be given as hospitality to visitors. In this way, they attempted to revive customs from socialist and pre-socialist times when the celebration had developed into a lively event for the whole community. The communal table in front of the church and the opportunity to invite guests took on an almost sacred meaning for them. They felt entitled to be in their home village and were proud to be able to celebrate together with relatives and friends again.

For the villagers, these events and sentiments did not necessarily hold or embody any nationalist aspirations. However, the public gathering of Serbian men at an Orthodox village festival in a Croatian-controlled region only a few years after the war had national connotations in itself, especially in the eyes of the Croatian newcomers who had settled in the region. In this tense atmosphere, the Orthodox villagers were proud and relieved when some local Croats joined them in the afternoon. Together with their Croatian neighbours they sat in front of the Orthodox village church, drinking homemade wine and *bevanda*, eating homemade bread and *janjetina*, singing traditional Dalmatian songs and playing traditional Dalmatian games like *balote* and *šija*.



Plate 22. *Slava* at the Orthodox church of Sveta Trojica in the village of Biskupija (summer 2000).

One incident during the afternoon, however, shows very clearly how notions of home and belonging were continually shifting between local and national discourses. A Croatian settler came along to complain about the ringing of the church bells. He lived nearby and felt disturbed by the 'noisy and continuous racket', as he put it. A Serb who was present answered that a Serb would not complain about the noise of Catholic church bells during a celebration, although the Serbs would of course hear them too. When the settler replied that the bells of *his* church would not ring as aggressively, the Serb answered directly that he did not know what the settler meant, as both churches, the Orthodox as well as the Catholic, were *their* churches. This was *their* village; they were local here, while the settler was a newcomer who did not own any property in the locality. In his reply, the Serb thus made clear where the border ran in his mind: between settlers and locals, not between Catholics and Orthodox or Croats and Serbs. Local Croats present at this conversation did not intervene.

The incident demonstrates the way in which the festival helped to re-establish a local community that included local Serbs and Croats, yet did not necessarily seek to include Croatian settlers. Or, to put it more precisely, it shows that Serbs used notions of locality and of being native to the region to create a community from which they could exclude Croatian settlers. The settlers, on the other hand, noted that the festival was helping to recreate a Serbian national community in the locality of Biskupija, which they saw as a threat. The fact that local Croats took part in the festival did not change their view – indeed, they saw the mixing of local Croats with Serbs as even more ominous in that local Croats became untrustworthy too.

7.4 Additional aspects of Catholic and Orthodox ritual life

7.4.1 Regular church services

To fully understand the role of religious festivals in the lives of Croatian settlers, local Croats and Serbs, and the various meanings these festivals had for the creation of community and for property issues, I now take a closer look at the role of the church and religious practice in everyday life. What significance did religion have at a social as well as a symbolic level? In which way did it help to create communities along national or local lines, and in which way was it used as an exclusive national marker or a symbol for the relation to one's home and local community?

Many Croatian settlers attended church services regularly, at least once a week, while local Croats were less frequent churchgoers.[187] In fact, the number of Croatian settlers from Bosnia stretched the capacity of the local Catholic church of Sveti Ante in Knin to accommodate them. As an interim solution, an empty warehouse was used as an overflow church building, which saw considerable use at Sunday morning mass and festive church celebrations. The improvised use of the warehouse took on special meaning. It reflected the demand of the people of Knin for a large Catholic church that could hold several thousand believers and thus also symbolised a renewal of religious and national identity in the Knin region.[188]

The church building, the annual Catholic celebrations and especially the regular church services helped Croatian settlers develop a sense of being at home in Knin, and in their 'own' Croatian culture. Many had already developed a special relationship with the Church in socialist and pre-socialist times in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Unlike the Catholic and Orthodox locals in the region of Knin, many Croats in Bosnia used to attend church services regularly even under socialism. Then, the Catholic Church had been associated with opposition to socialism and was seen as an expression of national and cultural identity.

The construction of a settler community and a settler identity was also strengthened by the opportunity for people to socialise and get to know one another in and around the church. By regularly attending church, settlers met others who shared similar life experiences, and they developed the habit of chatting in front of the church either before or after mass. In some ways, these social meetings became institutionalised: relatives and friends who visited the Sunday church service began to invite each other home for a cup of coffee before lunch. Couples would exchange news and discuss political as well as community issues, like the new housing programmes and general perspectives in the area. Thus, for the new settlers, the church functioned as a hub of communication. Settlers often decorated their homes with religious symbols and objects, such as a Catholic calendar, crosses, rosaries, statues and paintings of the Virgin Mary and other saints. These objects were

[187] However, not all the Croatian settlers went to church regularly. Families who came from larger Croatian towns like Zagreb or Split were not particularly religious. In addition, men often did not go to mass but stayed at home, continuing a socialist tradition. On the other hand, some local Croats were also regular churchgoers.

[188] After the war, the construction of new churches boomed in all parts of the former Yugoslavia. Because they were seen as symbols of national identity, such building often increased national antagonisms. This was especially the case in Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where after the war Franciscans erected a Catholic church that towered above the town.

important markers of Croatian and Catholic identity and enabled the settlers to feel at home.

Local Croats had a somewhat different relationship with the Church. In some respects, they shared the same values as Croatian settlers in that religion had assumed a much more important role in their lives after the war than before and was seen as a marker of Croatian identity. Being a good Croat often went hand in hand with being a good Catholic. Nevertheless, many local Croats had not been churchgoers in socialist times and did not take up this habit after the war. In the contest for being the 'better' Croats, the locals even reacted disapprovingly to the settlers' regular church attendance and tried to differentiate themselves by emphasising differences. Some local Croats looked to their roots in the region of Knin and to what they perceived as their moral sincerity, while describing the settlers as strangers and morally insincere despite their frequent church visits. They also deliberately avoided taking part in the same church services as the Croatian settlers in the neighbourhood, as they felt marginalised by them. Croats from Biskupija said that they attended mass in Knin rather than in Biskupija whenever they had the opportunity because they would meet more of their 'own' people there. Others said that they even went to the neighbouring town of Drniš because the church services there were attended only by local Croats. Before the war, Drniš had been inhabited almost exclusively by Croats and so no settlers had moved in later.

As already noted, Serbs were even more unlikely to go to church regularly than local Croats. Although religion served as a marker of Serbian national identity, attendance at the Orthodox service did not play a great role in the everyday life of the Serbian community. Even after the war, it was most often only a few elderly women who made the effort to hear the liturgy.

In the following sections, I examine religious festivals such as Christmas and the Orthodox Patron Saint's Day (*krsna slava*), which were mainly celebrated in individual homes rather than at a national or community level. I also look at funerals as an example of life-cycle festivals. These kinds of festivals were predominantly celebrated among relatives, friends and neighbours and were less influenced by the messages of politicians and the clergy.

7.4.2 Christmas celebrations

While some Croatian settlers celebrated Christmas with their relatives in Bosnia and in this way maintained links with their home region, the majority of settlers celebrated in their new 'home' in Knin. Relatives and friends – mostly settlers also living in the Knin region – came to visit, as did relatives

from abroad. For many settlers, church mass on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day were the most important Christmas rituals.

Many local Croats did not attend church even at Christmas. Instead, they invited relatives and sometimes also friends and neighbours to their homes. On Christmas Eve (*badnji dan*), some roasted *odojak*, the traditional local Christmas dish. The roasting lasted for hours and *odojak* was served to the family and guests on Christmas Day (*božić*), while grilled trout and other fish dishes were served on Christmas Eve. In some places, these Christmas rituals and celebrations included people of Orthodox belief, as they had done in socialist times.

In Biskupija, I observed that a well-respected local Croat family invited their local Serbian friends to celebrate Catholic Christmas, which took place two weeks before the Orthodox Christmas. The friends arrived early to roast the *odojak* together and prepare trout and other fish specialities for the Christmas Eve dinner. Before eating together, the head of the family lit the Christmas candle and gave the Christmas blessing.[189] He asked everyone to cross themselves according to his or her religion – the Croats in the Catholic tradition and the Serbs according to Orthodox ritual. In doing so, he showed respect for the religious customs of his Serbian neighbours.

However, as I have explained above in other contexts, this example of a joint Christmas celebration between Croats and Serbs was the exception rather than the rule. Not all local Croats showed as much understanding of Orthodox customs. Others did not have Serbian relatives or neighbours and therefore did not even think to invite Serbs. On the other hand, not many Croats celebrated Christmas on a large scale. In Biskupija, however, where returning Serbs were in the majority, I observed that a local Croatian family who did not socialise with Serbs but roasted *odojak* exclusively for themselves was marginalised in the community.

In chapter 3, I described the similar Christmas traditions shared by local Serbs and Croats under socialism (cf. Milićević 1967–8: 496). However, in 2000–1 few Serbian households in Biskupija celebrated Christmas in the old way. Many of the elderly or single-headed households had neither the money to roast an *odojak* nor guests to invite, and many did not care to put up a Christmas tree (neither the traditional Orthodox oak tree, nor the fir tree that decorated Catholic homes). Nevertheless, a group of young Serbs decided to organise a Christmas party for young people not only from Biskupija, but from the whole Knin region. They collected the money to buy an *odojak* and some beer while others provided homemade wine, home-baked bread and salted anchovies (a typical Dalmatian fasting

[189] The candle looks exactly like the *slava* candle.

dish). A couple of friends with parents of mixed nationality made temporary repairs to the war-damaged *dom kulture*, the socialist 'house of culture', which was to be the party location since it was next to the Orthodox church. Other young men sought to give the party a 'traditional' Orthodox flair by felling an oak tree in the forest for burning *badnjaci* (yule logs). Burning *badnjaci* at home was not an exclusively Serbian Orthodox custom as it was also practised by local Croats. Burning *badjnaci* in public, however, is an Orthodox tradition mainly found in Serbia, parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro (Vučinić Nesković 2001). Vučinić Nesković describes how the collective burning of *badjnaci* serves as a symbol for home in an emotional and national sense. According to information given by local Serbs in 2000, this tradition had lapsed during the socialist period and perhaps even earlier. The first collective burning of *badnjaci* for Orthodox Christmas in Biskupija took place in 1989 and was linked to a growing awareness of Serbian national identity. After the war the new Serbian Orthodox priest, who came from Vukovar, attempted to teach the local Serbs how to practise the Orthodox religion 'properly' and introduced 'new' traditions.

In the evening, the church was unusually crowded with about 100 people attending. The party that began after the church service attracted about 150 Serbs, many of them from other villages or from the town of Knin. The atmosphere was relaxed and cheerful, and teenagers from a neighbouring village brought along an accordion and played folk music around the *badnjaci* fire. However, not many local Croats came to the party. One reason was that the Catholic Day of Epiphany was celebrated on the same day with a church mass in the evening. In addition, Croats may also have interpreted the public burning of *badnjaci* as a Serbian national symbol and read it as a territorial claim or as a sign that it was an exclusively Serbian cultural festival.

7.4.3 The Serbian Patron Saint's Day (krsna slava)

The Orthodox *krsna slava* was perhaps the most important festival among the Serbian population. In contrast to other annual festivals, the *krsna slava* was very closely linked to the home and the patriline since it was celebrated on the patron saint's day of the male side of the family. In socialist times, most Serbian families still celebrated the *krsna slava* with relatives, neighbours and friends, and plenty of food, in a joyful atmosphere (chapter 3). Many (but not all) families also welcomed into their homes the priest who visited and blessed the house.

In the postwar period, however, the *krsna slava* celebrations, if celebrated at all, were very muted. Those families living in poverty or people who had stayed on alone in their homes, often without a phone and without

relatives close by, often ignored the festival completely. But nearly every household still lit the *slava* candle, which was traditionally placed in a glass filled with grain and sometimes prettily decorated. The lighting of the candle was linked to the visit of the priest who, in 2000, blessed nearly every Serbian household. The priest was guided by a local Serb because he was not originally from the region and lived in a neighbouring village and therefore did not know which houses in Biskupija were inhabited by Serbs, local Croats or Croatian settlers.[190]



Plate 23. A priest blesses a Serbian house on an Orthodox *krsna slava* in a village near Knin (winter 2000).

After the male head of the household had lit the candle, the priest said a prayer for the house, the family and its (male) ancestry. The lighting of the *slava*-candle symbolised the renewal of the family's bonds to the ancestral home and the fertility of the land and the family. In some households, the candle was placed next to a flagon of homemade wine, a loaf of home-baked bread and a dish of meat – all additional symbols of fertility relating to the household. Where the family had a telephone, relatives would ring to wish

[190] I also observed that the priest expected money from each household, regardless of the fact that almost all had severe financial problems. The villagers complained about the priest for this reason and it might explain why some households did not welcome the priest.

sretna slava (a happy *slava*) and described their own *slava* festivities at home.

However, the festivities lacked their former liveliness and sense of social focus. The common meal for a large gathering traditionally formed the heart of the *krsna slava* (Rheubottom 1976; Prijić 1991: 258–64; Kaser 1993; see also chapters 2 and 3), but after the war in the 1990s few guests were invited. For example, Danjela, a young, unmarried woman who had returned to the village of Markovac with her family, told me that before the war up to 60 guests had taken part in the family *slava* on Jurjevdan on 6 May. Her father had grilled two lambs, one for the *slava* meal at noon and one for the evening. By contrast, in 2001, the family saw little reason to celebrate their *slava* at all as most of their close friends and relatives had dispersed during the war and not returned. Instead, they decided to hold a small-scale celebration with a handful of guests. The family bought pieces of *odojak* from the butcher instead of preparing and roasting their own *janjetina*.[191] But at the same time, they made a great effort to be hospitable to their guests. In addition to the tasty meat, Danjela, her mother and sister offered delicious cakes, soup, homemade *pršut*, as well a variety of typical Dalmatian salads and vegetables. Homemade bread and wine were served as well. The offering of such splendid food reinforced the honour of the house and family. The celebration of *slava* also re-established the links of the family to its house as well as to those who came as guests, and therefore recreated a sense of home and community.

Although this particular celebration was modest in scale, a number of larger *krsna slava*s were held in Biskupija and the neighbouring villages in the same year. They took place in the few households that had younger members or had a comfortable income, or both. In Biskupija, the family of 30-year-old Zoran held a notable *slava*. As we saw in chapter 6, Zoran had a job as a driver for a construction firm and the family earned extra income from agriculture. Zoran and his father invited their relatives, the firm's boss, a Croat, and friends working in international organisations in the region to celebrate. Again, the joint celebration with Zoran's close family as well as his Croatian boss and employer, who came with his wife, in his house transformed the relations among them into more intimate and friendly ones. For these relations, neither religious exclusivity nor national identity were paramount, but notions of locality and community. For Zoran's family, the house as a place in which to host a gathering of friends received new meaning, too.

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[191] *Odojak* was served cold and was mostly prepared the day before the festival, while *janjetina* was often (but not exclusively) served as a warm dish and therefore prepared on the same day. *Odojak* was also cheaper than *janjetina*.

Some of the unmarried men in Biskupija, like 40-year-old Jovica, who had returned with his parents,[192] and 25-year-old Drago, who had returned without his parents, invited local young people and other friends to their *slava*. On this occasion, young, single people who had their *slava* on the same day came along, rather than celebrating in their own homes. In the postwar atmosphere, when many households chose not to celebrate their *slava* according to full custom, young and unmarried people preferred to join others in a lively circle instead of staying at home with their elderly parents. Drinking, eating and joking, as well as singing popular Dalmatian songs, were at the centre of these festivities. Croatian relatives and friends visited, too, and wished *sretna ti slava* ('happy *slava* to you'). In summary, the *krsna slava* was celebrated more modestly than in socialist times because people lacked the resources to prepare food for a large number of guests and younger relatives could not always be present. Still, the *slava* festival was not abandoned completely, and people continued to acknowledge the religious component of the festival, re-establishing their bonds to the locality and the community. In some ways, the *slava* had even greater importance than before because celebrating it symbolised that the house was revitalised and filled with new life.

7.4.4 Funerals

Sadly, after the war, funerals were by far the most frequent life-cycle ceremony conducted by Serbs – and to a lesser extent by local Croats – in Biskupija. Because of the extremely low birth rate – in 2000, not a single Serbian baby was born in the village – and the high average age of the population, neither weddings nor baptisms were held and it seemed that one funeral followed the next.[193] While many of the deceased had reached old age, others had been only in their forties or fifties and had probably suffered post-traumatic stress disorder or other war-related illnesses.

As under socialism, local Serbs as well as local Croats considered it extremely important to be buried at home in the family grave (chapter 3). After the war, Serbian relatives in exile often expressed their wish to be buried at home, and most Serbian families did their best to fulfil this wish even if it incurred high transportation costs. Others ordered expensive

[192] Because of the disruption caused by war, no-one wondered about the fact that unmarried men in their forties socialised with the younger generation. In the half-emptied villages, the number of unmarried young people was very small and therefore generational barriers were much more relaxed.

[193] In contrast, the Croatian settlers celebrated many more weddings and baptisms than funerals (cf. chapter 4).

gravestones in a bid to create a symbolic link with the home and family despite living in poverty.[194]

As well as the gravestone, the funeral ritual was important too. Traditionally, both Serb and Croat neighbours came to pay their respects and were expected to take on particular tasks related to the burial. They would dig the grave and join the wake, carrying the coffin to the cemetery,[195] which could be at a distance of several kilometres. (When a person died at home, as was usually the case, the body remained in the house until the funeral.) Relatives would prepare homemade food for the guests and offer homemade *pršut* at the funeral meal. After forty days, Serbian families met to remember the deceased according to the Orthodox tradition and the priest would bless the grave.[196]

Local Croats had similar practices concerning the dead. For local Serbs as well as local Croats, the cemetery and individual family graves were important sources of local and family identity. Like the Serbs, Croats began to invest in new gravestones after the war and made improvements to the neglected Catholic cemetery. One local Croat even sensed a business opportunity and built large family tombs which he tried to sell to the villagers.

Serbs and Croats shared not only similar customs but also long inter-family relationships that extended back over a long period irrespective of nationality. As time passed after the end of the war, national conflicts were put to one side when a villager died. As long as that person had not been directly involved in war atrocities, he or she was mourned by the larger part of the local community. When, for example, the former Serbian head of the agricultural cooperative died, numerous local Croats attended his funeral. Local Croats held him in esteem because he had distinguished himself as a member of the socialist community council (*poglavarstvo*) before the war and had remained reliable, honest and moderate throughout. The fact that he had been a prominent member of the Serbian Democratic Forum (*Srpski Demokratski Forum*), a moderate Serbian political association in Croatia, and had advocated the rights of the Serbs in the region after the war did not change their view of him. Several Serbian national politicians, such as

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[194] Cutting gravestones in Biskupija was the only business that was highly profitable. One family enterprise employed its two teenage sons.

