INTERPLAY OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL IDENTITIES A CASE STUDY OF SLOVENIAN-CROATIAN BORDERLAND

By
Anja Šter

Submitted to
Central European University
Nationalism Studies Program

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts

Advisor: Professor Szabolcs Pogonyi

Budapest, Hungary

2011

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Acknowledgements

1 INTRODUCTION

Since 1991 when Slovenia and Croatia, the successor states of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, declared their independence, the question of defining their border has come to the forefront of the countries' neighboring policies. As in former Yugoslavia only external borders of the Federation were defined without paying much attention to the internal borders of the republics, the border between Croatia and Slovenia has never been clearly drawn. Inability to set the border due to great incompatibilities in interpretations on where the border should be drawn has led to a series of disputes between Croatia and Slovenia regarding the exact position of the state border.

Even where the location of the borderline between Slovenia and Croatia was indisputable, the transformation of once soft and permeable internal boundaries between the republics into international borders significantly changed the conditions for the borderlands and their inhabitants. The increase of border surveillance modified everyday lives of the 'border people'. Social and economic cross-border interactions have diminished, people changed their shopping habits, and even visiting relatives across the border has become a scarce activity. As locals along the Slovenian Croatian border argue, "before we didn't even know where the border was located. Today we cannot go to our fields without an identity card."[1] Ivanka Lisac from Fara, a small settlement in the Slovenian side of the border along the river Kolpa, remembers how she once went out for a walk without taking her identity

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[1] A statement by Ivanka Lisac, who lives on the Slovenian side of the border in Fara. She remembers the period before the emergence of international border as " before we were all the same, and then the border divided us."

card. The border policemen[2] stopped her, and since she did not have any document with herself, she had to return home accompanied by the two policemen. Only when she showed them her passport, they left. Most of the interviewed people expressed dissatisfaction with the border police.

The establishment of the international border thus has not only affected the political situation between the both countries and the everyday practices of border communities but has also served as a tool in the attempts of political elites to construct "a national identity". As borders give legitimacy to the nation, state elites in Slovenia and Croatia (ab)use the state border to propagate nationhood and group identity. Nevertheless, the official discourse on nationhood promoted by the two nation-states is often very distant from the understandings of national identifications of the people living along the border.

In order to examine the identifications of the border communities, the present thesis focuses on the understandings of ethnic and national (self)identifications of people in the Upper Kolpa Valley[3] in contrast to the national rhetorics articulated by the spokesmen and activists of nationalist politics. The ethnographic study of everyday ethnicity in the micro-environment of the Upper Kolpa Valley is mainly concerned with the effect of the new state border on the identifications of 'border people'. Therefore, the study concentrates on the question how the new border regime affected cross-border interactions, of cooperation and conflict, of populations on both sides of the respective borderland.

It is argued that due to historical, geographical and economic determinants together with intense cross-border interactions people in the Upper Kolpa Valley do not perceive the border in the same way as do the politicians in the state centers. Their identifications do not fit into the fixed categorizations imposed by the state. However, these categories may become

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[2]   Policemen in the borderland who control the border have to be from other regions of Slovenia, they are never from the borderland.
[3]   A southern part of the Slovenian-Croatian state border.

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very influential in the light of today's decreasing of cross-border contacts. On the one hand, border people's notion of ethnicity and nationhood differ substantially from categorical and rigid conceptions of national identity and membership as defined 'from above'. On the other hand, as cross-border interactions are diminishing, essentialist understandings of nationhood are starting to manipulate (self)identifications of the borderlanders.

The present thesis is an attempt to show how categories of ethnic and national identities work in the field. The goal is to accentuate the discrepancy between nationalist politics 'from above' and the groups in whose name politicians claim to speak. The thesis does not aim to change existing theories on ethnicity and nationhood, but seeks to demonstrate how scholarly analysis of ethnicity have too often studied ethnic groups as bounded and substantive units of social world4. In this respect, it is argued that ethnicity should not be approached by invoking the language of bounded groups but should be examined through a wide range of forms and practices. In order to detect how ethnicity and nationhood are performed in the Upper Kolpa Valley, the present study examines groups in their everyday settings as categories of analysis.

The first chapter gives a theoretical framework of how to study borderlands. It defines main concepts, such as frontiers, boundaries, borders and borderlands by putting them in a comparative perspective. The chapter serves as a basis for classifying the Upper Kolpa Valley borderland in relation to a various types of borderlands.

The second chapter defines the concepts of nationhood and ethnicity. It adopts Brubaker's analytical approach to the study of ethnicity and nationhood and Barth's understanding of identity formation as a product of boundary construction.

The third chapter specifies the Upper Kolpa Valley by giving a historical overview of

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4   Following Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalist politics and everyday ethnicity in a Transylvanian town* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

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the area. In order to understand the region better, the chapter provides with its geographical, economic and linguistic determinants that have enabled intense social, cultural and economic cross-border interactions.