[195] Until 2001, there was no hearse available in Biskupija as it had been stolen after *Oluja*.

[196] In spring 2001, I was present at such a ceremony for a deceased person who had emigrated to the USA and had been buried there. This confirmed that links between families were strong despite emigration and war (chapter 3).

Milorad Pupovac, attended the funeral, standing side by side with local Croats.

In the village of Biskupija, relations between local Croats and local Serbs were especially good, and I observed that Croats came forward to organise funeral ceremonies when their Serbian neighbours needed help. Most striking for me was the funeral of Milka, an old blind woman who had shared a household with her elderly husband. When she died in early 2001, one of her two sons was visiting for the first time since having fled over five years earlier. He was quite helpless and confused after the unexpected death of his mother, and uncertain about how to proceed with the funeral arrangements as he had not been in the community since the forced migration of the majority of local Serbs. He found immediate support from two Croatian brothers with whom he had been friends for many years before the war. (The brothers' family was mentioned above in the context of the joint Christmas celebration.) The young men not only helped their Serbian friend to make the essential arrangements for the funeral and joined the wake – along with other neighbours and several distant relatives still living in the community – but they also offered to help his brother come from Serbia to attend the ceremony. The brother had not been home since the war and did not have the necessary Croatian papers to cross the border. The Croatian brothers proposed that they would travel by car to Banja Luka in the Serbian Republic of Bosnia, pick up the Serbian brother there and bring him across the border where they knew the border guards. However, despite this kind and selfless offer, the Serb felt unable to go, believing that he was not safe in Croatia and that he might compromise the safety of his two Croat friends. Still, the example shows that religious exclusivity played no part in this funeral and that bonds of friendship were far stronger than any ethnic or religious adherence. By conducting the funeral rites, the family's position in the local community and its bonds to the locality were re-established. For local Croats, who were in minority in the village, it became clear that involvement in funerals of neighbouring Serbs was an important way of raising their own standing in the local community.

In contrast to the local Croats, few settlers, if any, attended the funerals of local Serbs or of local Croats, and locals did not come to their funerals either.[197] In Biskupija, local Croats even argued that they should be

[197] Once I saw a woman settler attend the funeral of a Serbian neighbour. This was highly appreciated by some of the young Serbs. Moreover, people generally knew who had died in the community and were emotionally touched when they heard of a tragic death. In one case, for example, a young settler died of a heart attack after having swum in the lake. He had only recently married and his wife was three months pregnant. He had tried to obtain a house in the village and had been in

the only ones to be buried in the local Catholic cemetery belonging to the famous Sv. Marija church. They based this claim on their local roots (which differentiated them from settlers), irrespective of the fact that local Croats and Croatian settlers shared the same religion and nationality. After the first settler was buried there, local Croats demanded that the Croatian newcomers use the cemetery in Knin, which in their view was more suitable for settlers.[198] Croatian settlers were still regarded as the competitors of local Croats, and as Croatian settlers far outnumbered local Croats, the attempts to exclude settlers from the local graveyard must be seen as a bid to secure a superior position in the locality. After this argument over burials, settlers were buried in Knin and not in the graveyard at the Catholic church of Biskupija despite the fact that they were Catholic and the more regular churchgoers. Settlers themselves viewed this as an act of hostility as it served to prevent them developing roots in the locality. This also affected their relations to the houses they inhabited in Biskupija and the choices they subsequently made about where to live. Not surprisingly, many settlers preferred to find alternative accommodation in Knin rather than remain (in an occupied house) in the village.

However, not all settlers wanted to be buried in the Knin region. In most cases, Croatians from Bosnia wished to be buried 'at home', just like the local Serbs and Croats did, and so some settlers arranged for family members to be laid to rest in their home regions in Bosnia. When relatives in Bosnia died, like the elderly parents of young settler families, the family usually organised the funeral in Bosnia. The funeral thereby expressed a further dimension of 'home' and community, in this case links to a distant place in Bosnia which they had left behind many years ago.

7.5 Conclusions

Festivals and rituals – both Catholic and Orthodox, national and local – had traditionally shaped inter-ethnic relations in Knin. In a wider context, they also influenced the building of communities, as well as claims for a 'homeland' and for property.

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conflict with some of the local Serbs. However, the Serbs were shocked by his death and sympathised with the young widow.

[198] The Knin cemetery was not directly in the centre of town and there was no church attached to it, only a small chapel. Serbs and Croats shared the cemetery but used different parts of it. Many 'foreigners' had already been buried there, mainly German and Italian soldiers in World War II. After the 1990s war, the unidentified victims of the 1995 *Oluja* military operation had been laid to rest there too.

After the 1990s war, Catholic as well as Orthodox church festivals reflected national discourses more explicitly than in socialist times. During Catholic festivals, a number of leading Catholic priests and Croatian politicians recalled recent experiences of war, displacement and the suffering of the Croatian people and referred back to bygone national myths. In so doing they strengthened feelings of Croatian solidarity and belonging to the region. Through such narratives, some even reinforced Croatian national aspirations in the form of exclusive claims to territory. These festivals were especially important for Croats who were not native to the region. They helped settlers justify and legitimise their occupation of Serbian houses and, more generally, their endeavours to settle in the region.

For those Serbs who had fled the region in 1995 or had left even earlier and not yet returned, notions of a national 'homeland' reflected in Orthodox festivals were central to their wish to return and to their property claims. Nevertheless, such notions were not necessarily exclusive. During these festivals, Serbian politicians and local Orthodox priests expressed a desire for reconciliation and encouraged tolerance towards the other national groups, for example during the Feast of Transfiguration celebrated at the monastery of Krka in 2000. Official attempts at reconciliation were partly linked to the weak political position of the Serbs in Croatia, who after the war saw no alternative than to redefine their place in the Croatian state and society and accept that the 'home' and 'home region' of Serbs was also the 'home' and 'home region' of Croats.

Through religious festivals, whether Catholic or Orthodox, but especially those celebrated within the family or among friends, all three groups established a community of acquaintances and intimates in which they felt 'at home' and emotionally secure. These communities were less nationally defined and instead based on personal relatedness, shared values and personal esteem. Local Serbs and local Croats were able to negotiate alternative meanings to wider events. In the private sphere, local people revitalised personal relations with members of the other national group based on family, kinship and neighbourhood ties, enabling them to disregard or circumvent the national borders set by religious festivals and official propaganda. Some even felt comfortable enough to attend the festivities of the other religious group. By celebrating with intimates, they linked the meanings of the religious festivals to the home and local community based on common pre-war memories, joint experiences and local customs.

Religious festivals thus helped to establish partly opposing, partly overlapping communities and to strengthen perceptions of home and homeland: while on the one hand religious festivals supported the establishment of national exclusive groups and territorial claims, on the other

hand they supported local community building processes which divided locals from settlers and in which notions of home were based on feelings of being rooted in the locality. For the single families in the region of Knin the development of such feelings of being at home and belonging to a community very much influenced their choices of living in (and settling as well as returning to) the Knin region.

Chapter 8
Political Campaigning

8.1. Introduction

In May 2001, towards the end of my fieldwork, local elections were held and a change of government seemed possible in the Knin region. A year earlier, a government comprising several former opposition parties had replaced the nationalist HDZ government, which had ruled the country for almost a decade. After the death of former president Franjo Tuđman, the power of the HDZ in Croatia seemed to be very fragmented and in some disarray.[199] In the Knin region, in particular, (inter-)ethnic issues, which included the housing problems, were a challenge for all parties, and apportioning blame for the disastrous economic situation in the region aroused strong emotions throughout the election campaign. The outcome of the elections reconfirmed the power of the Croatian national and nationalist parties, despite the conflicts between local Croats and Croatian settlers and despite the strengthening contact between local Croats and Serbs in everyday life. At the same time, the elections revitalised the Serbian parties. Interestingly, parties and independent candidates who focused solely on inter-ethnic strategies to win over the electorate won few votes.

This chapter will analyse the election campaign in the municipalities of Knin and Biskupija in 2001 in order to provide a perspective on why the electorate chose to give a 'national vote' and what issues were at stake with regard to access to property. The actions of the politicians and their parties will therefore be analysed as embedded and positioned in a larger field of power (Bourdieu 1991). Following the approach of Bailey (1970), the chapter will focus on the normative as well as the pragmatic rules followed by political actors in their efforts to gain support from the population. On a normative level, politicians and their parties referred in their discourses to

[199] For example, the new government was having to counter the outrage of some nationalists who criticised its representatives as 'red bandits' and 'traitors' of the country for besmirching the memory of the 'homeland war'.

symbols of power based on specific and widely accepted values and convictions about the social world (cf. Kertzer 1991: 88–9), and tried to stir up emotions bound to the past. The political performances, involving the ritualisation of political discourse, can be seen as an important way of influencing the electorate and legitimising political power. On the pragmatic level, politicians tried to win votes by linking their programmes to the interests of the electoral groups they wanted to attract. Very important components for the mobilising of the electorate were therefore the personal backgrounds of the party leaders as well as their 'political capital' in the form of charisma and/or a capacity to dispense patronage (on local and national levels).

I argue that the connection between property rights (and, in the broader sense, civil rights) and nationality was powerfully placed at the centre of political arguments and ritualised in the election rallies – and in the foregoing campaign of the Catholic Church. This served to convince many voters about the importance of the national question. Croatian settlers, who formed the majority in the region, mainly trusted nationalist parties to defend their housing rights based on their experiences of previous years, while Serbs turned to Serb-national(ist) parties based on the fact that they lacked many civil rights in Croatia.

I begin with an examination of the party spectrum in the municipalities of Knin and Biskupija, both before and after the elections in 2001. An important element in the local elections was the 'charity' campaign in Knin by the local Catholic Church, which will be described in the next section. Although property claims were not at the centre of this campaign, it becomes clear that the Church addressed important economic and emotional aspects influencing people's decisions about whether to remain in or return to the area. The Church successfully employed a national approach to property relations, in which the spiritual notion of a national home and homeland received precedence over economic considerations.

I then focus on the programmes of the parties and the profiles and personal approaches of their leaders, and the reactions of the inhabitants in the Knin region. The issue of housing rights and the often controversial housing practices of the local politicians are seen to have had a certain influence on the electorate and proved to be of political and emotional importance.

In the final two sections I describe the staging and ritualisation of politics and explore and analyse the outcome of the voting. Here, it becomes obvious that property relations were still presented with national connotations. Those parties who could convince the electorate that their

political power reached beyond the local level tended to be the more successful.

8.2 The changing party spectrum and power sharing

After the Knin region was reconquered by the Croatian army, the municipality of Knin was dominated by the nationalist Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica – HDZ). At the local elections in 1997, the HDZ held a three-quarters majority and occupied 19 out of 25 seats. The opposition parties were made up of the Croatian Social Liberal Party (Hrvatska Socijalna Liberalna Stranka – HSLS), the Croatian Peasants Party (Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka – HSS) and the Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske – SDP), which was the successor to the Communist Party. Each of these parties held two seats.

Before the elections in 2001, the party spectrum in Knin had been widened considerably compared with the local elections of 1997. Various Croatian national parties, some with newly founded branches in Knin, tried to gain votes from the HDZ electorate by positioning themselves either further to the (extreme) right, or by occupying a more moderate position. On the extreme right was the Croatian Party of Rights (Hrvatska Stranka Prava – HSP), locally in a coalition with other Croatian nationalist parties. In opposition to the Croatian national-oriented parties, two Serbian national parties decided to support candidates in the elections. These were the nationalist Serbian People's Party (Srpska Narodna Stranka – SNS) and the partly left-oriented Independent Democratic Serbian Party (Samostalna Demokratska Srpska Stranka – SDSS). The Social Democratic Party (Socijalna Democratska Partija – SDP), the successor party of the former communists, the Croatian Peasants Party (Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka – HSS) as well as the Croatian National Party (Hvatska Narodna Stranka – HNS) presented a rather moderate Croatian national line for the Croatian electorate.[200] The SDP, HSS and HNS were part of the ruling coalition at the national level.[201] The new prime minister of Croatia, Ivica Račan, was a

[200] The Democratic Centre (Democratski Centar – DC) and the Croatian Social Liberal Party (Hrvatska Socijalna Liberalna Stranka – HSLS) occupied a similar political position in Knin as well. The Socialist Workers Party in Croatia (Socialistička Radnička Partija Hrvatske – SKE-SRP), which had leanings towards the socialist past, was marginal at the national level. However, these parties will not be described here, as they were marginal in the local Knin region.

[201] Together with the HSLS and the Istrian Democratic Council (Istarski Demokratski Savez – IDS).

member of the SDP, and President Tuđman's successor, Stipe Mesić, was a member of the HNS.

In addition to these parties in the local elections in Knin, several independent candidate lists were established. Their leaders tended to occupy prominent positions in the town of Knin and their political programmes were locally defined. The leader of the settlers' association founded his own election list (Nezavisna Gradska Lista Željko Komšić) to represent the interests of the settlers. A Serb from Knin, who had not returned permanently but mainly lived in Belgrade, attempted to represent the interests of Serbian refugees from Knin (Nezavisna Gradska Lista Božidar Kulišić) (see *Šibenski List* 5 May 2001: 12–14). The director of the communal water supply firm, a Croat from a well-known local family, also had a list (Nezavisna Gradska Lista Damir Vidović).

From 1997, the situation in the municipality of Biskupija was quite different from that in Knin as Biskupija was the only municipality in the Šibenik-Knin county dominated by the Croatian Peasants Party (HSS) in opposition to the HDZ. The HSS had nine councillors on the Biskupija council, while the HDZ had only four (they had had seven, but three of them – settlers from Bosnia – had moved from Biskupija and were not replaced).[202] The victory of the HSS over the HDZ was based on the fact that in 1997 many Serbs, who by now made up the majority in the rural municipality, had given their votes to HSS because Serbian parties had not yet been founded. In 1997, Croatian settlers had voted almost exclusively for HDZ, while local Croats had voted for HDZ or HSS. At the elections in 2001, however, it could be expected that the HSS would not be able to keep its majority because two Serbian parties (the SDSS and the SNS) as well as the SDP and the HSP had been established.

As I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, the national(ist) parties received most of the votes in the local elections in May 2001. The Serbian political factor was essentially new – but because the ethnic distribution of the population differed in Knin and Biskupija, the results in the two municipalities diverged. Of the 17 seats in the Knin city council, the HDZ won nine and so continued to hold the majority and, in this way, consolidated its power. The Serbian parties – SDSS and the SNS – each won three seats (a total of six). The Serbian parties were supported, of course, entirely by Serbs. The coalition of the HSP with other radical right parties was not very successful and received only one seat. The same applied to the list of the leader of the settlers' association. The moderate parties – SDP as well as the HSS and HNS – did not receive any seats at all. This was a

[202] OSCE Field Office, Knin Weekly Report 46, Annex 2, 13 November 2000, (Unpublished document).

disaster for the SDP, as it could not even retain the two seats it had received in 1997.[203]

In the neighbouring municipality of Biskupija, the electorate gave most of their votes to national(ist) parties too. However, as the Serbian population outnumbered the Croats, the Serbian parties received the absolute majority. The Serbian SDSS won the elections with nine seats out of 15, and the Serbian SNS received two seats. The parties with a purely Croatian electorate, HDZ and HSP, as well as the moderately oriented parties HSS and SDP received only one seat each.

8.3 The Catholic Church as a political player

The election campaign in Knin was prefigured by a welfare campaign initiated by the local branch of *Caritas*, a Catholic charity led by the abbot of the Franciscan monastery in Knin. It addressed the socioeconomic as well as national problems of the Knin region under the slogans 'fight hunger in Knin' and 'for staying' ('*opstanak*').

The 'fight against hunger' was aimed at helping Croats who were very poor. On another level, the charity discouraged the emigration of Croats to other regions of Croatia or abroad, which was seen as being forced on families as a result of the poor social and economic situation in Knin. The Catholic Church was worried about the demographic decline in Croatia and about the decline of ethnic Croats in the former war regions in particular. The Church therefore promoted a national(ist) policy supporting the settlement of Croats in these regions (explained in more detail below).

The image presented by *Caritas*, first published in Church magazines such as the weekly *Glas Koncila*, was that the Croats in Knin were battling against hunger and desperately needed help. No mention was made of the Serbs who made up nearly half of the population in the Knin region and whose economic situation was certainly no better than that of the Croatian settlers or local Croats (see chapter 6). The Franciscan head of *Caritas*, Petar Klarić, wrote an open letter in which he appealed to Croats across the country to donate money, food and toiletries to the 'hungry' in Knin. His plea (quoted in Glasnik Sv. Ante 2001: 14) went as follows:

> Save the hungry in Knin.
>
> As is widely known, Knin faces a humanitarian catastrophe with about 12,000 Croats living on the edge of poverty … These are our

[203] Most likely, the two seats were based on the votes of Serbs who, in 1997, did not have the option of voting for Serbian parties.

> respectable and honest Croatian families with many children ... Should we stand by and watch an exodus of our Croats in Knin to a European countries or overseas? Of course we don't want that! That is why we invite all Croats from our homeland and all expatriates, as well as all our friends and people of good will, and those who have the interest of Croatia and Knin at heart, to help at once with money, food and toiletries today, because tomorrow may already be too late.
>
> Yesterday we heard more sad news, 'Father, these are my parents. They are now planning to move to America.' Why, you ask? 'Because they cannot make a living here.' Do we want to get such news every day? This not only concerns us in Knin but all Croats in the homeland as well as elsewhere in the world. We know the meaning of the Croatian flag on the castle of Knin.
>
> Recently, one of the local inhabitants of Knin [*Kninjanin* – a local from Knin] said, 'Every morning when I wake up I look immediately at the castle and at the Croatian flag flying there. I implore God that it may never happen that one day I will wake to find the Croatian flag gone from its place, as then I would immediately move from Knin. As long as the Croatian flag remains on the castle of Knin, only hunger can drive me away.'
>
> If we do not help the hungry people in Knin now, our conscience will speak to us tomorrow. Let us awake, today.
>
> Jesus said, 'That what you do for one of my brothers, you do for me.' And I can say openly: if you have not fed your brother and sister, you have killed them'.