In the forth chapter the thesis turns to the empirical study of the nationalist politics 'from above'. As it is argued that the mainstream media reproduce the ideology of the dominant political discourse, the rhetorics of nationalist politics will be examined through a discourse analysis of the leading Slovenian and Croatian media. Initially, the idea was to analyze both national and local press. As there are no significant or influential local newspapers in the region, the analysis examined only the national media. Since most of the interviewed subjects in the Upper Kolpa Valley[5] on the Slovenian side argue that they read one of the leading Slovenian daily newspapers, the analysis focuses on the representations in Delo and Dnevnik. Moreover, although many people on both sides of the border follow Slovenian as well as Croatian media, most people on the Croatian side of the borderland read Croatian press. In this respect, the study focuses on the Jutarnji list and Vecerni list. Since the analysis of everyday reports on the construction of identity in the studied newspapers would be too broad and too demanding, the present media discourse analysis focuses on the period from 17 December until 24 December 2008. This was the time when the border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia finally erupted into the open following Slovenia blockade of the Croatian negotiations with the European Union. As border dispute serves political elites in both countries as a tool in evoking the concepts of nationhood and national belonging, the analysis will shed light on the question how 'national identity' is constructed by political elites of both states. However, as this was the time of intense and heated relations between the neighboring countries, the representations of Croatian and Slovenian nationhood may be

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[5]   The empirical study in the Upper Kolpa Valley was conducted in April, the sample consists of twenty two
       interviews with people from both sides of the border.

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partial. In order to give a more unbiased view of the (re)production of national identity by the centers of the respective nation-states, the analysis also focuses on the events from 11 September until 25 September 2009, when the first steps towards resolving the dispute were made.

Finally, the fifth chapter analyses the understandings of ethnic and national (self)identifications of people in the Upper Kolpa Valley. By conducting qualitative interviews with people living in both sides of the borderland (both those belonging to the constituent nation as well as members of the minority) the thesis explores the processes in which identities are built up and negotiated through individual, group narratives and everyday practices within a complex set of institutional arrangements.

The last chapter summarizes the main findings of the study of nationalist politics 'from above' and 'everyday ethnicity' in the Upper Kolpa Valley, and poses relevant questions for future research. As the thesis argues, the rhetoric of state nationalism that views the border as a site of two separate cross-border national cultures is inconsistent with the reality of the border locality. The local populations of both sides of the Slovenian-Croatian border do not interpret ethnicity and nationhood in the same way as do the politicians in the state centers. In their everyday practices ethnicity does not matter. As the ethnographic study of the Upper Kolpa Valley has shown, peoples' (self)identifications do not fit into the fixed categorizations imposed by the state that enforces the perception of clearly bounded cultural and national difference between Slovenes and Croats.

2   BORDERS IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Contemporary national borders appear on maps in precise forms as lines that demarcate the jurisdiction of one state over the other. In most cases people take them for granted, as if they have always existed. Nevertheless, all borders were, at least initially, constructed in the heads of politicians, lawyers and intellectuals. As borders raise fundamental questions concerning citizenship, identity, nationhood, political loyalty, exclusion and inclusion, their drawing is central for the ordering of society. The mapping of borders thus symbolizes a collective attempt by state elites to use politically imposed frontiers to give legitimacy to the nation by establishing a worldwide system of clear-cut territorial jurisdictions. In this respect, "national borders are political constructs, projections of territorial power"[6] that demarcate distinct political communities.

When examining borders there is a lack of conceptual consensus in the social sciences arising from differences in the use of terms boundary, border, and frontier. Boundary is often used in diplomatic discussions on the precise location of borders, but it also has a more general meaning as the line of demarcation or delimitation between different peoples and cultures.[7] As Wilson and Donnan claim, boundaries are the "expression of the spatial limits of state power, the manifestations of political control, and indicators of changes in political power between states."[8] The term border usually refers to a zone, a rather narrow one, though it can also mean a line of demarcation. According to Anderson, frontier is the word with the widest meaning, although it originally denoted the territorial expansion of nations or

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[6]   Michiel Baud and Willem Van Schendel, "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands," *Journal of World History* 8, no. 2 (October 1, 1997): 211.

[7]   Ibid., 213.

[8]   Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, *Borders: frontiers of identity, nation and state* (Berg, 1999), 46.

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civilizations into 'empty' areas. In Turner's famous classic *The Frontier in American History,* frontier is used to refer to the moving zone of settlement in the interior of the continent. In contemporary use, it addresses the "precise line at which jurisdictions meet, usually demarcated and controlled by customs, police and military personnel."[9]

As one can see, although social scientists in various disciplines claim precision, all three terms sometimes pass as synonyms and other times identify completely different phenomena. Further conceptual confusion comes from the use of the terms in different languages. Within the anglophone world, scholars in the United States tend to use the term frontier, as the term 'border' normally means international frontier, while the British prefer the terms boundary and border. French have four words, frontière, front, limite, marche, with only the first being applied to international frontiers.[10] Spanish have three – frontera, marca, limite – and German, along with many European languages, use only one term – Grenze. In this respect, scholars have used different terms to refer to the same phenomena.

In his book *Frontiers,* Malcolm Anderson uses the term to identify the international boundary, while boundary is used to denote "the frontiers of political and administrative authorities below state level."[11] According to him, frontiers have four dimensions. First, they are instruments of state policy. By enforcing border control and promoting national symbols on frontiers states define who is included and who excluded from its territory. Nevertheless, the policies and practices of governments are limited by the degree of *de facto* control they have over the state frontier. Moreover, frontiers are markers of identity, usually national identity, although they identify a range of different, sometimes contradictory identifications, and a term of discourse. The meanings people ascribe to frontiers change over time, in the

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[9]   Malcolm Anderson, *Frontiers: territory and state formation in the modern world* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 9.
[10]   Ibid., 10.
[11]   Ibid., 10.

context of the political event, and respective statuses and identities of the people concerned.[12] The novelty of Anderson's work is his emphasis on the role of international borders/ frontiers in shaping identities, such as ethnic, local, religious and linguistic, although he never gives a description of territorial depth to a frontier. Nevertheless, in the academic discussions in anthropology, political science, geography, history, law and sociology, the term frontier has different meanings according to the theoretical approach adopted.

In political geography, frontiers are used to refer to zones which mark either the political division between two countries or between the settled and uninhabited areas within countries.[13] In the same manner, geographers define boundaries as the lines which demarcate state territory. Although there is an apparent conceptual overlapping, Prescott warns in his work on *Political Frontiers and Boundaries* that the terms frontier and boundary should never be used as synonyms, going on to define border as the "adjacent areas which fringe the boundary" and borderland as "transition zone within which the boundary lies".[14]

For the purposes of this thesis we use the term *border* for the political divides that were the result of state building. Following Anderson, borders are both markers of the actual power that states wielded over their own territories as well as markers of identities. The often complex relationship between the state and its members is best reflected in marginal areas such as borderlands. Sahlins argues that even after a border was created, the state's power in the borderland has in some cases remained restricted and unstable. Members of local society try to use state institutions to their own ends and sometimes play off one state against another.[15] As the key focus of this thesis is Slovenian Croatian borderland along the river Kolpa, the concept of *borderland* is of central importance for our study. Although usually

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[12]   Ibid., 2-3. And Donnan and Wilson, *Borders., 56-58.*
[13]   John Robert Victor Prescott, *Political frontiers and boundaries* (Unwin Hyman, 1990), 36.
[14]   Ibid., 12.
[15]   Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: the making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (University of California Press, 1991), 276.

borderland is understood as a region in one nation that is significantly affected by the international border, this thesis takes a cross-border perspective, in which the region on both sides of a state border is applied as the unit of analysis. The borderland thus should not be regarded as an analytically empty transitional zone, but as a "site of creative cultural production that requires investigation."[16] In this respect, borderlands do not address only the physical spaces at the conjunction of national borders, but also the sites where distinct cultures come together in interaction without losing their differences.[17] It depends upon the character of the border, whether disputed or peaceful, where the borderlands are located. Well-defended or uncontroversial, long established and uncontested borders will more likely lead to a diminished sense of borderland in their hinterland, while borders where there exist irredentist claims or where various ethnic, religious or linguistic groups meet, will more likely extend in lands that are actually quite distant from the borderline.[18]

Nevertheless, although some borders delineate different cultures, rarely does a border constitute an unambiguous dividing line between different ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic groups. Indeed, it is more apparent that the division of such groups is a consequence of a border: communities which once shared a dialect or a language, or same ethnic background have changed significantly after the separation by the border. Thus, as borders create political, social and cultural distinctions, they also encapsulate new networks and systems of interaction which distinguish the borderland from the inland and determine the development of the region. These new social networks that reach across the border are the focal point of our analysis. In this respect, the study of Slovenian Croatian borderland moves

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[16]   Renato Rosaldo, "Ideology, Place, and People without Culture," *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (February 1, 1988): 77-87. and Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 207-8.

[17]   Robert R. Alvarez and George A. Collier, "The Long Haul in Mexican Trucking: Traversing the Borderlands of the North and the South," *American Ethnologist* 21, no. 3 (1994): 607.

[18]   David Laven and Timothy Baycroft, "Border regions and identity.," *European Review of History* 15, no. 3 (June 2008): 256.

from the state-centered approaches that see borders as unchanging and unproblematic phenomena to the perspective from the borderland itself, which assigns an active role to the borderlands and their population. Therefore, the thesis is mainly concerned with the study of everyday interactions between people from both sides of the border.