This emotional appeal to Croatian solidarity in the face of 'hungry Croats' living in one of the country's most symbolically loaded towns – among them many children – achieved the desired effect. Other Catholic institutions reacted to the *Caritas* appeal and expressed their solidarity with the Croatian settlers by praying for the allegedly poverty-stricken Croatian families and their many children in Knin, by collecting donations and visiting Knin to preach to the Catholic congregation.[204]

Knin thus became a symbol of Croatian unity and a measure of personal moral conduct, due in part to the many children among the Croatian

[204] As outlined in chapter 7, a certain percentage of families in Knin really did live in poverty. However, the statement that thousands of families fell into this category was sheer propaganda.

inhabitants, which was unique in Croatia. Knin town had the highest birth rate after the war and so deviated from the general demographic pattern in Croatia (a steadily falling birth rate, and a slowly rising death rate and a constant negative migration balance). The Catholic Church as well as the various conservative parties, which were deeply worried by the demographic decline in Croatia, had declared prevention of emigration and an increase in the birth rate to be their demographic goal. The immigration of Croatian settlers from Bosnia and other places such as Kosovo was seen as a way of countering the negative population trend, since the settlers had a relatively higher birth rate than the local Croats (and of course also local Serbs) (Duijzings 2000: 60). The local Catholic Franciscans in Knin also seemed to be interested in securing a strong base of believers and churchgoers in the local community so as to outnumber the practising believers of the local Orthodox church.[205]



Plate 24. Catholic church service in a former warehouse in Knin mainly visited by Croat settlers (spring 2000).

[205] An additional consideration here is that in Croatia the finances of the local churches were mainly based on the voluntary contributions of their members, and a large stock of practising members also secured the church (relatively) large donations (as even poor settlers would not dare to attend mass without making a donation).

On 11 March, the demonstration of solidarity by Catholic institutions reached its height when Catholic bishops and Franciscans from the Dalmatian towns of Split, Dubrovnik and Šibenik participated in the Sunday mass in Knin. They preached in front of about 1,000 Croats who had gathered in the provisional church building (a former warehouse, see chapter 7).

Like the local Franciscans, the Dalmatian bishops supported the Croatian settlers. In their sermons and speeches they addressed several points concerning the fate of the Croats in Knin. Interestingly, instead of appealing to the Catholic saints for protection and to grant the prayers of the populace, as was the practice in other Catholic services, they referred to the 'divine' rights of the Croats in Knin. In this interpretation, the settlement project in the territories formerly inhabited by Serbs represented the direct will of God. The bishops stressed that as representatives of the Catholic Church they would be willing to defend these rights 'before the national and international public, before the government as well as before businessmen, scientists and politicians' (see Glasnik Sv. Ante 2001: 20). The bishop of the Šibenik diocese, Ante Ivas, declared:

> God the Father gives His people land and a homeland in which they should live freely. So that they will live honourably on their land and in their homeland … You have the right to a worthy human life, here in Knin in Croatia. You dear and troubled families, dear children and dear young ones. Jesus Christ offers this to you, He who is the foundation of every human dignity and human right. You have the right to a human dwelling. You have the right to a piece of land, to your free homeland, to your nation, to your language, the right to express yourself and to vote … (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2001: 17–19).

According to the bishop, rights to housing, land, language, free expression and a free vote were granted by God. At the same time, he makes clear that in saying that God 'gives his people land', he is talking of Croats, not Serbs or Muslims. In his sermon, the ideology of the Catholic Church and Croatian nationalist ideologies merged into one; religion and nationalism were presented in union. The auxiliary bishop of the Split-Makarska diocese, Marin Barišić, addressed his sermon not only to the Croats in Knin, but also to politicians at the national level. The large number of HDZ politicians who attended the service were specially welcomed. Bishop Barišić said:

> I call on those responsible for the people [in Knin], for you Croatian people, not to forget you … But I believe that those responsible will not see you as a problem, as a nuisance, but they will see these families here in Knin as a gift. Families are the greatest gift in every society, in every healthy society. And every member is a gift ... And

> if God wills, this day [today] will be a new beginning, a new sign of hope, of optimism and encouragement to all of you who want to stay here, [a sign] that you can stay here (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2001: 21).

In stating this, the bishop was giving spiritual support to those Croats in Knin who felt abandoned and neglected by the state. Only ten days after this church service on 11 March, the local *Caritas* opened a soup kitchen in Knin with a festive ceremony. The establishment of the soup kitchen marked another peak of the *Caritas* campaign, and this time the organisation offered help in a very concrete way. The kitchen aimed to supply 150 meals a day for the 'hungry' (*gladne/gladnike*), as *Caritas* officials put it. The festive opening of the soup kitchen was attended by all those who had given spiritual, financial and/or logistical support: the Bishop of Šibenik and other high clergy, the president of the 'Club of Croatian Returnees from Abroad', which had contributed generous funds to the kitchen, as well as former high-ranking officers who had been active during the war like Janko Bobetko,[206] Ljubo Česić-Rojs[207] and Ante Gotovina,[208] most of whom were members of the HDZ, as well as other high ranking national(ist) politicians (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2001: 24, 25). The former leading war officers brought with them 120 tonnes of flour, sugar and oil to the value of €100,000, and paid about €10,000 into *Caritas*'s bank account in Knin. Another high-ranking officer brought €2,500 which had been collected by various associations for the dignity of the war ('*Društvo Domovinskog Ponosa i Časti*' and '*Stožer za Obranu Digniteta Domovinskog Rata*') (Vjesnik 22.3.2001). The representatives of Croats abroad also contributed generously to the kitchen.

> The strong presence of the HDZ politicians as well as the famous former army officers again showed the extremely close relationship between Church and state with their religious as well as moral imperative: to do 'God's work', to support the Croatian families in need and to strengthen Croatian unity by combining sacred and

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[206] Bobetko was appointed Chief of Staff of the Croatian army at the end of 1992. In August 2002, he was indicted for crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war in the 1993 *Medački džep* Croatian military operation by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY 2004). However, the Croatian government tried not to execute the warrant on the grounds of the 83-year old Bobetko's disabilities. He died in April 2003 (Rožić 2003: 569).

[207] A former officer of the Croatian army, Ljubo Česić-Rojs was a parliamentary representative for the HDZ during the Račan government.

[208] Gotovina was one of the commanders of the Croatian forces during the *Oluja* military operation as well as in the months thereafter. In July 2001, he was indicted for war crimes committed against Serbs during *Oluja* by the ICTY. However, he disappeared and was only arrested in December 2005 (ICTY 2005).

> secular forces. Officer Janko Bobetko, the highest ranking commander of the Croatian army during the war, referred to moral responsibility when speaking about his reasons for attending the opening of the soup kitchen in Knin: 'What are the officers doing here today? Knin is liberated, there is no battle. So what are we doing here? I have to answer openly that we are here for ourselves, for Croatian history and the Croatian truth … We came to Knin, this is the town that we liberated, the people for whom we acted as a guarantor that Croats would return, and today as well as in earlier times it is difficult for them, therefore we must be with them (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2001: 28, 29).

The sensational way in which the situation of Croatian families was presented by the Catholic Church, politicians and army officers received huge national and even international media coverage. Leading Croatian newspapers soon picked up on Knin as the town where returning Croats or newly settled Croats were now going hungry. In reaction, firms, schools, political organisations and individuals from all over the country as well as from abroad sent parcels and money to the people of Knin. The donations arrived day after day by the truckload. According to a report in the local Church newspaper (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2001: 14–16), some 2,555 families received 4,407 well-packed humanitarian parcels from early November 2000 through to 19 May 2001.[209] These parcels generally contained 3 litres of oil or margarine, 1 kg washing powder, 1 kg salt, 1 kg fruit, 2 litres of milk, 5 yogurts, 1 kg salami, 3 white cabbages, 3 savoy cabbages, 35 kg potatoes, 25 kg flour, 30 eggs and 2 kg sugar (Vijesnik, 19 March 2001). Furthermore, an unknown amount of money, but probably in excess of €100,000, was placed in *Caritas*'s bank account in Knin. *Caritas* expressed its gratitude in the local Church bulletin: 'We were very grateful to experience such great loving attention from our Croats in the homeland as well throughout the world' (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2001: 15).

The *Caritas* campaign increasingly became more politicised, with local and national politicians pledging their support to it and using it for their own political goals. As we have seen, the local HDZ representatives as well as the HDZ head of the county and his deputy were present at the opening of the soup kitchen. The HDZ representatives took the opportunity of presenting the poverty in Knin as a direct result of the political decisions made by the new national government in Croatia, which since the beginning

[209] 19 May 2001 was the day before the local elections. The fact that the local Church authorities counted the food parcels only up to that date and not beyond suggests that the donations were intended to be used as nationalist political propaganda.

of 2000, had been led by the Social Democratic Party (SDP). They highlighted the fact that the new government had cut the budget for Knin, which in their view had constrained the locally governing HDZ from taking action, and at the same time had failed to come up with alternative economic and social projects for the town. The local HDZ, on the other hand, was presented as an organisation that cared passionately about the fate of the people in Knin. The county deputy, a HDZ politician, declared, for example:

> The problems in Knin are really disastrous. Neither the town nor the county government can solve them by their own means alone. We tried to obtain help from the national government and we are [still] trying today. There was help, [but] was there a lot of help? Obviously there was not. Did it bear fruit? It did not bear fruit… (Glasnik Sv. Ante 2001: 31).

The local SDP representative, whose party stood in opposition to the locally ruling HDZ, was a self-confessed atheist and did not support the political involvement of the local Catholic Church and so had not been involved in the opening of the soup kitchen. This was in line with many other SDP politicians for whom religion was a private affair rather than a matter of state policy. In fact, the local SDP leader criticised the *Caritas* campaign as well as the politics of the HDZ. In a press conference held on 26 March, he argued that the problem facing Knin was not a shortage of food, but the weak economy and the failed housing policies. According to him, these problems were not new to the region, but had developed over several years since the summer of 1995 when the region was reintegrated into the Croatian state and the HDZ came to power in Knin. The SDP thus accused the local HDZ of being responsible for the economic crisis, since they had not done anything to combat it. Instead, he said, they had squandered the town's budget on their own well-being:

> The SDP in Knin is astonished that those who invented the farce about the hunger in Knin are the very same people who have been in a position to influence the working and living conditions in the Croatian Royal Town of Knin [*Hrvatski Kraljevski Grad Knin*], from *Oluja* until today (Gradski Odbor SDP Knin, 26 March 2001).

The national government, which had been led by Ivica Račan of the SDP for about a year, was also under considerable pressure to react to the image of 'hunger' in Knin. It held a meeting in Knin on 31 March 2001, with the aim of setting up an economic revitalisation programme for the 'regions of special state concern', i.e. the former war zones. One outcome was that the government promised to create jobs for up to 4,000 people in the Knin region.

However, despite the commitment of the ruling SDP at the national level, the Croatian population in Knin were not won over by the government's programme. The majority of Croats in Knin believed that this was simply a political move to appease them before the forthcoming elections, and that no action would follow on the heels of these promises. At about the same time, reactions to the image of 'hunger in Knin' and the charity campaign of the Catholic Church became increasingly ambivalent in Knin itself. Especially on the Croatian side, the campaign, including the soup kitchen, became a focus of antagonism and began to encourage divergent claims of identity and belonging and in a wider sense also claims to property. This provided a further reason for factionalism among the Croats.

Many of the Croatian settlers living in Knin were very positive about the fact that the Catholic Church had finally brought their miserable living conditions to public attention. Having felt neglected by the international organisations, which had mainly supported Serbs, and ignored by the government and 'the state' in general, they hoped that the charity campaign would help them to improve their situation. The solidarity shown by other Croats and Catholic institutions across Croatia encouraged many Croatian settlers to feel incorporated into the Croatian national community and cared for by the Catholic Church. The Croatian settlers once again saw the locality of Knin as Croatian territory to which Croats – locals and settlers – had a sacred claim. This gave them the support they needed to justify their settlement in Knin and their occupation of Serbian houses. This emotional and spiritual support was for many of them even more important than the material help offered by the Church. However, those who received the humanitarian parcels of food and toiletries also came to view the Catholic Church as the only actor that had managed to act positively and provide real assistance.

Among local Croats, there was a different view of the recent events, with some being openly critical of the actions of *Caritas* and rather ashamed that Knin had become known as the poorhouse of Croatia. A student from Knin who was studying in the coastal town of Zadar, about 70 kilometres away, explained that when she was doing some photocopying in the copy shop in Zadar and showed her Knin student card to the man working there, he felt sorry for her and gave her the copies for free and another 10 Kuna (€1.25) to buy a sandwich. She felt utterly embarrassed and unable to forgive the Church for the picture of Knin it had presented to the world. Like her, many local Croats felt the Church had exaggerated the number of people who were 'hungry' in Knin. They calculated the monthly welfare payments that were made to the Croatian settlers compared to their expenses, and came

to the conclusion that they could not be as poor as was claimed. In fact, many voiced the opinion that settler families received a few thousand Kuna from the state every month, yet did not pay rent for the houses they occupied. Many did not even pay for their water and electricity. They believed that most settlers lived virtually for free – a state of affairs, as local Croats maintained, which could not be healthy for the community and was a financial burden on the local Croats living in Knin.

Other local Croats argued that the great majority of those people 'who could not feed themselves' did not really try to do so, but were too comfortable or just too lazy to find a way of making a living. Local Croats were convinced that many Croats from Bosnia would rather drink coffee (several times a day) and chat, living off the state and community, than work in the garden growing and harvesting vegetables, as the local people did. They would rather spend their money on cigarettes, drinks and other luxury goods instead of buying food for their many children. Local Croats pointed, for example, to the fact that people who queued in front of the *Caritas* office to receive their free food parcels were smoking cigarettes or had dyed hair, signs that they spent money on non-essentials. Others arrived to pick up food parcels, not with wheelbarrows, but in VW Golf cars. It was also argued by some local Croats that the money spent on the soup kitchen and food parcels would have been much better spent on creating jobs, which would have been a sustainable investment. The food parcels represented just a drop in the ocean. But they did not necessarily agree with the local SDP, which tried to blame the HDZ for the misery in Knin.

Last but not at least, some local Croats, who had always kept themselves more remote from the Catholic Church than their Bosnian compatriots, were critical about the conduct of the local *Caritas* led by the Franciscans. They suspected the local Franciscans of using the charity campaign purely for publicity and of keeping the best of the donated goods for themselves or for friends and clients who were not necessarily in need. They were especially suspicious about the use of cash donations that were deposited in a bank account in a nearby town, believing this money to be earmarked for a new Catholic church instead of destined for the poor – or perhaps even to be used for completely non-charitable purposes. Because of the tensions between local Croats and Croatian settlers and their spiritual distance from the local Catholic Church (see chapters 6 and 7), local Croats tended to be critical about the increasing presence and power of the Church in Knin. With the increased power of the local Catholic Church and its attempts to legitimise and support the settlement project and its appeal for Croatian unity, they feared that the Church was encouraging Croatian settlers to manifest their political power in Knin and so overrule the interests of local

Croats. All in all, local Croats maintained that it would be better for the Church to stick to questions of belief rather than attempt to deal with humanitarian issues and interfere in political life. It was certainly obvious to nearly everyone in Knin that the Catholic Church had become a political player, despite denials from the Franciscan abbot there.

Few Serbs showed any active response to the *Caritas* campaign. They had not been mentioned in the campaign, either by representatives of *Caritas* or the Catholic high clergy, or indeed in the national media, although their return to Knin was dependent on the same social and economic conditions that affected the Croat population (see chapter 4). When this criticism came to the notice of the Church, with *Caritas* being accused of acting politically and neglecting Christian principles, *Caritas* said it would widen its remit and provide Serbs in need with humanitarian aid as well. However, this new stance was not publicised. Not surprisingly, very few Serbs requested support from *Caritas*, either because they were unaware that aid was available to them, or because they were convinced that *Caritas* was ideologically flawed in its support of the Croatian settlement project. Whereas Croatian settlement had wide public support, the return of Serbs to the Knin area was unpopular because it was seen as a policy forced upon the Croatian government from outside by the European Union. Although the Orthodox Church as well as Serbian political parties in Croatia were concerned about Caritas's overt support for Croatian settlement, they did not have a strong enough voice to form an effective opposition.

The issue of 'hunger' in Knin created such a furore that it became the main feature on the leading weekly political TV show, *Latinica*, aired on 14 April 2001, about six weeks before the local elections. Representatives of all three groups in Knin were present: the Croatian settlers, local Croats and local Serbs. Everyone agreed on one matter: most people in Knin had been severely disadvantaged by the war and were unemployed and living in very difficult social and economic circumstances. Political interpretations, however, varied widely. The TV programme shone a spotlight on the different political factions in Knin and made visible the line of conflict that divided not only Serbs and Croats, but also local Croats and Croatian settlers. One person in the audience, for example, said that many settlers did not trust the new government led by Račan and Mesić, but believed that the late President Tuđman had achieved everything for them and that people had not been hungry under his leadership. Others maintained that people were disappointed that Tuđman had promised a lot to the people in Knin but had

not delivered.[210] A Serb born in Knin was fed up with politics in general and described the situation in the following words:

> Hey, listen, in former times people did sing a lot in Knin, we know that very well, Mr. *Latinica*: 'Friend Tito, we greatly appreciate you…' They ate, drank, and roasted about 500 lambs on the spit near Simić's well [Simić is a Serbian hamlet in the Knin region]. Simić died, the well became Croatian, and no-one roasts lamb there anymore, not even mutton because people don't have the money anymore. And now people sing: 'Hey, Tuđman, we don't have a single Kuna anymore'. But Tuđman died as well. And no-one can expect to receive anything more from him. What happened next? Stipe Mesić came and today people in Knin sing: 'Hey, little flower Mesić, we are all here with a naked arse'.

According to this Serb, people in Knin had been prosperous in socialist times, but since Knin had become part of Croatia in the 1990s, the living conditions had deteriorated sharply – no matter who ruled the country. This was why Serbs as well as Croats were frustrated with politics and politicians.

The TV presenter reacted to the problems in Knin by asking his audience to donate money to buy cows for Knin so that the people would be provided with a sustainable income.[211]

8.4 Party programmes, leaders and the electorate

The *Caritas* charity campaign, with all its political baggage, undoubtedly had a strong influence on the outcome of the Knin region elections. However, it was not the only decisive factor. The attitudes of the electorate were also moulded by the wider election campaigns of the political parties for the local elections in 2001, by their strategies to attract votes, and by the personal profiles of their leaders. By law, the election lists had to indicate the nationality of the candidates, and nationality was clearly as important as political affiliation. In addition, the personal background of local politicians played a crucial role – their educational status, personality and social commitments, and importantly here, their views on housing and property rights. In the following, I will look in more detail at the programmes of each

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[210] Other people maintained that because all the attention was focused on Knin, the real needs of many other towns were completely overlooked. In these towns the vast majority of inhabitants were unemployed, lived off welfare benefits and were also going hungry.

[211] In fact, this suggestion was also put forward by Janica Kostelić, the famous Croatian skiing champion. Interestingly, in Croatia sports personalities were often involved in advocating political policies.

political party, the profiles of the party leaders, and the reactions to them of the electorate.

8.4.1 Croatian national parties

The local HDZ attempted to attract the votes of both local Croats as well as Croatian settlers with the slogans: 'Prevent the bankruptcy of Croatia' ('*Spriječimo stečaj Hrvatske*') and 'You have experienced change – can you survive?' ('*Oživjeli ste promjene, možete li preživiti*?'). Both slogans referred to the change in national government in 2000, which had pushed the HDZ into opposition. The HDZ was now able to maintain that the ruling coalition was responsible for the economic and social crisis in the country. At the same time, the HDZ in Knin presented the 1995 *Oluja* Croatian military operation as a triumph over 'Serbian aggression' as well as a happy reunion of Croats, both locals and immigrants. This was put forward as an achievement of the HDZ itself and found expression in the election slogan: 'We were better and we will be better [than the other parties]' ('*Bili smo bolji i bičemo opet bolji*'). In the view of the HDZ, a vote for the SDP government was a vote for foreign rule, and the HDZ was confident that it represented the will of the people and would regain power.

However, the local HDZ was confronted by a struggle over economic and political power between Croatian settlers and local Croats. Local Croats argued that they wanted to see locals in power, not settlers. In their view, being native to the region put them in a superior position. They maintained that they had lived in the region for generations and were familiar with the characteristics and customs of the area. However, many Bosnian Croats responded by pointing out that Croatian settlers now made up the majority in Knin and so settlers should lead the party.[212]

Although many settlers were concerned about a local Croat leading the party, the HDZ mayoral candidate in Knin was a local Croat. He was in his late forties from a well-known local family, and had returned to his own family house after *Oluja.* An engineer by profession, he had worked in the principal local factory – TVIK – before the war and was well known for his criticism of the communist leadership of the factory in the 1980s (see chapter 3). He was seen as courageous, honest (*iskren, pošten*),[213] and open

[212] See Schlee (2002). In ethnic conflicts, the group size can be almost as decisive a factor as cultural markers.

[213] These adjectives are normally not applied to politicians. In fact, ordinary people saw politics as a 'dirty' business with political candidates being in it solely for personal gain no matter which party they belonged to.

to economic reforms. In fact, he was supported not only by local Croats, but also by some settlers and even by a number of Serbs as well.

To reconcile the competing Croat interests, relatively young Croatian settlers occupied the second and third positions on the party list. Still, this was seen by local Croats as a threat. They maintained that Croatian settlers, who already occupied most posts in Knin, would be in a position to impose their will on the locals. They joked: 'Our people know where the municipal office is located, and Croatian settlers sit in it.'

A controversy concerning the personal conduct of a Croatian settler politician in connection with housing and property was also a central theme in the run-up to the 2001 elections. This conflict began when the incumbent deputy-mayor of Knin, a Bosnian Croat who was in second place on the county list of HDZ candidates, announced on *Latinica* that he wanted to sell his house in Bosnia for €200,000 as he had no intention of returning. In the meantime, he lived in an army-owned apartment in Knin for free. Many local people were understandably sceptical about his stand on settlers' housing needs and accused him of profiting from the situation. Still, his statements met with understanding from a large group of Croatian settlers from Bosnia, who, being young, wanted to stay in Croatia and improve their economic and social position.

Many people, settlers as well as local Croats, favoured the HDZ, but for another reason. Being the most powerful party in Knin, the HDZ controlled most of the resources and positions in the region. People were convinced that party membership offered them better access to such resources and believed that associating themselves with the party would help them overcome bureaucratic hurdles. In fact, the slow workings of the administration was a great problem in the Knin region (and in Croatia in general), and people commonly found that they could get what they wanted much faster if they had personal connections to individuals in power. This was expressed in the words '*veze*' (connections) and '*poznanstvo*' (acquaintanceship). Thus many people did not necessarily expect to receive any direct benefit from the stated manifesto of a political party, but based their voting decision on trust and reciprocity in social relations with relatives, neighbours and friends who were active members of the HDZ. They expected to receive a direct or indirect benefit from those who had asked them to support the party. Such methods of buying votes for favours or buying votes for cash suggests a clientelistic approach to politics, i.e. that the civil service that administered government policies was not impartial but was subordinated to personal contacts.[214] Although personal networks

[214] This has also been described for Bosnia in the late 1990s by Gosztonyi and Rossig (1998) and Grandits (1998a).

operate in the state sphere in many countries across Europe, in south-eastern Europe this can be seen as a legacy of socialism when Party membership gave people a sense of entitlement, i.e. they felt that the system should be worked to their benefit (e.g. Bulgaria Creed 1998).

The election programmes of parties on the extreme right in Knin showed both similarities and differences with the programme of the HDZ. The HSP coalition with the HPS and HČSP called for stability (*stabilnost*), not only in economic terms but also in terms of the commitment of Croats to Croatia and the Croatian idea. These parties pointed to the threat of the fragmentation of Croatian unity and solidarity. Because of the national electoral defeat of the HDZ at the beginning of 2000, and the struggle between local Croats and Croatian settlers within the local HDZ, the coalition parties did not regard the HDZ as a guarantor of Croatian unity. They especially criticised parties that favoured a coalition with Serbs or even those with Serbian members, as well as individual Croats who voted for non-nationalist parties. Unlike other Croatian parties, the HSP was not ready for any kind of reconciliation with the Serbs. Instead, the local HSP concentrated on 'Croatian unity' and maintained that Croats should return to and settle in Knin and should be able to build their homes there. They had a particularly hard-line position with regard to the question of the restitution of occupied property to Serbian owners and questioned the legitimate rights of Serbs to their property after having been 'aggressors' in war. On this, they found support especially among those settlers who had occupied housing illegally or who did not want to return their housing to the Serbian owners under any circumstances. Like the local HDZ, however, they failed to provide any concrete policies for dealing with the social and economic crisis and the housing dilemmas that affected the Bosnian Croats. In fact, many settlers did not even believe that the extremist HSP would support economic reforms.

The independent party of Željko Komšić, the leader of the Settlers' Association (*Udruga Doseljenika*) founded in Knin at the beginning of 1998, claimed to represent the interests of the Croatian settlers by declaring the policy of 'staying' (*opstanak*) as its main political goal. In the preceding years, the Association had taken action against the deteriorating situation of the settlers in Knin and had helped to organise and deliver humanitarian aid. It had also advocated the retention of use permits for Serbian houses. Using similar declarations to those employed by the Catholic Church, the Association introduced emotion and nationality into the debates on the housing conflict in Knin and argued that Croatia should be grateful to those Croats who settled in the devastated and abandoned Croatian lands. Party leader Komšić insisted that Knin should be home to those (i.e. Croats) who

wanted to live there, and not just to those registered in the municipality before the war. He also reminded the Croatian government of its obligations towards the settlers.

But instead of openly agitating against Serbs, Komšić stressed that he wanted to find a joint solution. This new policy represented an ideological deviation from the HSP, as well as a break with the HDZ. Komšić accused the HDZ of being more interested in ideology than practice, i.e. of being preoccupied with nationalism rather than dealing with the social problems of the electorate, and of working to exclude rather than to integrate. Komšić's party was also linked to a nationwide network of Croatian settlers, the 'Union of Croatian Settlers' Associations' (Zajednica Udruga Naseljenika Hrvatske), and was involved in an ongoing dialogue between representatives of the Croatian settlers in the Knin region and local representatives of Serbian organisations.[215] The focus of the Union of Settlers' Associations, as reflected in the dialogue between the settlers and Serbian organisations, was on the 'restitution and reconstruction of property and the provision of permanent accommodation for Croat settlers' (see the OSCE Field Office Knin Weekly Report no. 49, 7 December 2000, unpublished document, ZUNH [Zajednice Udruga Naseljenika Hrvatske], Glasnik Zajednice Udruga Naseljenika Hrvatske 2003). By showing its willingness to cooperate with the Serbs, the Settlers' Association hoped to receive international funds for the construction of houses for Croatian settlers. This policy of a multi-ethnic approach, which aimed for a win-win solution for both Croatian settlers and returning Serbs, can be seen as a strategy for acquiring external financing from the European Community and other international donors. This would indicate that external funding had a considerable influence on local politics and reconciliation. Nevertheless, it was questionable whether the policy shift on the part of the Settlers' Association in Knin towards reconciliation and cooperation with the Serbs was widely accepted by the majority of settlers on an emotional level. Furthermore, some Serbs, but also some local Croats and settlers, accused Komšić of founding his own party simply to secure himself a paid position in local government and to benefit his friends. Given the internal workings of local politics, the possibility of building cooperation

[215] An important meeting took place in 2000 in the office of the local OSCE office in Benkovac, a hot spot of conflict between Croatian settlers and Serbs, and was attended by the mayor of Benkovac, the chief of the Benkovac police, the director of APN, and representatives of HVIDRA, the Serbian Democratic Forum Benkovac, the Association of Croatian Settlers from Bosnia and various other local and international organisations. Although the atmosphere at the meeting was tense, a discussion took place in which people expressed their frustrations and visions. Most expressed interest in finding a joint solution to the local problems.

between Croatian settlers and returning Serbs on the basis of foreign aid seemed limited to say the least.

8.4.2 Nationally moderate Croatian parties: HSS, HNS and SDP

Moderately oriented parties like the Croatian Peasants Party (HSS),[216] the Croatian Peoples' Party (HNS) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) tried to attract Croatian as well as Serbian voters in Knin. The HSS traditionally covered the rural sections of the population and was rather conservative, while the HNS was more urban and progressive. Although both parties differed significantly in their programmes at the national level, the branches in Knin focused their coalition campaign on building a better future for all citizens who wanted to stay in the region of Knin, regardless of their nationality. Both aimed to fight unemployment by revitalising agriculture and industry and appealed to universal human rights with an emphasis on individual rights and beliefs and respect for private property (see *Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka Biskupija* 4 May 2001). The HNS/HSS election advertisement on Radio Knin featured a young woman candidate:

> I am Ivana P. and 22 years old. I am a student of psychology in Zadar and a candidate on the election list of the HNS/HSS for the town of Knin. Many ask why I am a candidate for the Croatian Peasants Party. The answer is simple: the party programme focuses on our people [the people of Knin]. We believe that with their work and honesty they can change a lot in Knin. I have a vision of Knin as a town of happy and content people. I see Knin as a place in which you and your children will show Croatia that we are not a town that depends on welfare, but that we can contribute a lot to our country once we have the right opportunities. Together with you, we can do everything. HNS: we are the generation that established the Croatian state. Its future is in your hands. Give us your vote, and we will see that it makes a difference. That is our way: HSS.

HSS and HNS thus pushed the idea that they were a party for young people, that they were forward-looking and vitally interested in the economic development of the region. Although the election advertisement above did not explicitly address Serbs – in fact it refers to those who established the Croatian state (which would seem to automatically exclude Serbs as they had been part of the secessionist 'Republic of Serbian Krajina') – both parties underlined the inter-ethnic character of the coalition by listing both Croats and Serbs as candidates. Here the question appears to be more how the

[216] The HSS was moderate only at the local level – at the national level it sometimes expressed strong Croatian nationalist views.

parties managed to enlist Serb candidates given the ethnic divisions emanating from the war.

One strategy to win Serb candidates to the HSS/HNS list and thereby to mobilise the electorate across national boundaries was to revitalise 'old' (pre-war) friendship ties between neighbours. In the municipality of Biskupija, for example, the ruling HSS was led by a well-educated Croat from Knin,[217] who was also the mayor of the municipality. With his ability to communicate, his computer skills and his open approach, he had attracted sizeable donations from international organisations for the municipality. He enjoyed the support of local people, Croats as well as some Serbs.[218] In the spring of 2001, before the start of the election campaign, the mayor of Biskupija was anxious to keep his position, not just for ideological reasons but because he was very good at his job. He also appreciated his regular salary, an important consideration in this insecure postwar period. By listing his achievements on behalf of the electorate in a leaflet distributed to every household in the municipality of Biskupija, he hoped to build support for his programme. However, he was worried that the Serbs, whose recent growth in numbers placed them once more in the majority, would vote for one of the two Serbian parties which were competing for the first time. Since he was born and bred outside the municipality, he had no close relationships with local Serbs.

As a result, the mayor decided to find local supporters to help him win over the Serbian electorate. He was able to rely on two local Croats from Biskupija whom he knew from his workplace and with whom he shared pre-war and wartime experiences.[219] The two young men had many friends among the Serbian youth in Biskupija. He asked them to support his election campaign and also to persuade some of their Serbian friends to join them in backing his candidacy by joining the election list of his party. After managing to put several Serbian candidates on his list, the mayor was hopeful of being elected, since he reckoned that people would vote for close family and friends. However, like the other parties, the HSS listed the Serb

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[217] Before the war, this man had been employed at TVIK. In 1999, he had been appointed mayor after his predecessor, a Croat who lived outside the municipality, had resigned as a result of struggles within the party.

[218] It was difficult for the local Croatian mayor to satisfy everyone. Serbs, for example, accused him of spending the municipal budget mainly on local Croats since much of it went on road construction (the roads to the Catholic hamlets were paved). Local Croats, however, complained that he spent too much on the other groups. In turn, Bosnian Croats claimed that he had neglected their needs.

[219] As well as being mayor he also still had a regular job at the railway company in Knin. One of these two local Croats was a colleague there.

candidates below the Croats (local Croats and Croatian settlers), and Serbs were generally not very active in the party (if at all), compared with the Croats on the list (*Šibenski List* 5 May 2001: 13).

Like the HSS and HNS, the SDP claimed it was fighting ethnic and national divisions and chose to face the future rather than dwell on the past. This intention was expressed in their (nationwide) election slogan: '*Idemo dalje, pouzdano i odgovorno*' ('We go forward conscientiously and responsibly'). In fact, the local SDP leader suggested that all groups would gain once they stopped thinking in terms of national categories, and accused the HDZ of living on the back of the population instead of helping people to build a decent life in the town (see the SDP election campaign brochure, Knin, spring 2001). Regarding the problem of housing, the local SDP leader promised that settlers would receive permanent accommodation, either with the help of APN or through state construction projects. Consequently, Serbs would have the opportunity to repossess their property. Here, the local SDP leader referred to Prime Minister Račan's international commitments to implement the return programme.

Like the HSS and HNS, the SDP also recruited Serbs as candidates in the hope of receiving the votes of their relatives, neighbours and friends. Among others, the local SDP leader managed to win over a Serb who was quite popular in the area of Biskupija. The new Serbian candidate was in his early 40s and one of the youngest married Serbian returnees in his village. He lived in his repaired and refurnished house, which had been saved from occupation by his father who had remained in Biskupija during *Oluja*. However, many Serbs believed that the fellow Serb running for SDP had been 'bought' by the SDP leader, an opinion that gained weight when it was established that he had previously been a member of the nationalist Serbian SNS. It was rumoured that the local SDP leader had offered a job to the unemployed Serb, either in the form of a paid political position (in case his party would win) or in the form of another paid job in case the party would not make it into the government.

Last, but not at least, in the eyes of most Serbs the local SDP leader engendered little respect and was generally viewed as the most distrusted politician. This was based on a rumour concerning his personal conduct in relation to the property situation. According to the rumour, the local SDP leader owned a family house in Bosnia which had not been destroyed or occupied, but was now rented out to an international organisation at a high fee of around €600 per month.[220] In addition, he was said to own a *konoba* (a traditional inn) on a Croatian island, as well as a *vikendica* (a holiday house)

[220] In both Bosnia and Croatia this was a lot of money – in fact, more than the average monthly income in Knin.

on the Dalmatian coast near Šibenik. This house was said to have belonged to a Serb who left the area during the war. Locals said that the SDP leader had purchased the house cheaply after the war with the intention of restoring it and renting it to foreign tourists, while also using it as his own holiday home. These details about his accumulated property bothered many Serbs since he had been occupying a former socially owned apartment in Knin, rent free since 1999. Before occupying this flat, he had been living in a private Serb house, and furthermore, his married daughter occupied another former socially owned flat as well.

Many Serbs also maintained that the Bosnian Croat had returned the occupied house two years after the Serbian owner had come back to Knin, and that he had removed most of the furniture before he left, none of which belonged to him. Some Serbs also said that he had moved out of the private family house to further his political career as leader of the SDP and had been advised not to act openly against the private property rights of the Serbian population. At that time, the repossession of private property was much higher on the public and political agenda than the repossession of former socially owned housing rights (see chapter 5). Still, many Serbs maintained that it was unjust to occupy a former socially owned apartment that had belonged to a Serb. They claimed that the apartment should be returned to the former holder of the use-rights, especially as the occupier was not in need of social housing. In their view, the SDP leader's behaviour suggested that he would never respect the property rights of Serbs.

On this point, however, the local SDP leader argued vehemently that he was working with Serbs on housing issues. At a joint workshop for local politicians and community leaders in December 2000, he praised himself in emotional tones for having been one of the first to accept the private property rights of Serbs by returning the private house he had occupied to its owner, and for having saved the owner's personal belongings, 'even a flag of the Serbian Krajina Republic' that he had found in the basement. That he occupied a former socially owned apartment was not seen as problematic for the SDP politician as by doing so he had been able to return the house to the Serb family and was simply resolving his own housing problem.

By trying to appease the Serbs over the housing situation he simply came across as untrustworthy. The Croatian settlers were equally as sceptical but for other reasons: they felt that the local SDP leader was betraying his 'own' people by socialising with Serbs and trying to attract their votes. In Knin, most people still believed that a viable solution to their own problems could not include a solution to the problems of the other groups.

8.4.3 Serbian national parties

Like the Croatian national parties, the Serbian national parties SDSS and SNS addressed their own national group. However, the two parties were on bad terms with each other and therefore could not form an opposition alliance against the 'Croatian' parties.