2.1 BORDERLANDS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Relations across international borders between the populations which they separate vary significantly. The more closed the frontier is, the more it serves as a practical and symbolic boundary and the more states try to impose stricter control of the border in order to preserve their power.[19] The most illustrious twentieth-century examples of such rigid frontiers are the imposed borders between Israel and its Arab neighbors, the line separating Greek and Turkish Cyprus, the Kashmir border region between India and Pakistan, the Iron Curtain and the line separating the two Koreas, just to name some. In these cases, populations across the borders are alienated from one another, exchanges are kept to a minimum and violence can erupt.[20] These territorial conflicts are mainly grounded on ideologies which argue for a deep relationship of their populations to the area they inhabit. Although they appeal to history for their justification, they are based on rather tenuous historical evidence. Nevertheless, these territorial ideologies become powerful instruments of political mobilization in local situations.[21] Similar to Anderson's classification, Martinez, who distinguished four models of borderland interaction, has called this *alienated borderlands* in which cross-border interchange is practically nonexistent due to the animosity between the two sides of the

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[19]   Anderson, *Frontiers*. 6.
[20]   Ibid.
[21]   Ibid., 35.

border.[22] The second in his categorization of borderlands are *coexistent borderlands* in which people on both sides have minimal interaction despite the unfriendly relations between the two states. The third model is that of *interdependent borderlands* in which people across the border live symbiotically, having a considerable flow of economic and cultural exchange. Finally, when all barriers to human and trade movement are diminished, we talk of *integrated borderlands.[23]* People on both sides speak the same language, or at least mutually comprehensive ones, economic and social life has melded together so that we can speak of merged regions. Nevertheless, open and easily crossed borders remain barriers for important everyday practices, such as for legal systems, taxation, access to public services, flags, etc.[24] In most integrated borderlands, as it is the case with the Slovenian Croatian borderland, local and regional authorities participate in joint trans-border activities, though some of these promote genuine joint actions while others do not. It is generally acknowledged that frontiers in the highly developed regions have become more permeable and less prone to be regarded as the defensive lines of cultural and social identities.

These models are ideal types that can only serve as heuristic tools in determining borderlands, having in mind that benefits of cross-border interaction are often distributed unequally among the borderland population. Most of the borders have become economic divides, where income, employment, and life opportunities vary importantly. Moreover, there is a huge gap between the rhetoric of border maintenance and everyday life of people in borderlands. On the one hand, states try to impose national culture on borderland populations, and on the other hand, they regard borderlands as peripheral displaced areas. Paradoxically, at the same time political elites view borderlands as sources of nation building ideologies as

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[22] Óscar Jáquez Martínez, *Border people: life and society in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands* (University of Arizona Press, 1994), 5-10.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Anderson, *Frontiers*., 6.

well as peripheral parts of the nation's political life. As a consequence, people in borderlands often experience ambiguous identities as they are both pushed away from national centers and pulled in by the state centers across their borderline. Moreover, due to the economic, cultural and linguistic factors which pull them in at least two directions, many of the people living in borderlands may display only a weak identification with the nation-state in which they reside.

In all, the role and significance of borderlands change over time as the meaning of borders alter. Baud and Schendel distinguish five stages in the life cycle of borders.[25] The *infant borderlands* are those that exist just after the borderline has been drawn. Preexisting social and economic networks are still in place, and people on both sides of the border share close kinship links. National identities of the people are undefined, and people can choose on which side of the border to live in future. In the first stage of the cycle the border is a potentiality rather than a social reality. The *adolescent borderlands* have already become an undeniable reality although people remember the period before the border existed. Old networks have still not disintegrated but economic and social exchange has already begun to decrease. In the *adult borderland* stage the border has become a firm social reality. Cross-border and kin relations become scarcer and are increasingly viewed as problematic, social networks follow the contours of the border. The next stage is *declining borderlands*. These are the result of the border losing its importance. New cross- or supra-border networks emerge that are no longer seen as a threat to the nation-state. Finally, when the border is abolished and the physical barriers between the two sides of the border are removed, we talk of *defunct borderlands*. Border-defined networks gradually fall apart and are replaced by new

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[25] Baud and Schendel, "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands.", 223.

ones regardless of the old division.[26]

2.2 IDENTITY AT THE BORDERS

In terms of language, ethnicity and culture, some theorists of borderlands have tried to make a distinction between *natural* and *unnatural* borders.[27] Although we believe that such a classification is impossible to be made since differences in ethnicity or culture are often manipulated by political elites in the service of nationalist ideology, these scholars perceive border to be natural if it separates groups that differ clearly with respect to language, ethnicity, or culture. The sharpness of the differences can also be a consequence of the stage the border has reached in its life cycle, meaning when a border is established the state imposes strict rules regarding the use of official language or other policies. Thus, in time when the border loses its hardness, such as in the case of the European countries' integration into the EU, the differences become less significant and cross-border networks increase.