The SNS was an openly Serbian nationalist party led by a Serb who came from Donji Lapac, a small and remote town on the Bosnian border with a strong, pre-war Serbian majority. In 2001, the town again had a Serbian majority, since few Croats had settled in this economic backwater. Like Donji Lapac, the SNS was isolated on the national agenda and only attracted media interest from time to time owing to the antics of its leader.[221]

The SDSS was perhaps the strongest critic of the SNS. The SDSS presented itself as an advocate of sustainable development in the region from which all should profit, Croats and Serbs alike. Like Željko Komšić, the SDSS stressed that the problems of the Serb population were also the problems of the whole community, and that Croats ought to deal with Serb interests if they wanted to solve their own problems. This approach was expressed in the election jingle: '*Vrijeme je za miran život sa susjedima*' ('It's time to live peacefully with the neighbours'). However, this party was unable to attract any Croat onto its election list, and so remained an exclusively Serbian party, with Serbian candidates and a Serbian electorate. The three primary SDSS candidates for Knin were a lawyer, an unemployed engineer and a former police officer. All were well educated and experienced actors in the political arena.

In the municipality of Biskupija, however, the situation was slightly different. The local Serb who occupied first place on the SDSS election list had worked as a mechanic in the local TVIK factory but was unemployed after the war. In his early 40s, he was one of the younger returnees and lived with his wife in his reconstructed house in the village of Biskupija, where they made their living from small-scale agriculture. He was a very sociable person, and as he lived in the hamlet with the largest number of returnee households in the village, most of the returnees knew him well and identified with him in one way or another. At the same time, people were also sceptical about his political abilities since he was not well educated and had no computer skills – and did not even have a driving licence. In the postwar period, however, the local SDSS candidate was the only individual who was willing to run for the position of mayor on a Serbian election list. Most Serbs

[221] In Donji Lapac, where the SNS was a serious political force, the party was in coalition with the ultra-nationalist Croatian Party of Rights (HSP). The SNS leader Milan Đukić advocated renaming the streets as in communist times.

were still extremely cautious about active involvement in politics, especially in a Serbian party, since they feared they might be targeted by Croatian nationalists. At the same time, they felt severely discriminated against by Croatian institutions and parties. For this reason, many local Serbs believed that if a fellow Serb were to lead the municipal council they would be able to make their voices heard.

8.5 Political performance and links to the national level

The election rallies played a further important role in attracting potential voters. The intensity and quality of support shown by national politicians at these events, as well as the backing of other key public figures, was decisive. But the parties at the national level did not always support the policies of local branches, and an obvious lack of support tended to have negative consequences for the local party campaign.

In the following section, attention turns to the main public rallies in the election campaigns of the HDZ and the SDSS. In my view, these events contributed significantly to the good results achieved by the two parties in the election. By comparison, the events staged by the other parties were rather unconvincing. They had little support from national politicians and attracted few new voters.[222]

8.5.1 Political performance of the HDZ

The central campaign event of the local HDZ, held on the Friday evening before the Sunday election, was very well organised. It was staged in Knin's main square beside the monument of the Croatian soldier, which commemorated the military victory of August 1995. An illuminated platform, decorated with Croatian flags and election posters, became the focal point of the square, and a strategically positioned folk orchestra served to attract people who had not actually come to listen to the HDZ election messages. Altogether, between 500 and 1,000 people gathered in the square.

Local and national politicians as well as high-ranking officers of the Croatian army stood shoulder to shoulder on the stage. This signified unity and appeared to place the locality of Knin within an undivided nation. The speakers appealed to the people's emotions and experiences of the war. They

[222] For example, the SDP campaign event was staged in Knin's main square, but only a few people attended. Just one national politician joined the local party committee for the rally, and because time was short, the SDP was forced to start the event at 3 p.m., when Knin was empty (most people rested around this time during the hot summer months, with shops generally closing at midday and opening only in the late afternoon).

highlighted the suffering of the Croatian people and the final victory of the Croatian army over the 'Serbian aggressors'. In addition, they situated the political goals and programme of the HDZ in a broad temporal and spatial perspective by linking the medieval past of the Croatian 'royal town' of Knin with the future of the Croatian state.



Plate 25. HDZ politicians on stage during the HDZ election meeting in Knin (spring 2001).

The leading candidate, a local Croat from Knin, was introduced as 'a rock on the rocks of Knin … an old Croatian oak, which the enemy failed to fell'. These metaphors were designed to place the leading candidate in the familiar yet ancient stony landscape of the Dalmatian hinterland where sturdy oak trees grow. At the same time, the metaphors evoked the recent history of region. In his address, the local HDZ candidate referred to the historic 'unity of Croats' and began with a review of the medieval past. He pointed out that in Zvonimir's time, the Croatian kingdom had fallen apart not only on account of external attacks but also because of internal disunity and division. He went on to urge unity within the HDZ, which appeared threatened by secession. His speech was as follows:

> Dear Croats (*Hrvatice i Hrvati*), citizens of Knin, members and sympathisers of the HDZ, welcome to the pre-election campaign of the Croatian Democratic Union. Knin deserves better. The town of Zvonimir wants this and demands this of us. Nothing great will be

> accomplished if there are small dispersed souls who leave the HDZ and set up an independent [election] list. I think this is a mistake [applause] ... We remember that when Croats in our history were divided and argued, they lost. That is why others were their masters. Dear people of Knin, we should not waste the gift of our journey through life that will end sooner or later. Still, the journey of our Croatia, of our Knin must go on and, dear citizens of Knin, we should help the town of Knin to go on. For this it will live forever and for this it will never be attacked [again] from outside or from inside. For this, our Croatia will live forever. God bless it. Thank you.

This speech appealed to patriotic emotions and called on the people not to think of themselves but to keep the fate of the Croatian state as well as that of the town of Knin in mind. In this way, his speech resembled those of the Catholic charity campaign, in which spiritual support was very important. The pragmatism of those Croats who were considering leaving for economic reasons appeared selfish and immoral when set beside the 'historic mission' to fight for an 'eternal Croatian state'. As a 'good Croat and Catholic', the HDZ candidate asked for God's blessing.

Other speakers argued in a similar vein and focused mainly on the 'glorious' Croatian past of the medieval era. The present-day problems faced by the population of Knin were barely mentioned. For example, the well-known former army officer and HDZ parliamentarian, Ljubo Česić-Rojs – who had attended the opening of the soup kitchen by the local *Caritas* in Knin (see section 8.3 above) – started his speech with the following words:

> Dear, honoured families of the fallen Croatian noblemen [*vitezova*], the fallen members of the Croatian army and the Croatian defence, honoured invalids, members of the Croatian army and defence, honoured soldiers who were called the 'strength of Croatia' ... We all are well aware of the evil that befell the Croatian people in the last 10 years and which began here in Knin. I am thankful to the courageous Croatian sons, those who are not among us anymore, who gave up their lives to build the foundation of the Croatian state. Today we have freedom, independence and an independent Croatian state ... I welcome all of you and promise never again will the *Četnik* coat of arms fly over the Croatian castle, but we will always see the Croatian coat of arms ...

However, Česić-Rojs also added that Serbs should be allowed to return if they were 'free of guilt'. This rather unexpected turn to his speech was probably linked to Croatia's aim of joining the EU, which was also supported by the HDZ. In order not to lose those voters outside the former

war zone who were in favour of EU membership, the HDZ advocated applying international standards in dealing with minorities. In Knin, however, Česić-Rojs limited his call for reconciliation by stressing that few Serbs would actually qualify for any welcome back: '… those who did do wrong, and, I think, most of the Serbs did, ought not return'.

Later, Česić-Rojs spoke about the social and economic crisis in Knin and the humanitarian aid that had arrived in recent months:

> But I must say that the Croatian people are not used to living off charity. We have land that belongs to the state and we must share it among the Croatian people. If they worked on the land and grew potatoes and grain, the situation would not be as bad as it is.

By proposing the division of state land among impoverished Croats, Česić-Rojs appeared to advocate a policy with a long history. After the Venetian triumph over the Ottomans in the seventeenth century, settlers as well as soldiers had received land from the new administration. Similarly, after World War II, poor people and the families of killed partisans had received land from the state, which had been expropriated from wealthy families. After the war in the 1990s, decommissioned soldiers of the Croatian army were in principle eligible for 10 hectares of state land (see chapter 6). It seemed that Česić-Rojs wanted to expand this policy to include the Croatian settlers in Knin.

The campaign was loudly supported by a group of war invalids in the audience, some of them in wheelchairs. They carried pictures of the deceased former president, Tuđman, as well as of the retired army general Mirko Norac who had been indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia shortly before the elections and had disappeared.[223] The war veterans showed their support for the speakers by waving Croatian flags and shouting 'Tuđman' and 'HDZ' between the speeches, indicating that they saw HDZ as the party that would protect and advance their interests.[224]

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[223] Norac was later arrested. In 2003, he was sentenced to 12 years in prison by a Croatian court for organising the execution of at least 50 Serb civilians in 1993. In May 2004, the ICTY indicted the retired general for war crimes committed in the early 1990s (International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia 2004).

[224] It has been suggested that the veterans were paid by the party to show their support in this way but, again, they may have attended the event out of political conviction. In Croatia and Bosnia it is common for political parties to organise groups of supporters to attend election rallies. Sometimes, 'supporters' are shipped into other communities by bus. However, a less cynical explanation can be found in the fact that the HDZ had introduced a relatively high state pension for disabled war



Plate 26. HDZ sympathisers at a HDZ election meeting on the main square in Knin (spring 2001).

In general, the celebration of Croatian history and the future vision of the Croatian state presented at the election rally appeared to cast a glorious light onto the campaign, giving Croats in Knin spiritual support for their settlement in this region while highlighting their important position within the Croatian nation state. This served to make the social and economic problems affecting most of Knin's population seem minor and trivial in comparison. It also allowed the speakers to avoid giving any concrete details about how they planned to deal with current issues, while still presenting themselves as the 'doers' in the election.[225]

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veterans. Since these pensions were controversial in Croatia, war invalids tended to support the HDZ as the guarantor of their rights.
Nevertheless, I also heard from a young man in Biskupija that an army officer offered him and his friends 50 Euros each if they would vote for the HDZ in the local elections. Of course, they did so and were glad to have earned the money so easily.

[225] No other election rally in Knin was as well organised and comprehensive. However, the campaign event of the local coalition of HSP and HČSP also took place in the main square, and was also supported by national politicians as well as officers of the Croatian army. Nevertheless, like the SDP campaign rally (see footnote 25 above), the event took place in the late afternoon, and without live music it did not create an exuberant atmosphere. In addition, the HSP and HČSP focused

8.5.2 Political performance of the SDSS

The SDSS sent two of the party's most prominent national-level politicians, Milorad Pupovac from Zagreb and Vojislav Stanimirović from Vukovar, to the Knin region to support the local election campaign. These two politicians were perhaps even more influential in the campaign and subsequent election success of the local SDSS than the national HDZ politicians and Croatian army officers were for the success of the local HDZ. Few local Serbs were inclined to involve themselves in politics because they saw politics as being a top-down process. Pupovac, a university professor of linguistics in Zagreb and the intellectual head of the party, was widely said to have charisma. Stanimirović, on the other hand, had a crucial role as the head of the SDSS in Eastern Slavonia, the only area occupied by Serbs during the war that had been peacefully reintegrated into the Croatian state. In this region, the number of Serbs who had stayed on was much higher than in the territories retaken by the Croatian army, and presented an example of good practice for Serbs in Knin. In Vukovar, for example, the SDSS had permitted the use of the Cyrillic alphabet in schools for Serbs.[226]

In contrast to the HDZ election campaign in Knin, the main events of the SDSS campaign were staged not in the town but in the mainly Serb-inhabited villages in the surrounding region.[227] The Serbian parties may have intentionally decided not to hold open-air rallies in the centre of Knin as such settings risked attracting Croats intent on disturbing the event rather than Serbs interested in the messages of the Serbian politicians. Most likely, this would have further intimidated Serb voters, while Croatian radical parties would have gained votes. But even in the rural locations, few Serbs appeared at the election campaign events. In the village of Vrbnik in the municipality of Biskupija, for example, of 300 returnees only about 50 Serbs attended, mainly men.

Furthermore, the SDSS campaign seemed improvised rather than carefully planned. In Vrbnik, the two national politicians and three local

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on the threat emanating from the return of Serbs, who in their view would soon outnumber the Croats. The parties presented only an 'either–or' solution: either the Serbs would return or the Croats would stay. No compromise was possible. Social issues were subordinated to this radical nationalist rhetoric. The election event attracted only 150 to 200 people, some of whom turned up wearing black shirts as a symbol of party membership, but which was also reminiscent of the *Ustaša* of World War II.

[226] However, integration was limited since Croatian and Serbian children attended separate schools.

[227] The SDSS did hold an election launch meeting in Knin, but it took place in the building of the former grammar school and not in the main square.

politicians gave their speeches from a wooden bench set up between two trees that served as the rally platform. There was no microphone, no music and only two small election posters. In a way, this lacklustre campaign merely served to emphasise and make more visible the political and public isolation of Serbs in the Knin region. Nevertheless, the campaign rally and messages were acknowledged by the local Serbs as an attempt to create a link between the national politicians and the local people.



Plate 27. Local and national Serb politicians from the SDSS speaking to villagers during the election campaign (spring 2001).

In general, the SDSS politicians stressed that they would help lift the Serbs out of their isolation in the Knin region. They pledged to support Serbian civil rights, especially the return of property, jobs for Serbs, and respect for Serbian national identity. A local SDSS politician from Knin, for example, said on Radio Knin:[228]

> We all know that many people who return do not dare to enter their vineyards, their gardens, their courtyards, their fields, let alone their houses. There is open discrimination regarding jobs. A very small number of Serbs are employed, a very, very small number.

[228] Because I did not record the election rally speeches in the villages, this is a quote from a pre-election interview on Radio Knin (politicians from each party gave an interview on Radio Knin).

> Apartments were taken away … even from families whose family members together have 80 years of *radni staž* [(state) employment] ... But there are [Croatian] families who come here and occupy several homes. This means each son has a house or apartment ... While others, [Serbian] returnees, have to adapt old houses abandoned for a long time in order to live in them again, because they cannot return to another place. This here is their homeland …
> This all shows that we live in a state in which we cannot live in peace. This state must be changed and that is why we came here, we founded this party to realise this change as far as possible, so that we can live like everybody else, so that we become integrated into the political life and everyday life of Croatia, into Croatian society. So that we will be appreciated as much as we appreciate the others. Not more and not less.



Plate 28. Serb villagers gather for a SDSS election meeting in a village near Knin (spring 2001).

The SDSS national politicians further argued that Serbs should not vote for the (moderate) Croatian parties such as the SDP, HSS or HNS. Although the SDSS appreciated that these parties had introduced significant changes at the national level after their election in 2000 (see chapter 5), the Serbian politicians highlighted that the implementation of the new laws and procedures was slow and ineffective. They explained that the national

government would hesitate to put the civil rights of Serbs into practice because of power considerations. Croatian parties that supported Serbian rights in a country in which public opinion was still strongly divided would jeopardise their own positions. In this situation, the Serbian politicians explained, Serbs would do best to lobby for their rights through political opposition. A local SDSS politician from Knin said on Radio Knin:

> We are now in the position of a minority, nothing else, and we do not have anything against it, but we demand that the laws are properly executed and that the minority is treated correctly. That is why we are running as a national party in this election. We do not especially like the title 'national' ... But there are several reasons why we still are running for the election on a national party ticket – because not a single civilian party has dealt with the problems and situation of the Serbs or even shown an interest in them …

In short, the SDSS politicians maintained that Serbs were the underdogs of Croatian society, with special, nationally defined problems that could only be solved through the empowerment of Serbian national parties. By voting for a Croatian party, even a moderate one which claimed to represent the interest of Serbs too, they would only waste their vote, as such parties would not be in a position to promote the interests of Serbs. Still, the SDSS politicians also acknowledged that the problems of the Serbian community could not be solved without integration into Croatian society. A local SDSS politician put it this way on Radio Knin: 'The Serbian community has no future while it cannot see that the development of Croatia is also its own development'.

8.6 An analysis of the election results and the political ramifications

As I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, the HDZ received an absolute majority in the 2001 local elections in Knin, while the two Serbian parties received a significant number of mandates (three each out of 17). The other parties fared much more poorly.

Despite the widespread criticism in Knin of the local HDZ government, the local HDZ leaders had still managed to regain power. Issues such as the achievement of Croatian independence and the military victory in Knin, both linked to HDZ policies, had been revitalised in the election campaign and served the party as a form of 'historical capital' which was flaunted by the Croatian army officers and national politicians at the HDZ election events. The fact that the Catholic Church had initiated a very successful charity campaign that offered material and spiritual support to the

Croats in Knin by appealing to ideas of Croatian solidarity, and in which HDZ politicians had played a particular role, also contributed to the HDZ's election success. In addition, the fact that Serbs once again represented a considerable demographic force and two Serbian parties had been established and run in the elections had worried many Croats and rallied them behind Croatian national parties. For the Croatian settlers, a further reason to vote HDZ was that the party had given them the chance to settle in Croatia after the war, and had issued them with Croatian travel documents and the right to (temporarily) occupy Serbian homes. In the fear of losing their newly gained rights, settlers tended to vote for Croatian national parties.

Still, bearing in mind that the HSP coalition and other extreme right parties received only a small number of votes, the election success of the HDZ indicated that Croats in Knin had not radicalised their national position despite the pledges of the local HDZ to implement the provisions of the return programme. This can be seen as progress in the development of civil society in Croatia and a sign of the increasing acceptance of the private property rights of Serbs. Based on interviews I conducted in Knin I gained the impression that only those Croats who strongly rejected the return process, and who wanted to keep the houses they occupied, voted for the HSP.

Despite the efforts of the leader of the Social Democratic Party to attract voters from all groups, neither Serbs nor Croats were convinced by his performance. Many not only lacked trust in the vague policies of the SDP but were extremely sceptical about the local SDP leader because of his personal conduct in relation to the housing issue (see above). For some, this served as an example of the hypocrisy of the SDP concerning the return programme and property repossession policy in general.

Because the majority of Serbs were deeply frustrated with the 'Croatian' parties, which had failed to commit themselves fully to the implementation of Serbian civil rights, they voted for Serbian parties. But while Serbs had favoured the SDSS and SNS, many had been wary of open political engagement. The political engagement was, however, also obstructed by the government in Knin. The elected representatives of the Serbian parties were not appointed to any important positions on Knin city council. The HDZ turned down the Serbian bid for the seat of deputy mayor or president of the city council, arguing that this was not the will of the electorate and the SDSS/SNS had no suitably qualified politicians who could manage such positions (Juras 2001; Krneta 2002b).

In the municipality of Biskupija, where Serbs were in the majority, the election results for the HSS and SDP were considerably better than in Knin.

However, the Serbian SDSS received an absolute majority with nine mandates out of 15, while the other parties received only one or two mandates. The HSS mayor of Biskupija was deeply disappointed as he had hoped to receive more votes. His assumption that Serbs would vote for their Serbian friends and relatives who were standing as candidates on the party list had not been met. Some local Serbs may have voted out of family or friendship loyalty, but most were very frustrated by the general situation and expressed their resistance by silently voting for the Serbian national parties. That the local mayor was an outsider while the SDSS candidate was someone they knew well and trusted was doubtless another factor in their voting decision.

The post-election talks concerning the establishment of a municipal council again emphasised the qualities of the politicians in question, and the importance of nationality was interpreted according to the social and political realities not only in the municipality of Biskupija, but in the wider realm of the Knin region and Croatia. Despite the fact that the HSS had received just one seat out of 15 on the municipal council, the incumbent mayor was reconfirmed in his position by the Serbian SDSS. The Serbian representatives appreciated his experience, his good relations with the international organisations who were active in the region, and his work for the municipality in recent years, although they were critical of his failure to do more for the Serbs. The positive SDSS reaction was linked to the fact that the party had no candidate who would have been able perform at the same level and it feared that chaos would result if a less competent candidate took office without the support of the former mayor. Furthermore, Serbs were concerned that they would isolate themselves without a Croatian mayor, since the municipality of Biskupija was dependent on Knin in nearly all matters. A Croatian mayor would be in a much stronger position than a Serbian mayor when negotiating with the Croatian authorities. Another advantage in retaining the incumbent mayor was that it gave the SDSS (as well as the Serbian population) the appearance of actively moving towards reconciliation and inter-ethnic understanding. Both the SDSS and the national government exploited this to demonstrate its policy on minorities to the European Community.

Although the Serbian parties in Biskupija confirmed the local Croat from Knin as mayor, they did not relinquish their power. They formed a strong majority on the municipal council and insisted that their leading candidate should receive the position of deputy mayor, with a salary equal to that of mayor. In addition, the Serbian deputy had the right to veto decisions taken by the mayor. At council meetings, the deputy mayor served as spokesperson for the Serbs in Biskupija and made great efforts to study all

the proceedings in the municipality. This gradually prepared him for taking over as mayor in the future, giving him leverage to represent Serbian interests in the municipality. Following this development, several housing conflicts between Serbs and Croatian settlers were solved relatively easily. Although relations between the Croatian mayor and his Serbian colleague had been tense in the first days and weeks after the elections, the two became an effective team and in autumn 2003 they were still working together.

8.7 Conclusions

In the campaign for the 2001 local elections, the Catholic Church was very active in advocating a Croatian national solidarity that was built on the collective experiences of forced migration and the ethnic war of the 1990s. These experiences were pushed to the fore not only to create a charity network that included Croats but excluded Serbs on the basis of their nationality, but also to revitalise the power of the local HDZ in Knin, which was built largely on the achievements of wartime and the immediate postwar years. This was despite the internal conflicts between local Croats and Croatian settlers, which were reinforced by the Catholic campaign. In fact, this campaign had given mainly emotional support to Croatian settlers emphasising the Croatian nation as their spiritual home and highlighting that their settlement in this region was a great gain for the Croatian nation. In this way, the Church managed to upgrade the status of Croatian settlers in Knin and put a new political and emotional spin on disputes over property rights.

In assessing the party programmes and election rallies it is apparent that the treatment of social and economic issues, including housing and property, was mostly embedded in national propaganda that concentrated on the war of the 1990s and reached back as far as medieval times. The election rallies furthermore show that the presence of national politicians who represented a national(ist) point of view was very influential too. However, the personal conduct of local politicians in relation to property and housing certainly influenced the election campaign. This sometimes placed them in opposition to declared party policies and made them appear untrustworthy (as was the case with the SDP party leader in Knin), or led to internal quarrels (as with the local HDZ). This again underlines the difference between the proclaimed party manifesto and the reality of property rights. Furthermore, it shows that the political constellations and the distribution of power reaching beyond the local level played an important role in the success of the individual parties and independent candidates.

The election results indicate two basic tendencies. First, Croatian settlers and returning Serbs felt politically, socially and economically marginalised in Knin and so voted almost exclusively for Croatian or

Serbian national parties respectively. Secondly, the parties that tried to circumvent the controversial topic of the housing and property rights of the national groups and instead widened their policies to embrace all the citizens of Knin had difficulty winning votes. The HDZ, which received the majority of the Croatian vote, adopted a more moderate and democratic tone than it had done in earlier years. This was most likely a result of pressure from the European Union and of national power considerations. The SDSS, which received the majority of the Serbian vote, put forward an integrative approach, and maintained that Serbs could solve their problems only if they also considered the Croatian perspective. In this regard, they reacted to the minority position of Serbs in Croatia.

Chapter 9
Summary and Conclusions

At the heart of this book lies the exploration of a precarious, existential process: the restitution of housing property to Serbs in Croatia in the years following the war of the 1990s. The ethnically mixed region of Knin, where I conducted my fieldwork, was the scene of a war between Serbs and Croats that lasted from 1991 to 1995 and in which 'ethnic cleansing' was a tactic used by both sides. The land was declared as national territory and was occupied by a particular national group; members of the opposing national group were then expelled, or even murdered, and their homes destroyed or occupied. During the war, Serbs occupied about one-third of Croatian state territory with Serbian forces expelling the Croats who lived in these regions and destroying or occupying their houses. In 1995 this situation was dramatically reversed when the Croatian army successfully retook the Serbian-occupied territory, causing the flight of almost the entire Serbian civil population (mainly to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia).

In the so-called 'postwar years' after 1995, the politics of 'ethnic engineering' continued. Even months after the end of military operations, the few remaining Serbs became the target of intimidation and violent attacks. Many Serbs who had fled their homes in Knin during the war later returned to find their houses and apartments destroyed or occupied by Croats who themselves had been forced to flee from Bosnia. In 1995 the Tuđman regime actively legalised and supported the occupation of Serbian property by Croats. The destruction and occupation of residential property was one of the central barriers preventing the return of Serbs to Croatia. Under increasing international pressure in 1998, the Croatian state revoked the laws that encouraged occupation of residential property and adopted a return programme with procedures for the repossession of occupied (Serbian) private property. But the implementation was feeble and this slowed down the return of refugees and the enforcement of their civil rights. On the ground, tensions also developed between Croatian settlers from Bosnia and the local Croats who had returned to their home region after having been

expelled by Serbian forces. While Croatian settlers occupied private as well as so-called 'former socially owned property', which was specific to socialist Yugoslavia, many local Croats respected the private property rights of their former Serbian neighbours and only occupied former socially owned apartments.

In order to explain the dynamics of property relations and ethnic conflict in postwar Knin, I have focused on the rights to, meanings behind and functions of both residential property (i.e. private houses and former socially owned apartments) and land. Residential property and land are – in a broad sense – material expressions of the positioning and identification of individuals and groups. Because the conflict in Yugoslavia was linked to a re-territorialisation of ethnic identities and because any sense of community or belonging was increasingly formulated in relation to a homeland, housing property and land can be seen as intrinsic elements within the outpouring of violent aggression. Thus, questions about the conflict dynamic are closely linked to questions about housing and land. More generally, empirical research on property relations helps to examine the complex social and political processes that are at work in this postwar, postsocialist society: political and social restructuring as well as the relations between ideological and legal (property) rights and (property) practices. As property is of enormous emotional and practical concern to most people, it establishes an appropriate field for studying the strategies of various actors in the locality of Knin in reference to translocal processes and factors.

At this point, it is helpful to recap the main theoretical concepts which have framed my analysis. Generally, property relations are understood as social relations between persons in respect of material (but also immaterial) objects, which are embedded in a political and social system (Hann 1996: 8), yet which at the same time have evolved over time. As an analytical tool, the layered model of Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (1999) proved to be very useful, differentiating four layers on which property relations manifest themselves: the ideological layer of property relations, the legal and procedural layer, the social layer and the property practices layer. With the help of this tool differences between legal norms and practices as well as the various constellations of legal pluralism could be unravelled and comprehended.

Also central to the analysis are concepts of ethnicity, nationality and conflict. Following the theories of Elwert (1989, 1997) and Schlee (1997), ethnic and national groups distinguish themselves from each other by cultural characteristics. But the importance of these characteristics largely depends on their social and political frameworks. Although national and ethnic group membership is seen as exclusive, which means that an

individual can only be a member of a single ethnic and/or national group, members of national and ethnic groups can also have more than one identity at a time, such as membership of a local community or of a certain social section of the population. Such identities can include members of opposing national groups and thus can form so-called 'cross-cutting ties' between these groups.

In times of political transformation, especially when accompanied by violent conflict, the changes in property relations can be especially severe. Group borders are often redefined and changing patterns of social inclusion and exclusion can have a strong effect on property relations. Following the von Benda-Beckmann analytical model, such changes can be identified at all four layers. For example, a 'Vermachtung' can take place, a term coined by Elwert (1999: 12–13), which means that instead of laws and courts determining access to property, the administration or various groups in society take on this role. In relation to the escalation and settling of conflicts (in this case, property conflicts), Elwert's (2001, 2004) theoretical approaches to procedures have been useful: namely, those procedures that create binding instructions for action by both conflict parties and so help to settle a conflict, as well as pending procedures in which the anticipated action fails to materialise and which may therefore result in escalation of the conflict.

In the following, I summarise the crucial findings of the book in relation to these theoretical concepts.

Chapters 2 and 3 of this book dealt with changing property relations in the *longue durée*. The historical perspective demonstrated the interlinkage of social structure, collective identities and property forms in this part of Croatia and served as the contextual background to the postwar situation since 1995. Chapter 2 dealt with the region of Knin in pre-socialist times, and stressed that land was central to economic activity and social identity in local society and was mainly owned by the male family members. From the end of the nineteenth century, land also assumed new meaning and symbolism in terms of national territory. The political polarisation of Serbs and Croats along national lines, which began in the late nineteenth century, found expression in the territorialisation of national identities and culminated in a civil war along national lines in World War II.

Chapter 3 provided the immediate background to postwar property relations in the Knin region, covering the years of socialist Yugoslavia and the tragic end of the regime which resulted in an awful war. In socialist Yugoslavia, land mostly remained in private ownership but its social and economic importance declined. Housing, both private and socially owned (the latter being a property form unique to socialist Yugoslavia) became

even more important within local society than land itself. Private houses were built on family land with the help of relatives, neighbours and friends, and construction often took years to complete. Many of these houses were never officially registered. According to the socialist ideology of 'Brotherhood and Unity', citizens' eligibility for socially owned housing was to be based mainly on social criteria. With the newly introduced social entitlements, including the right to housing, education, work and medical care, social differences were to be equalised and national disparities overcome. However, in practice these entitlements were not always distributed according to ideological premises.

I have argued that in the Knin region, as in many other parts of socialist Yugoslavia, nationality remained an informal criteria for differentiation and access in certain contexts. This has also been found in other socialist countries, as shown for example by Verdery in Romania. Although there was no formal system of ethnic discrimination under socialism, in the region of Knin it appears that Serbs profited from the distribution of socially owned apartments as well as other entitlements on account of their dominance in local positions of power and their demographic superiority in the Knin region. Rights to socially owned housing could thus become the vehicle for the articulation of ethnic interests and could therefore modify or even negate the impact of national or regional directives and legislation. In the Knin region, this ethnic clientelism increased ethnic tensions. However, such local developments were by no means the only driving forces for inter-ethnic conflict here – the political and economic crisis of the Yugoslav socialist system in the 1980s also served to increase local ethnic tensions. Furthermore, it was largely due to influence from outsiders, such as nationalist hard-liners from Serbia, particularly the then Serbian president Milošević, that the conflict in Knin finally escalated in 1990–1. In the resulting war in Croatia, Serbs expelled Croats from the Knin region, often destroying or occupying their houses in the process. At that time, access to and loss of property, as well as mere survival, was decided mainly on the basis of national group membership. Two distinct histories of suffering, a Croatian and a Serbian one, developed.

Building on the historical background of the previous chapters, chapter 4 analysed the developments that form the centre of this book: the destruction, looting and occupation of Serb houses by Croats after the end of the military operation, the difficult return of those Serbs who had fled, and the intricate (re-)establishment of community relations. The chapter presented the complexity of changing property relations after the end of the war in 1995 against a background of political, economic and social upheaval. At the same time, the analysis concentrated on the strategies employed by

original owners and subsequent occupiers of property in the locality of Knin, i.e. local Croats and Serbs, as well as new Croatian settlers.

With implicit regard to the four layers of property relations differentiated by F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann, I have shown that the experiences of violence and war in the 1990s were crucial in determining access to property according to national criteria and became an important source of its legitimisation. Violence not only overruled legal norms and therefore restructured society (Elwert 1999a: 5), but the shared experience of violence was used by the Croatian government to appeal to Croatian solidarity and legitimise the transformation of legal norms during and even after the end of the war. After the reintegration of the Knin region into the Croatian state, which had been under the control of Serbian forces during the war, and after the flight of the Serbian population, the Croatian government under the leadership of President Tuđman passed new laws enabling Croats to receive use permits for abandoned private houses which had belonged to Serbs and to former socially owned apartments for which Serbs had had housing rights. Croats who occupied Serbian property therefore used these laws, together with their collective experience of violence, to justify their actions. The ideology of the exclusiveness of national rights and the fear of deprivation by the other national group which resulted from this logic were decisive in driving the destruction and occupation of Serbian-owned houses. According to this ideology, Serbs had lost their rights because of their role as aggressors in the war while Croats had reconquered the Croatian homeland, which now needed to be protected and rebuilt.

At the same time, the distribution of access rights to Serbian property along national lines also helped to house socially marginalised Croats. Many of the Croats who had settled in the former Serbian-occupied regions were war refugees from Bosnia, whose houses had also been destroyed or occupied. Other Croatian settlers, who had come from elsewhere in Croatia, had often lost their jobs and their homes during the postsocialist, postwar transition. The common ground between these two groups of settlers lay in the fact that they hoped to use nationally defined access rights to property in order to escape their difficult social circumstances. Others, who were in a better social position, chose not to move to the Knin region. The nationally defined rights to property were therefore used mainly by those who were 'losers' in the context of both the war and the postsocialist transition. A small number of Croats, however, also managed to gain from the situation, for example by occupying several Serbian houses.

I have also shown that people's property relations not only mirrored economic and social interests (and ideologies), but also emphasised various differences between local Croats and Croatian settlers. Those who had been

uprooted from their home regions and become victims of nationalist interest in earlier times, especially Croatian settlers, ignored private property rights while nationally based property rights became paramount. They did not distinguish between private and former socially owned property, but occupied both. For local Croats, on the other hand, the return to their home region was more moderate in that they tended to acknowledge the private property rights of Serbs. This suggests that historically grown local norms and emotions connected with property were not erased by the experience of violence nor by the creation of new laws. The return to one's own house was often an emotional decision rather than one based on economic or 'rational' logic. The acceptance of private property rights seemed to create identity for local Croats, especially because it had been a measure of family origin and social status under socialism and for many centuries before that. In this regard, the idea of appropriating the property of a stranger was anathema and shattered their own sense of identity. However, as unemployment was high among Croats in the Knin region, and because the war had had a dire effect on social relations within their local communities, many local Croats who had established themselves in new homes outside the former war zone did not return. The highest percentage of local Croats who returned were the elderly, who had suffered most from having lost their homes during war and who sought to repossess their own private property.

Still, many local Croats felt at ease occupying former socially owned apartments. This again was linked not only to the experience of war but to the socialist legacy. In the eyes of local Croats, Serbs had benefited disproportionately in received housing rights in socialist times, and so they saw the appropriation of former socially owned property as righting an historical injustice. Serbian private property, on the other hand, was seen as belonging to the private sphere and was outside the domain of the socialist state and its clientelistic ethnic policy.

The occupation of residential property and the loss of rights to former socially owned housing hindered the return of many Serbs. In the former socialist Yugoslavia socially owned housing had mainly been located in the towns, and in postsocialist, postwar Croatia there were no plans to repossess these apartments. This made return to urban areas especially difficult and, as a result, relatively few and predominantly elderly Serbs returned to the now marginalised rural areas, while the young and better educated remained in exile. They preferred to endure difficult living conditions in Serbia than return to face insecurity and uncertainty in Knin. While some found their emotional ties to be too strong and so chose not to sell their houses, others severed all links with the region after realising that 'everything had changed' after the war.

Chapter 5 dealt with the slow and difficult process of the repossession of houses by Serbian owners. Under international pressure, the Croatian state passed new provisions and decrees for the restitution of private property to Serbs in the return programme of 1998. However, the local administration adhered to the principles of national solidarity and failed to implement the new provisions. After the death of President Tuđman and the electoral defeat of his party in 2000, the new government, led by the Social Democratic Party, showed stronger commitment to the policies of the international community, though this was more to do with Croatia's aspirations to join the European Union than any sense of justice. Again, implementation of these policies was imperfect – the new legal situation was characterised by a plurality of competing or overlapping norms and provisions, as theorised by F. and K. Benda-Beckmann (1999: 30–2), as well as by a lack of political will on the part of local power-holders and the Croatian government. In the former war region, the civil right to private property competed against nationally defined rights, and the outcome rested on the local power situation, as well as the interlinkages between local and national governments. In the Knin region, local politicians continued to privilege settlers while Serbian owners were discriminated against. Local and national politicians were slow to reduce legal inequalities and close loopholes and until the year 2000 even encouraged further illegal appropriation by Croatian settlers. This had a negative effect on property relations, on inter- and intra-group relations as well as on the balance of political power. Drawing on the conflict theory of Elwert (2001, 2004), one can conclude that this situation made the futures of both Serbs and Croatian settlers even more insecure.

Legal and political uncertainties threatened to radicalise the conflicts between Croatian settlers and Serbs and this played into the hands of nationalist politicians, police and civil servants by helping to consolidate their power (Elwert 1999a). Those Croats who had illegally occupied property became most dependent on the nationalist power-holders who supported their property rights against Serbs. They protested against the new legal provisions for the restitution of housing property to Serbian owners.