Borders that do not coincide clearly with ethnic or cultural divides but cut through a fairly homogeneous population are, according to some theorists called *unnatural* borders. By adopting new policies with regard to language, settlement, and culture, the states try to impose new cultural divides that coincide with the border. Symbols of national unity are (ab)used in order to legitimize the border and highlight the differences between the two sides. Despite the attempt of the state-center authorities to impose a national culture on borderland populations, many borderlanders have developed their own 'creole' or 'syncretic' border culture.[28] Governments have often resisted such border cultures by enforcing strict policies –

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[26] Ibid., 223-225.
[27] Ibid., 231.
[28] Ibid., 234.

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for example, prohibiting the use of the local language in communications with state authorities – and cultural projects that aim to replace border culture by a more 'civilized' national one. In these efforts the media play an important role in conveying national identity on the borderland people by invoking national stereotypes, myths and symbols.

The relationship between the national identity enforced by the state and a variety of identifications of borderland people on both sides of the frontier can best be examined at the local level in real experiences of the borderland populations, from the so called bottom-up perspective. For Wilson, the potential conflict/differences within borderlands are caused by the fact that a state's projection of its 'own' national culture may be at odds with the lived experiences of borderland populations.[29] By studying both sides of the border as a starting point for the research, this thesis tries to understand the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of Slovenian Croatian borderland, and the particular transformation its people have experienced since 1991. In this respect, it will be of key importance to examine the relationship between the two cross-border communities. As there is quite a high level of cross-border cultural continuity still present, people identify much more with those from across the border than with the individuals from elsewhere who share the same citizenship.

Nevertheless, one has to keep in mind that borders are the best examples of how mental constructs of some can become social realities. Once agreed at diplomatic meetings and neatly drawn on a map, borders become a real fact for the people living near them. Whatever their impact may be, borders become part of the perception and mental map of the borderlanders.[30]

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[29] Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan, *Border identities: nation and state at international frontiers* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). and Laven and Baycroft, "Border regions and identity.", 262.
[30] Baud and Schendel, "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands.", 242.

3 NATIONHOOD AND EVERYDAY ETHNICITY

As the scholarship has often taken the top-down approach to the formation of nations and states in which all power flows from the center, this thesis primarily focuses on the micro study of everyday experiences of communities living in the Upper Kolpa valley borderland. It examines the processes of nation-building and ethnicity from the viewpoint of local people, their narratives and expressions of identity. Rather than focusing on the rhetoric of national governments, the thesis looks at the social realities provoked by them.

By focusing on 'everyday ethnicity'[31] the thesis adopts Brubaker's analytical approach to the study of ethnicity and nationhood which does not conceptualize the constructs in an essentialist and substantialist way as things and entities in the world, but in terms of practical categories, cognitive schemas, situated actions, organizational routines and discursive frames.[32] This means examining not the group as an entity, but groupness as a "contextually fluctuating conceptual variable."[33] This enables researchers to treat groupness as an event and to focus on processes and relations rather than bounded substances, providing a fuller picture of a construction of various identifications in the borderlands. It gives an opportunity to study the degree of groupness in a particular setting, to ask how people do things with categories and to examine the politics of categories, both from above and from below. Indeed, by continuously distinguishing between categories and groups, one can "problematize rather than presume the relation between them."[34] In short, a focus on categories can elucidate "multifarious ways in which ethnicity, race, and nationhood can exist and 'work' without the

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[31] The term is borrowed from Rogers Brubaker.
[32] Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without groups* (Harvard University Press, 2004), 11.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 12.

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existence of ethnic groups as substantial entities."[35] These cognitive perspectives can explain how and why groupness emerges in some situations while in others it remains latent. Following Brubaker, the main task of this thesis is not to show that ethnicity and nationhood are constructed, but how they are constructed.[36]

In this respect, the study of 'everyday ethnicity' is a critique of the constructivist view which, in spite of acknowledging that ethnicity is arbitrarily created by a group of people in a particular context, tends to conceive groups as real substantial entities in the world. In so doing, scholars uncritically reproduce ethnopolitical rhetoric by 'reinforcing the reification' of ethnic groups.[37] Nevertheless, the thesis does not undermine the constructivist view but rather aims to renew it. The thrust of the theoretical base still relies on the constructivist conceptions of ethnicity, identity and nationhood.

In contrast to the primordialist and perrenialist understandings of ethnicity and identity as essential and natural facts that have always existed throughout human history, constructivists emphasize that ethnic identity is a process of cultural or social construction of differentiation between specific groups. In his influential book, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Barth[38] defines an approach to the study of ethnicity which focuses on the on-going negotiations of boundaries between groups of people. He departs from the anthropological notions of cultures as bounded entities, and ethnicity as primordialist bonds, by replacing them with a focus on the interface between groups. As ethnic groups are not groups formed on the basis of a shared culture, but rather on the basis of cultural differences, people identify themselves through relational processes of inclusion and exclusion. In this respect, the critical focus of analysis becomes the "ethnic boundary that defines the group,

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[35] Ibid., 13.
[36] Brubaker, *Nationalist politics and everyday ethnicity in a Transylvanian town*.
[37] Ibid., 10.
[38] Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic groups and boundaries: the social organization of culture difference* (Waveland Press, 1998).

not the cultural stuff that it encloses."[39]

As individuals may strategically manipulate their cultural identity by emphasizing or underplaying it according to the context, one should not look at ethnic groups in terms of a long list of *objectively* identified cultural attributes, but as categories in which membership is based on self-ascription and ascription by the others.[40] People may cross the boundaries between groups if they find it beneficial to do so, and may continue regular relations across them. Yet this does not affect the durability and stability of the boundaries themselves. Cultural differences are thus significant only when they are socially effective, as an organizational device for articulating social relations.[41] In other words, as long as individuals themselves claim membership in a particular ethnic category, and are seen as such by others, they are a part of that group however that shared culture might be named. Nevertheless, Jenkins emphasizes that it is important to distinguish between two distinct sources of ascription, *group identification* and *social categorization.* "The first occurs *inside* the … boundary, the second *outside* and across it."[42] In this respect Jenkins is critical of Barth since he does not consider that members of one group can impose their categorization on the members of another group.

Withal, this thesis looks at the identity formation as a product of boundary construction. Social boundaries thus do not have just two sides, but are characterized by an interface line between inside and outside, as well as by an identity line between *us* and *them*. Wallman notes that the "*interface element* marks a change in what goes on while the *identity element* marks the significance given to that change and expresses the participants' relation to

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[39] Ibid., 15.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking ethnicity: arguments and explorations* (SAGE, 1997), 23

it."[43] Any social boundary, she argues, must be analyzed as a consequence of possible relationships between identity and interface on both sides of itself. Therefore, as also Cohen claims, the best place to study everyday practices of exclusion and inclusion is at the community's boundary.[44] By focusing on interactions between groups on both sides of the boundary one can examine what the boundary means to people, more specifically which meaning they ascribe to the boundary. Although international borders are precisely drawn in most of the cases, it does not mean that they coincide with the perception of boundaries of the communities along the border. As some might see the border as invisible, to others it may represent a key factor in defining their identity.

The relational construction of national similarities and differences is even more apparent in border regions, or at least it is presumed to be. As many theorists[45] argue, borders bring up a sense of inherent duality and advance a "process of mirror imaging. They are the sites where the construction of otherness constantly takes place on both sides of the border.[46] Even in open interdependent borders where cross-border interactions are high, the inter-group boundaries exist. The task of this thesis, therefore, is to uncover these boundaries and the meanings they are given. The key questions are to what extent these symbolic boundaries created among the population on both sides of the border shape everyday life of people on both sides of the Slovenian Croatian border, and how they affect their ethnic and national identifications.

Barth's theory also contributes to the respective analysis as he argues that in most cases the 'cultural differentiae' does not come from a locally organized context but a pre-established 'cultural contrast' is brought into a pre-established social system of inter-ethnic

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[43] Sandra Wallman, *Ethnicity at work* (Macmillan, 1979), 207.
[44] Anthony Paul Cohen, *The symbolic construction of community* (E. Horwood, 1985).
[45] Borneman, Berdahl, Lofgren, etc.
[46] Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár, "THE STUDY OF BOUNDARIES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES.," Annual Review of Sociology 28, no. 1 (2002): 184.

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relations.[47] From this perspective, a study of ethnopolitical rhetoric of nationalist politics 'from above' will shed some light on the divergence between people's understanding of ethnicity and nationhood in borderlands and the interests of politicians, who may be living off, and for politics.

Breuilly and Brass[48] also stress the importance of the political elites in the process of (de)constructing ethnicity and nationalism. On the other hand, Smith[49] identifies ethno-symbolic characteristics as fundamental in the construction of modern nations. He argues that "what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular living past has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias."[50] Although these theories contribute to the understanding of the construction of ethnicity and nationhood, they are insufficient in explaining how ethnicity and nationhood actually work in the everyday life of ordinary people. Moreover, as criticized before, they take discrete and bounded groups as categories of analysis instead of analyzing processes in which they develop. For Michael Billig notions of nationhood are deeply embedded in contemporary ways of thinking[51] and acting in social life. Despite postmodern discourses, Billig argues that nation-states continue to exist and are daily reproduced in banal ways, through everyday beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices. According to him, people never forget their nationhood. What is more, banal nationalism comprises commonsense, everyday practices, i.e. ways of thinking and doing things. I believe this argument is rather pretentious since we "cannot assume that for most people national identification - when it exists - excludes or is always or ever superior to the

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[47] Ibid., 30.
[48] John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester University Press, 1993). Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (Sage, 1991).
[49] Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and memories of the nation* (Oxford University Press, 1999).
[50] Ibid.
[51] Michael Billig, *Banal nationalism* (SAGE, 1995), 11.

remainder of the set of identifications which constitute the social being."[52] One should rather focus on the ways in which national identity and ethnicity play an important role in the course of the daily routine of ordinary people.