The situation of insecure housing rights was further exacerbated by the deteriorating economic and social fabric of the Knin region, which was characterised by a high rate of unemployment. Many Croatian settlers relied on social assistance in order to survive. Their reactions to the insecurity they faced were very different: some internalised nationalist discourses, blaming the Serbs for their situation, and attempted to hold on to their housing rights; others complied with the demand that they return the property they had occupied in the hope that their miserable situation would be taken into account by the Croatian state authorities so that they would eventually

receive alternative housing; while still others left the region altogether. All in all, only a few settlers considered returning to Bosnia, where a few young families had property claims.

Interestingly, the repossession of former socially owned housing property was not discussed with the same level of public debate and conviction as the repossession of private property. Even Serbs, for whom such property was crucial to their return to urban areas, did not seem to place the restitution of former socially owned property on the same level as the repossession of occupied private property. The reasons behind this de-legitimisation of former socially owned property can be found in the political and social embedding of the cancellation of use-rights. In the postwar period, use-rights to socially owned apartments were automatically cancelled after a three-month absence from the apartment. This was clearly discriminatory as the Serbian refugees were afforded no opportunity to cross the border to Croatia and return to their apartments. However, this procedure had been practised under socialism (albeit under different circumstances), and therefore known to people and likely to be more plausible and 'legitimate'. Furthermore, the international community also contributed to the de-legitimisation of use-rights to former socially owned property by loudly demanding the repossession of private property while apparently overlooking the restitution of socially owned property, as such property was not recognised by the European Court in Strasburg (unlike entitlements to pensions and social support). Taken together, the historical perceptions of rights with regard to former socially owned housing, the related procedures of the Croatian state and the wide international acceptance of these procedures seemed to create large-scale acceptance of the de-legitimisation of rights to former socially owned apartments.

The analysis of access to and use of agricultural land after the war (chapter 6) showed that land was an economic resource that defined inter-group relations in the Knin region mainly along the lines of local Croats and Serbs versus Croat settlers. Private ownership rights were largely respected and as rural life gradually returned to 'normal', local Croats and local Serbs resumed agricultural activities on their own private plots, while most Croatian settlers did not engage in agriculture at all. The reasons for this were both economic and institutional. The wide-ranging and numerous projects set up by international organisations to revitalise agriculture gave priority to people who were landowners and registered in the locality before the outbreak of war in 1991. While locals received agricultural machinery, livestock and loans, settlers were excluded from these donations and credit programmes and so were effectively blocked from establishing agricultural enterprises. The fact that the Croatian state granted settlers access rights to

land owned by Serbs was of no use without machinery and capital for investment.

The differentiation between locals and settlers was also based on various locally specific forms and values of land ownership and subsistence-oriented land use which were deeply historically rooted and which had been re-established by locals after the war. Both local Croats and Serbs claimed ownership rights to the land based on the norms of patrilocality and equal male inheritance. The land was the foundation of social identity and the kin group symbolised a certain mode of living. Subsistence-oriented agriculture relied on networks of cooperation and reciprocity among relatives, neighbours and friends rooted in pre-socialist and socialist forms of social organisation. At this level, social and economic relations that were able to transcend ethnic and religious boundaries were re-established. These shared local values connected with land use created the so-called 'cross-cutting ties' between local Serbs and local Croats and established an alternative to the national 'we-group'.

Interestingly, it was these very values and practices that inhibited attempts to build a sustainable market-oriented agricultural sector. Because of the historical fragmentation of land as well as the traditional agricultural methods, local farmers needed to renegotiate their access rights to land and adopt the methods of intensive agriculture. The foundation of a new agricultural association initiated by an American NGO as a means of stimulating commercial agricultural activity failed because of the lack of common interests and trust among its members. Here, local experience with the socialist agricultural cooperative could not be positively transformed into a new market-oriented cooperative form.

Chapters 7 and 8 provided further background to the analysis of the complex power play in postwar Croatia. Chapter 7 discussed the role of the Catholic and Orthodox churches, as well as religious festivals, while chapter 8 described the local election campaign in 2001 to provide insights into the interplay between the lack of civil rights and persisting or even rising nationalism.

As discussed in chapter 7 and partly also in chapter 8, the meanings and functions of land in the Knin region were loaded with competing notions of Croatian and Serbian 'homeland'. These notions were reinforced by religious and political rituals and festivals, as well as in political and private discourses. In the nationalist climate in the years after the war, the Orthodox and Catholic churches supported the national divide between Serbs and Croats rather than helping to bridge it. The Catholic Church in particular propagated the exclusive territorial claims of Croats to the region in its various public festivals, which were mainly attended by Croatian settlers. On

the ideological level, the Catholic Church therefore supported and legitimised the property claims of Croatian settlers and antagonised the Serbian owners. This approach served to strengthen the symbolism of land as national territory while pushing the precarious social and economic situation of settler families into the background.

For native Croats and Serbs this land was a national home, too. Through rituals and discourses, expelled Serbs and Croats asserted their right to return. However, by analysing private festivals, which both local Serbs and local Croats took part in, it became clear that land ownership followed an alternative logic for local people which reached back to pre-socialist times and was superior to ideas of national territory. For many local Croats, their relationship to the land as 'homeland' was locally defined and was even seen in competition to the claims of Croat settlers. In Biskupija, local Croats went so far as to deny settlers the right to be buried in the local graveyard. Local Serbs, on the other hand, referred to notions of locality and of being native to the region in order to counter the ownership claims of Croatian settlers. In addition to the national character of ancestral land in the former Yugoslavia, as stressed by Verdery (1999), my findings point to the multifaceted meanings of land. Native Croats as well as Serbs used locally grounded forms of property relations as a political resource to create a hierarchy between themselves and Croatian settlers.

The analysis of the election campaign and its outcome in 2001, which was presented in chapter 8, made clear why the majority of the population in the Knin region had supported national(ist) parties, although there had been conflicts within the Croatian national group (divisions between local Croats and Croat settlers), and local Serbs and local Croats had come closer to each other again. I have shown that the link between property rights (and, in a wider sense, citizen rights) and national group membership was emphasised so powerfully in the election campaign and in the charity campaign of the Catholic Church that many voters were convinced about the importance of the national question. Even more important, however, was the fact that the Croatian settlers, the majority population in the region, only trusted Croatian national parties to defend their housing rights. Serbs, on the other hand, were frustrated over the slow implementation of their property rights and turned once again to Serbian national and nationalist parties.

The fact that some local Croats had allied themselves with their Serbian neighbours despite their experiences of war and expulsion but then still voted for Croatian national(is) parties in the local elections can be further explained by the changing demographic circumstances and power imbalances of the different groups in the locality of Knin after the war. The politics of size, as highlighted by Schlee (2002: 4), played a crucial role with

regard to shifting allegiances and conflict constellations. With the strong influx of Croatian settlers in the Knin region after the war, the returning local Croats were soon outnumbered by settlers and became a minority within the Croatian national group in Knin. By claiming their rights as natives, and so distancing themselves from the settlers, they were able to obtain political authority and political rights despite their numerical minority. As long as Serbs were controlled by local Croats and had no political power, the ongoing return of Serbs could be seen by the local Croats as a numerical counterweight to the Croatian settlers. However, when Serbs re-established their own national and nationalist political parties and regained a degree of political power, as was the case in the 2001 local elections, Serbs were again perceived as a 'threat' to the Croatian majority – to Croatian settlers as well as to local Croats. This showed that changing relations between Serbs and Croats depended as much on power imbalances as on social and cultural factors or memories of violence.

In conclusion, it is helpful to sum up some of my findings concerning the dynamics of property relations and ethnic conflicts, which may prove useful in the analysis of conflicts in other parts of the world and in other ethnic contexts.

First, it was shown that there is a connection between the experience of violence coupled with forced migration and the enforcement of a new property regime. As soon as the network of social relations that had shaped property relations before the war has been undermined, the acceptance of new property rights is relatively rapid. On the other hand, an existing or rebuilt network of social relations that derives from pre-war times can diminish the acceptance of new property rights. In the region of Knin this became obvious when the new Croatian settlers, who had been uprooted by the war and torn from their own local community, declared themselves in favour of a more radical reinterpretation of property rights than the local people, for whom the locally based values and structures formed an alternative frame of reference.

Secondly, it was shown that there was an interplay between national and social property rights, which had an effect not only on property conflicts but also on ethno-national conflicts. As soon as pre-existing social rights lose their validity during a national conflict, and as soon as there is a possibility of winning rights based on national group membership, it can be assumed that enough people will turn to this definition of rights in order to receive material gain and/or to consolidate themselves as a coherent social group. A social conflict can be superimposed on a national one, or social causes of conflict can find a place within a national cause of conflict, thereby prolonging the national conflict. This was the case with the Croatian settlers,

who did not receive use rights to property on the basis of social criteria alone but largely on national criteria, and therefore persistently defended their national rights.

Thirdly, this case study has shown that it is pointless to talk about property rights and claims when local power relations do not allow an implementation of these rights. In such cases it is important to analyse local power relations carefully and to recognise the logic on which these relations are based. The strategies of one group can often only be understood by analysing the strategies of the other groups. This has been shown in the case of local Croats, who in some respects show a greater openness to reconciliation with local Serbs because of the presence of Croatian settlers in the region. At the same time, it is also important to analyse the extent to which local power structures and strategies of single actors are influenced by translocal processes and factors: the influence of the central state, the international actors and the living conditions in neighbouring states.

Finally, it has been shown that the value of residential property as well as land is influenced not only by economic factors but by diverse social and emotional relations. For the population in postwar Knin, these derived on the one hand from the experiences of war and the nationalist propaganda, and on the other hand from values and norms that are rooted deep in history. In the Knin region, native Serbs and Croats returned to their houses and kept them because they were a central element of their identity. Croatian settlers remained in the Knin region despite insecure housing rights and high rates of unemployment. In their turn, they were influenced by territorialised, nationalist convictions which have served to shape their identity.

Chapter 10
Epilogue

Although the SDP-led government made good progress with regard to Croatia's aspirations to join the EU and submitted an application for accession negotiations in 2003, it lost credibility with the electorate owing to the very slow improvement to the economic situation for large parts of the population. Voters also evaluated the government's treatment of war-related issues somewhat negatively. In the Knin region, as well as in the entire former war zone, the government failed to gain the trust of the population – both Serbs and Croats. In the view of most Serbs, the government had supported the Serbian position only because of international pressure and had never developed a real interest in their problems. They based this on the fact that the SDP had hesitated in addressing the question of the return of Serbs and failed to put it at the top of the agenda, apparently out of concern that this would polarise Croatian society. Thus, many of the new laws and procedures concerning the return of houses to Serbian owners were not implemented. From the perspective of many Croats, on the other hand, the SDP-led government had disgraced the 'homeland war', especially though its attempts to collaborate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia by arresting Croatian indicted war criminals. For them, the practices of the Račan-led government did not conform to the ideology of the 'glorious homeland war'.

In the November 2003 elections, power changed hands once again. The HDZ, now led by Ivo Sanader, who had been the deputy foreign minister in the 1990s and who had established good relations with conservative politicians in Austria, Germany and Italy, once again became the strongest party in the parliament. Contrary to the original assumption of the international community, the former HDZ continued the policy started by the Račan government, complying with EU demands to improve conditions for the return of Serbs and cooperating with the ICTY. The most powerful motivation behind these policies continued to be the aspiration to be accepted into the EU as soon as possible. Moreover, instead of entering into

a coalition with the ultra-nationalists, Sanader signed a cooperation agreement with the opposition Serbian SDSS party, led by Milorad Pupovac and Vojislav Stanimirović. The agreement stipulated that if the Serbian party supported the government on several points, Serbs in Croatia would no longer suffer discrimination at any level. The Serbian leaders first refused but then agreed to the pact as they saw in it the chance to share power in Croatia and thereby emerge from political and societal isolation as well as push for the return of the Serbs (Rožić 2003: 573–4, Grandits 2004: 40–4). New governmental endeavours to improve basic conditions to allow the return of the Serbs followed. Again, the key issue to be confronted concerned housing and property. The reconstruction of damaged houses and the repossession of occupied private homes were finally achieved. The number of occupied houses, which once stood at 20,000, was reduced to 1,400 by November 2004. Similarly, although there were about 80,000 applications to rebuild houses that had still not been executed as of 2002, by the end of 2004 this number had been reduced to 17,000 (OSCE 2004 Status Report no. 15).

However, the question of the repossession of former socially owned apartments remained unresolved until the end of 2004. It was only after the international community turned up the heat on Croatia that the government adopted legislation that granted financial aid to people who had lost housing rights since 1990 so that they could purchase other property. In accordance with this policy, there was no compensation for the loss of use permits to former socially owned housing, and only those Serbs who could prove they were in need of a dwelling after they had lost their housing rights were given the means to obtain alternative accommodation. This difference in treatment concerning repossession rights between private ownership and former socially owned housing, which had been introduced in the 1998 return programme, remained intact and further discriminated against Serbs. Furthermore, neither the national government nor locally acting civil servants saw to it that legislation concerning former use-rights to socially owned housing was implemented. As use-rights to former socially owned flats in the cities were widespread, the return of Serbs to urban areas was thereby, to a large extent, blocked (ICG 2002: 4, 10; OSCE Status Report no. 13, December 2003, p. 2; and OSCE Status Report no. 15).

The complexity of the return problem, which was bound not only to housing but also to inter-group relations and economic opportunities in general, was never fully appreciated. In the national and international media, the disastrous economic situation in large parts of the former war zone was largely ignored when discussing the return of Serbs. It was, for example, virtually impossible for Serbs to find public service jobs in the local labour

market, which made it very difficult for most of the younger returnees to make a living. Whereas elderly returnees survived on small state pensions and subsistence farming, the younger people quickly discovered that houses have little value unless they also offer a means of making a living, even if they still feel an emotional bond with their homeland. In addition, many local Croats and Croatian settlers are now affected by unemployment and poverty. This negatively influences social relations between the population groups and undermines any prospect of rebuilding the neighbourly and friendly relations between local Croats and Serbs that were shattered by the trauma of war.

Despite all of this, however, it is clear that in everyday life local Croats and Serbs are gradually rebuilding bridges. Historically rooted values and social structures that are based on shared local experiences are central to this process. The inter-ethnic reconciliation between the Croatian settlers and Serbs seems, on the other hand, to be proceeding at best at shuffling pace. In general, the return programme for Serbs appeared to have been disembedded from other social and economic factors. As I have sought to demonstrate, any approach to the return issue, including the repossession of housing, remains weak when economic prospects and emotional and inter-group relations between Croatian settlers, local Croats and Serbs are not considered. This again raises awareness of the fact that property relations are first of all social relations between people, which are framed by ideologies, legal procedures and practices.

Concerning the plight of the Serbs, several surveys indicate that in 2005, after more than one year of HDZ government, Croatia is still unable to speed up their return even though legal conditions have improved significantly. The proportion of Serbs in the overall population in Croatia, according to the census of 2001, was just 4.54% (201,631 persons) compared to a pre-war population of 12.2%. Of the more than 300,000 Serbs who, at the end of the war, had either fled Croatia or sought protection in Eastern Slavonia, which was still under Serbian control till 1997, only about 114,000 were registered as having returned by November 2004, according to official information by the Croatian government (ICG 2002: 3). This figure was only slightly higher than in 2002. Furthermore, according to reports by various international organisations, not all the registered returnees remained in Croatia on a permanent basis. At least a third commuted regularly to Serbia and Montenegro. Between 30,000 and 50,000 Serbs were registered in Serbia and Montenegro as well as in Croatia, suggesting that they held options in both countries. Most of the 'real' returnees are older people.

Existing estimates of how many Serbs still intend to return vary widely and must be looked at critically. In 2002, for example, the

government commissioner for refugees in Serbia and Montenegro, who had a rather negative view on return to Croatia, stated that only 4% of the Serbian refugees from Croatia currently resident in Serbia and Montenegro wanted to return. (which corresponds to some 10,000 out of 250,000 registered refugees; Human Rights Watch 2003). According to other statistics, 40,000 property owners had applied for the reconstruction of their destroyed houses and so had pledged to return. However, it is unlikely that a full return will be sustainable and many returnees may simply lock up their homes and try to sell the property as soon as they have the opportunity. According to a more recent opinion poll from 2004, about 14% of the Serbian refugees in exile in Serbia and Montenegro intend to return to Croatia. It seems clear that if the number of returnees does not increase soon, and, more especially, if the percentage of younger people does not rise, the Serbian population will struggle to establish itself in many regions of Croatia over the next ten to twenty years. The extent to which Croatian settlers will remain in the region and integrate into Croatian society is also an open question.

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Appendix

Hrvatski sažetak

Pitanje vlasništva u poratnoj Hrvatskoj

Dinamika vlasničkih odnosa i etničkog sukoba na području Knina

Glavni predmet studije je dinamika vlasničkih odnosa i etničkog sukoba na području Knina u poratnoj Hrvatskoj. Etnički miješano područje Knina bilo je poprište etničkog sukoba između Hrvata i Srba u periodu od 1991. do 1995. godine. Srbi su tijekom rata ovo područje proglasili srpskim nacionalnim teritorijem, prognali hrvatske susjede i uništili ili zaposjeli njihove kuće. Kada je 1995. godine Hrvatska vojska povratila oblast Knina, skoro čitavo srpsko stanovništvo izbjeglo je s ovoga područja. Po završetku vojne operacije uspostavljeni su novi zakoni kojima je legalizirano zauzimanje srpskih kuća od strane novodoseljenih Hrvata, dok je veliki dio preostalih srpskih kuća uništen.

Polazeći od teorija pravne antropologije, vlasničkih odnosa i etničkih sukoba, studija se bavi procesom provedbe novih propisa koji se odnose na vlasništvo i povezuje ovaj proces s odnosima između različitih grupa na lokalnom području Knina po završetku rata. U analizi se ističe razlika između hrvatskih i srpskih povratnika kao i novodoseljenih Hrvata i posebna pažnja posvećuje se njihovom svakodnevnom iskustvu i problemima, te se na taj način pruža uvid u složenost procesa povratka Srba u Hrvatsku i u težinu situacije u kojoj se nalaze novodoseljeni Hrvati i mnogi lokalni hrvatski stanovnici. Studija osvjetljava logiku održanja nacionalizma na ovom prostoru, ali i postupnog pomirenja sukobljenih strana u poslijeratnom periodu.