Thus, neither a study of the role that the political elites play in the construction of nationhood, nor a study of the everyday, less visible forms of nationhood, can alone contribute to the processes in which nationhood and ethnicity are expressed, enacted and manifested by people. To understand these phenomena best, one needs to study them from a microanalytical, as well as macroanalytical perspective. As Hobsbawm argues, although nationhood and ethnicity are essentially constructed from above, they "cannot be understood unless also analyzed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist."[53]

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[52] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 11.

[53] Ibid., 10.

4 SLOVENIAN CROATIAN BORDERLAND IN THE UPPER KOLPA VALLEY

4.1 THE BORDERLAND IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Before moving onto the analyze of the Slovenian Croatian borderland, one must first categorize the studied borderland. As explained in the chapter on various borderlands, any classification of borders is ideal and different stages of development do not necessarily follow one upon another in an unilinear mode, nor do all borders pass through all stages. In the case of Slovenian Croatian borderland characteristics of the *adolescent* as well as of an *adult borderland* can be found. The border has become a firm social reality, deeply embedded in the minds of those who live in the borderland. Yet many people still remember the period before the border existed and often one can sense their nostalgic view of the previous times. Although cross-border social and kin relations continue to exist, they have been significantly influenced by the existence of the new border. Old cross-border networks have not yet disintegrated, but they have become much scarcer and no longer represent a central experience of the border communities. Every-day life of borderlanders have adjusted to the rules of the border. People have come to accept the fact that if they want to visit their friends across the border they have to pass the border control, moreover if they want to work on their fields, they always have to carry their identity cards with them.

In terms of cross-border relations Slovenian-Croatian borderland can be regarded as an *integrated borderland*. People in this region speak the same dialect on both sides of the border, at least the older generations, while people born after the establishment of the border have not acquired this dialect, yet they can understand each other. As all models are ideal, Slovenian-Croatian borderland does not follow all of the characteristics of integrated borderlands. While economic and social life had been melded together before 1991, it has

significantly diminished after the existence of the border. In this respect, one can talk more of *interdependent borderlands* in which people across the border live symbiotically, having a *considerable* flow of economic and cultural exchange.

The analysis of Slovenian Croatian borderland examines how and if the political, economic and cultural networks overlap in the respective borderland. When looking at borderland politics, we can distinguish three types of borderlands, quiet, unruly and rebellious with Slovenian Croatian borderland falling into the first category. The state, regional authorities and local population operate rather homogeneously in Slovenian Croatian borderland along the river Kolpa without any strong claims to redrawing the border. Populations on both sides of the border continue their cross border economic and commercial exchanges though in a much lesser degree than before the creation of the border. This is in part due to the change of the political and economic systems from socialism to capitalism which led to the shutting of most factories in the region. On the other hand local communities are forced to interact economically as the both governments have failed to integrate the border economy in their larger national economy. These exchanges have been mainly based on pre-existing networks of kinship, friendship, and entrepreneurial partnership that cross the border.

In terms of language, ethnicity and culture, border between Slovenia and Croatia does not coincide clearly with ethnic or cultural divides but cuts through a fairly homogeneous population. By adopting new policies with regard to language, schooling and settlement, the states try to impose new cultural divides that coincide with the border. Symbols of national unity at the border crossings and constant police control denote the limits of one territorial jurisdiction over another. Despite the attempt of the state-center authorities to impose a national culture on borderland populations, people in the respective borderland have

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developed their own 'creole' or 'syncretic' border culture.[54] When different languages meet, a border lingua franca comes into existence,[55] people may visit each others' religious festivals or other festivities. In the case of Slovenian Croatian borderland, these interethnic relations based on friendship and kinship are even more frequent than the cross-border economic exchanges, moreover often they are a basis for commercial or economic interexchange.

As aforementioned, the border is rarely drawn between clearly distinguishable groups. Indeed, the division along cultural, ethnic, religious, or linguistic lines between the cross-border communities often arises as a consequence of the mapping of a border. In this respect, Slovenian Croatian border divides people living on both sides, who have had a long history of cultural and social contact, but simultaneously unites them in their experience of living close to the border and depending on it. This paradoxical character of separation and unity of borders challenges the nation building ideologies putting into question the territoriality to which modern states lay claim. Put it differently, a study of borderlands invites us to rethink the link between territory, ethnicity and nation. Therefore, to understand people's perception of nationhood and ethnicity in Slovenian Croatian borderland one should also study the political, economic, and cultural dynamics of the region over time.

4.2 A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In order to adequately assess the historical and political context of the current social dynamics in the borderland this thesis provides a brief historical review of the evolution of the Slovenian Croatian borderland in the Upper Kolpa Valley.