Studija donosi detaljnu analizu odnosa između različitih grupa na lokalnoj razini i strategija koje se odnose na nastanjivanje i vlasništvo nad zemljom. Novodoseljeni Hrvati, koji su uslijed rata bili izmješteni iz vlastitih lokalnih zajednica, u većoj se mjeri izjašnjavaju u korist »nacionalnog« tumačenja prava na vlasništvo nego lokalno stanovništvo, koje svoje poglede na ovu problematiku smješta u alternativni referentni okvir, zasnovan na lokalnim vrijednostima i strukturama. Studija, nadalje, ukazuje na međusobni utjecaj nacionalnih, socijalnih i građanskih prava s jedne, i moći nacionalističkih stranaka sa druge strane.

Studija je podijeljena na deset poglavlja. U prvome poglavlju čitatelja se upoznaje sa središnjim problemom istraživanja i korištenim teorijskim i metodološkim pristupima.

U drugom poglavlju ocrtana je povijesna pozadina istraživanih lokacija, s težištem na vlasničkim, društvenim i etničkim odnosima na ovome području sve do kraja Drugoga svjetskog rata. Posebno je istaknuta činjenica da od kraja 17. stoljeća do socijalističkog perioda zemlja nije bila samo ekonomska osnova za život, već i najznačajniji element u oblikovanju društvenog identiteta ruralnih, patrilinearno organiziranih obitelji na području Knina. Pravoslavno i katoličko stanovništvo je po mnogo čemu činilo jedinstvenu društvenu skupinu. Demografski rast, monetarizacija i modernizacija do kojih je došlo u 19. stoljeću su, međutim, doveli do osiromašenja seljaka i usitnjavanja zemlje. U okviru procesa izgradnje nacija na početku 20. vijeka, kada su pravoslavni seljaci postali Srbi a katolički seljaci Hrvati, zemlja je, pored društvene i ekonomske, preuzela dodatnu funkciju nacionalnog teritorija. Politička polarizacija dvije nacionalne skupine dostigla je vrhunac u Drugome svjetskom ratu, u građanskom sukobu s promjenljivim nacionalnim lojalnostima.

U trećem se poglavlju težište analize pomiče na transformacije i kontinuitete u vlasničkim odnosima i društvenim i etničkim odnosima u razdoblju između 1945. i 1995. godine. Analiza obuhvaća socijalističko razdoblje, sa sažetim osvrtom na rat u devedesetim godinama. U vrijeme socijalizma, vlasništvo nad zemljom izgubilo je na značaju, s tim da je zemlja ipak zadržala svoju ekonomsku vrijednost i funkciju društvenog identiteta. Ekonomski značaj privatnih poljoprivrednih dobara uvećan je kroz uspješnu suradnju s poljoprivrednim zadrugama. Pojačana industrijalizacija i ekonomski razvoj su, međutim, povećali vrijednost drugih oblika vlasništva i društvenih statusa. Kuće su u odnosu na zemlju postale značajniji oblik imovine – što se jednako odnosi na privatne kuće, koje su prevladavale u ruralnim područjima, i na »društvene« stanove u gradovima. Na značaju su dobile i druge društvene pogodnosti, kao što su pravo na obrazovanje i zdravstvenu skrb. To je potaknulo migracije iz okolnih sela u grad Knin i uspostavljanje novog oblika društva u kojemu nacionalne i etničke razlike nisu igrale veliku ulogu. Etnička i nacionalna pripadnost nisu, međutim, nikad u potpunosti izgubile svoj utjecaj, što vrijedi i za sferu raspolaganja imovinom. Rastuća ekonomska i politička kriza u osamdesetim godinama i raspad Jugoslavije uvjetovali su porast značaja etničke i nacionalne pripadnosti. Tijekom rata su nacionalni identiteti, podstaknuti nasiljem, postali ključnima u rješavanju pitanja vlasničkoga prava i raspolaganja imovinom. Područje Knina pripadalo je takozvanoj Srpskoj Krajini i hrvatske kuće i zemlja su po protjerivanju vlasnika bili zaposjednuti ili uništeni.

Analiza je u četvrtom poglavlju proširena detaljnim uvidom u utjecaj nasilnih sukoba tijekom devedesetih godina na vlasničke odnose kod

različitih dijelova stanovništva. Stanovništvo se razlikovalo prije svega po nacionalnoj pripadnosti, ali se isto tako lokalni Hrvati izrazito razlikuju po mogućnostima i strategijama prema vlasništvu od Hrvata doseljenih iz Bosne. Za sve skupine je, nadalje, neophodno uzeti u obzir razlike u dobi. U ovom poglavlju se pokazuje da je odnos ljudi prema vlasništvu oblikovan pod utjecajem kulturnih ideologija, pravnih regulacija, društvenih odnosa i praksi vezanih za imovinu, koji se međusobno prožimaju i u kojima uloga nasilja predstavlja vrlo važan aspekt. Strategije koje se odnose na vlasništvo se ne zasnivaju samo na ekonomskim i nacionalnim mjerilima, već i u velikoj mjeri na emocionalnom odnosu prema kući i na kriterijima koji su preovladavali kroz povijest. Bitna razlika u strategijama prema vlasništvu odnosi se na različite poglede na srpsko privatno vlasništvo: dok lokalni Hrvati u većini priznaju i poštuju postojanje srpskog privatnog vlasništva, hrvatski doseljenici smatraju da im pravo na vlasništvo nad srpskim kućama daju rat i njihova nacionalnost.

Peto poglavlje ima za predmet sukobe oko raspolaganja kućama na području Knina u razdoblju nakon ponovne integracije ovoga područja u hrvatsku državu. Analiza se u ovome poglavlju zasniva na zapažanju da su novi propisi i programi za povratak Srba i povrat njihove imovine koji su usvojeni pod pritiskom međunarodne zajednice vrlo rijetko (ili nimalo) provođeni u praksu i pokušava objasniti razloge i posljedice takve situacije. U ovome poglavlju opisano je kako su lokalni moćnici ustrajavali na principima nacionalne solidarnosti i privatnih interesa i pronalazili brojne načine da izbjegnu provođenje donesenih propisa. Problem nedostatka vlasničke dokumentacije predstavljao je još jednu otežavajuću okolnost za povrat srpske imovine; ovaj problem imao je svoje korijene u socijalističkom i čak u pred-socijalističkom razdoblju. Zakonski spisi koji se odnose na nekadašnje društveno vlasništvo ukazuju na to da je ono zakonski tretirano drugačije od privatnog vlasništva, tako da je za njega bilo još teže dokazati pravo vlasništva. To, sa druge strane, pokazuje da su, usprkos nacionalnome okviru u kojemu je uređivano raspolaganje kućama i koji je prije svega Srbe učinio gubitnicima u sukobu oko imovine, i mnogi hrvatski doseljenici živjeli u nesigurnim okolnostima s obzirom na to da su u većoj mjeri ovisili o volji lokalnih moćnika da zaštite njihovu novostečenu imovinu nego što su se mogli pozivati na svoja građanska prava.

Šesto poglavlje je posvećeno pitanjima koja se odnose na vlasništvo nad zemljom i korištenje poljoprivrednoga zemljišta u devedesetim godinama 20. stoljeća. Za razliku od naseljavanja kuća, nacionalnost nije bila najvažniji faktor pri rješavanju pitanja raspolaganja zemljom. Važnija je u potonjem slučaju bila razlika između starosjedilaca i novodoseljenih – što je postalo ključni element politike na kojoj su insistirale međunarodne

organizacije. Većina poljoprivrednih aktivnosti svodila se na proizvodnju za vlastite potrebe i prvenstveno oslanjala na privatnu imovinu, društvene mreže i moralnu ekonomiju zasnovanu na srodničkim odnosima ili vezama unutar zajednice koje potiču iz socijalističkoga perioda. To je djelomično ujedinilo lokalne Hrvate i Srbe, za koje je simbolička vrijednost zemlje kao »domovine« često predstavljala prepreku za ekonomsku manipulaciju zemljom, tj. za njeno iznajmljivanje ili prodaju, čak i onda kada je vlasnici nisu obrađivali. Po ovoj povezanosti sa zemljom su se istovremeno razlikovali lokalni Hrvati od svojih novodoseljenih sunarodnjaka, koji su imali samo ograničena prava na korištenje zemlje i nisu osjećali snažnu emocionalnu vezu sa njom, te su unutar zajednice u biti predstavljali pridošlice i njihovo članstvo u njoj često im je osporavano. Kod poljoprivrednih poduzetnika koji su nastojali svoju djelatnost unaprijediti u odnosu na tradicionalne oblike poljoprivrede mogućnosti za uvođenje inovacija i uspostavljanje veza s međunarodnim organizacijama uvjetovale su zanemarivanje nacionalnih razlika i otvorile put ka ekonomskom uspjehu.

U sedmom poglavlju pokazuje se kako su u poratnom periodu zajednice ponovno upostavljane kroz vjerske proslave i obrede i analiziraju se načini kojima su ove proslave i rituali posredno i neposredno korišteni za izražavanje stavova prema pitanjima vlasništva. Kroz opis javnih proslava ukazuje se na tenziju između nacionalističke propagande i strategija svakodnevnoga života stanovnika kninskog područja. Istaknuta je činjenica da se u javnom govoru uvijek iznova ističe značaj etničkog konflikta uz pomoć simboličke konstrukcije Hrvatske kao nacionalne domovine i podsjećanja na rat, što je izrazito podsticano od strane Katoličke crkve. Diskurzivna konstrukcija nacionalnih zajednica i Hrvatske kao nacionalne domovine pomogla je legitimizaciji prisvajanja srpske imovine.

Analizirajući procese unutar zajednice i privatne izjave sudionika proslava, studija pokazuje kako da su nacionalna razgraničenja djelomice izgubila na značaju, dok je porastao značaj lokalnih identiteta. Dio lokalnog ruralnog stanovništva čak se počeo pridruživati svojim susjedima druge nacionalnosti na njihovim vjerskim proslavama i pozivao ih na vlastita slavlja, oslanjajući se na lokalne običaje koji su uspostavljeni tijekom desetljeća ili čak tijekom proteklih stoljeća. Proslave su tako postale ne samo pozornice nacionalnog, nego također mjesta gdje su lokalni Srbi i Hrvati unutar zajednice ponovno uspostavljali veze koje su nadilazile nacionalne granice. Povezanost između lokalnih Hrvata i Srba, koja se izražavala kroz zajedničke proslave, utjecala je i na sukobe oko imovine, jer su pomagale legitimizaciju srpskih zahtjeva za pravom na raspolaganje kućama i potvrđivale superiornost lokalnih Hrvata u odnosu na hrvatske doseljenike.

Osmo poglavlje donosi detaljnu analizu političkih elemenata kampanje za općinske izbore u svibnju 2001. godine, s posebnim osvrtom na utjecaj nacionalih stranaka u Kninu. Analiziraju se načini na koje su Katolička crkva, političke stranke i pojedini političari tretirali nacionalne i socijalne probleme nezaposlenosti, naseljavanja i povratka u Knin, kao i pitanje prisvajanja i povrata imovine. U vezi s tim se osvjetljavaju normativne i pragmatičke strategije različitih sudionika i problem ritualizacije politike. Zbog dugotrajnog pomanjkanja građanskih prava, koja predstavljaju osnovu za vlasnička prava i prava raspolaganja stambenim objektima, kao i zbog intenzivne propagande u kojoj su izjednačavana socijalna i nacionalna pitanja, stanovnici područja Knina – i Srbi i Hrvati – i dalje su glasali po nacionalnoj liniji.

Zaključno poglavlje predstavlja rekapitulaciju izloženih rezultata, dok se u epilogu iznosi pregled poratne situacije do kraja 2004. godine.

(Translation: Tanja Petrovic)

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Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia
General Editors: Chris Hann, Richard Rottenburg and Burkhard Schnepel

Chris Hann
"Not the Horse We Wanted!"
Postsocialism, Neoliberalism, and Eurasia

The title of this volume was supplied by a Hungarian villager, who made use of a popular idiom to express his disillusionment with the results of rural privatisation. Hann draws on his own ethnographic materials from Hungary and elsewhere to explore a wide range of topics, from political economy to questions of ethnic and religious identity and minority rights. Applying a broad definition of 'property relations', he argues that private ownership, multi-party politics and the proliferation of NGOs are poor compensation for a decline in the substantive material and moral conditions of citizenship. The spread of neoliberal economic principles, identity politics and new 'rights' agendas is not restricted to the postsocialist countries and the volume therefore employs a wider comparative framework. Underlying all the chapters (none of them previously published in this form in English) is an inclusive, eclectic approach to contemporary anthropology. Hann concludes by arguing that anthropologists of all traditions and theoretical persuasions need to renew their engagement with world history. To recognise the enduring unity of Eurasia is an important step towards overcoming the distortions of Eurocentrism.

Chris Hann is a Director of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/S.

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Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia
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Chris Hann, Mihály Sárkány, Peter Skalník (Eds.)
Studying Peoples in the People's Democracies
Socialist Era Anthropology in East-Central Europe

Under socialism the anthropological sciences developed under conflicting pressures: on the one hand Soviet influences, Marxist ideology and institutional changes, on the other the continued influence of national traditions and of the distinction between Volkskunde and Völkerkunde. The chapters bring out striking differences between the countries considered: the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary; they also draw attention to variation within countries, and between sub-branches of the discipline. Coverage extends from the Stalinist years to the end of the socialist era, and the topics range from folklore studies at home to fieldwork expeditions abroad.

Contributors: Chris Hann, Tamás Hofer, Wolfgang Jacobeit, Zbigniew Jasiewicz, Josef Kandert, Gabriela Kiliánová, Martina Krause, Klára Kuti, Petr Lozoviuk, Ute Mohrmann, Dagmar Neuland- Kitzerow, Karoline Noack, Juraj Podoba, Aleksander Posern-Zielinski, Mihály Sárkány, Peter Skalník, Olga Skalníková, Zofia Sokolewicz, Dietrich Treide, Ulrich van der Heyden, Bea Vidacs

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Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia
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Aimar Ventsel
Reindeer, *Rodina* and Reciprocity
Kinship and Property Relations in a Siberian Village

Kin-based social networks are the main focus of this study of a hunter-herder community in the northwest of the Republic of Sakha, Russian Federation. Aimar Ventsel gives a clear account of the formal organisational changes which have taken place since the demise of socialism and shows how informal relations help local people to cope with increased insecurity, both inside and outside formal structures. Documenting the strategies used to extend kinship, the author draws attention to their relevance for understanding the new system of property relations. While certain features are the products of a specific history and the local environment, the work will appeal to all scholars of Siberia and of postsocialist societies. It also contributes to the wider field of herder-hunter studies by showing how this combination of roles could persist throughout the Soviet era down to the present day.

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Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia
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Florian Stammler
Reindeer Nomads Meet the Market
Culture, Property and Globalisation at the 'End of the Land'

Pastoral nomads are often idealised for their independence, pride and freedom. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the reindeer herds of the Yamal-Nenets District have become the largest in the world and Nenets herders are renowned throughout the circumpolar world as self- reliant, independent pastoralists.
Stammler meticulously analyses relations between these reindeer nomads and their social, political and natural environments, exploring continuities and changes in their concepts of property and territory, as well as in their engagement with the developing market economy. Their high social adaptability is combined with a sense of belonging to their animals and their land by living out the nomadic *nenei ilngana*, or 'real lifestyle'.
Refuting essentialist notions of Nenets culture, the author explores the dialogue between reindeer nomads and the surrounding world and shows how global processes and concepts such as culture, property and market are expressed in local practices. He demonstrates how reindeer nomads move freely between subsistence and commodity production; state-owned and private reindeer; animism, communism, and market relations; and territorial defence and cooperative knowledge of the land. This study makes an original and significant contribution to wider debates about nomadic pastoralism and to anthropological studies of trade, barter, property and territoriality.

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Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia
General Editors: Chris Hann, Richard Rottenburg and Burkhard Schnepel

Joachim Otto Habeck
What it Means to be a Herdsman
The Practice and Image of Reindeer Husbandry among the Komi of Northern Russia

Habeck examines the practice of reindeer herding in the Russian Far North. His vivid account of the everyday life of Komi reindeer herders and their family members as they interact with their bosses, the town, the market and oil companies, reveals both the reach of their agency and its limitations. Through a meticulous analysis of each of these domains, Habeck shows how public discourse about reindeer husbandry as a traditional life-style derives from outside the Komi reindeer-herding communities, yet it has powerful effects on the local actors' ability to frame their own existence. He argues that the concept of tradition, despite its many positive connotations, places Komi reindeer herders in a „golden cage" which leaves no space for acknowledging their drive to innovation and flexibility.

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Frances Pine, Deema Kaneff, Haldis Haukanes (Eds.)
Memory, Politics and Religion
The Past Meets the Present in Europe

This collection of essays focuses on the haunting themes of religion, politics and remembering the past. Spanning Europe from Ukraine to Spain, the authors consider ways in which memory is used, at the local level, both to legitimate and to contest claims to power, status, and social and cultural capital. The result is a rich and innovative set of texts on memory and silence, on the place of the past in the present, and on the ideologies and practices which constitute memory at the local level.

Contributors: John R. Eidson, Paola Filippucci, Paloma Gay y Blasco, Haldis Haukanes, Deema Kaneff, Carolin Leutloff-Grandits, Paz Moreno, Susana Narotzky, Vlad Naumescu, Frances Pine, Giovanni Pizza, Tanya Richardson, Galia Valtchinova, Ina Vogelsang

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Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia
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Davide Torsello
Trust, Property and Social Change in a Southern Slovakian Village

Slovakia is a young and little studied country of the former socialist bloc. As in all postsocialist Eurasia, continuing transformations of everyday practices are still inadequately understood. This study combines anthropological and historical methods to search for alternative ways of "reading postsocialism" in the rural community. More specifically, it applies the notions of trust and property to map the outcomes of over a hundred years of turbulent social change, but not in the way that mainstream economists and political scientists have used these concepts. Trust and property acquire analytic significance only when contextualised into the practices and ideologies of the actors. This allows the observer to grasp the nuances of apparently ambivalent behaviour and "uttered mistrust" in other villagers and local institutions. Ambiguity veils subtle strategies for keeping up with the instability of the times and obtaining the best one can from the present.
By providing a theoretically grounded ethnographical account of historical transformation the book makes an original anthropological contribution to the classic theme of social change in rural societies, while at the same time engaging constructively with other social science approaches to postsocialism.

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