The Slovenian Croatian border was already established at the turn of the twelfth into the thirteenth century which made it one of the oldest European borders, and not just in this

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[54] Baud and Schendel, "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands." 234.
[55] Sahlins, *Boundaries.,*166-76.

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part of Europe.[56] From that time on, its administrative and political role has changed, as well as its importance. Even so, for the most time it remained stable and one of the least changing borders within the wider European context.[57] Its alterations occurred due to the wealthy and economically powerful feudal families who held estates on both sides of the border. Until 1527 the border divided the Holy Roman Empire and the Hungarian-Croatian state union, and from then until 1918 it separated political-territorial units within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

In this regard, the areas along Slovenian-Croatian border are known as a historical border region due to the Ottoman expansion to Europe in late medieval times. Many territories of Croatia, Slavonia, Hungary and Romania were turned into a buffer zone, named as the Military Border, which protected the Austrian Empire from the danger of Turkish invasion. The Military Border ("Militargrenze" in German, and "Vojna Krajina" in Croatian) served its purposes from around 1527 to 1881. Although the territory of Slovenia was at that time a part of Austrian lands and had no direct connection to the Military Border, the upper Kolpa valley and Bela Krajina played an important role in the protection of inner Slovenian (i.e. Austrian) territories. There were fortifications in Poljane, Pobrezje and Kostel with the latter being extended into a mighty fortress which was conquered by the Turks only once. The role of a second buffer zone along today's Croatian border exposed to frequent Turkish raids turned once medieval cities and market towns into rural settlements.[58] Bad accessibility caused by traffic isolation and distance from the major urban centers together with the negative historical legacy led to underdevelopment, depopulation and other negative trends in

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[56] Dušan Bilandžić and Sveučilište u Zagrebu, *Croatia between war and independence* (The University of Zagreb and OKC Zagreb, 1991), 1-91

[57] Milan Bufon, "Theory and practice in Central European border areas: the slovenian example," *Croatia - A New European State□: (Proceedings of the symposium held in Zagreb and Čakovec, September 22-25, 1993)*, no. 1993/1994 (n.d.): 173-182.

[58] Stanko Pelc, "Slovene-Croatian border as past, present and future generator of marginalization," in *Globalized Europe* (Založba Annales□: Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko, 2005), 278

the social and economic development of certain border areas. Nonetheless, improved mobility of population and commuting to work has improved the situation and, thus, prevented total depopulation of geographically most unfavorable areas.

Within the Austrian-Hungarian Empire current Slovenian-Croatian borderline became a border between Austrian and Hungarian part of the Empire. With the decay of the Empire it continued to be an inner administrative border, first in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, then in Yugoslavia. After World War II it represented a border between two federative republics with the right of self-determination, which in turn led to the independence of Slovenia and Croatia in 1991. The border, thus, became a border of two independent nations and in May 2004 evolved into a Schengen border between enlarged EU and a non-EU state. Nevertheless, this border has always had an integrating role in both social and economic terms, for both countries in the Yugoslav times belonged to the same socio-political and economic system. Although each side was regulated by the politics and laws of the respective republics, these have in many ways followed the federal laws. After the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, the border acquired new significance. Many aspects of the previous unity were either weakened or abandoned. In efforts to examine the matters essential to the people on both sides of the border a better comprehension of their existing socio-geographic and economic determination is needed.

4.3 GEOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS

Geographically the studied Upper Kolpa valley[59] borderland lies approximately in the middle of the 546 km long borderline between Slovenia and Croatia. From the west to the

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[59] Or in Croatian Čabranka - Kupa valley: the river Kolpa is in Croatian language called Kupa

east and northeast the border starts in the Piran bay, where the delimitation is still not defined. Since there was no maritime border between the former Yugoslav republics, Piran bay represents the most polemically contested border dispute between the two states. From the bay the borderline follows the river Dragonja, cuts the hilly hinterland of Slovenian part of Istria and mounts Dinaric karst plateaus of south-western Slovenia.[60] Between Babno Polje on Slovenian side and Prezid in Croatia the borderline starts to sweep down to the valley of Čabranka and then Kolpa. Here the borderland becomes more populated, although still not very densely. Particularly in the wider parts of the Kolpa valley the population is higher than in the other parts of the borderlands. The Kolpa area of the borderline has two major border crossings, the first one at Petrina (Ljubljana-Kočevje-Rijeka) and the other one in relatively more densely populated region of Bela Krajina at Metlika (Ljubljana-Novo mesto-Karlovac). From there onward it moves through the hilly ridges of Gorjanci along the rivers Sava and Sotla to Haloze, and further on to the valley of Drava. The borderline mainly follows small brooks and crosses low ridges all the way to the Mura plain where the last section of Slovenian-Croatian border follows the river Mura.[61]

As the subject of the study is borderland in the Upper Kolpa region where the greater part of the valley belongs to Croatia, and the smaller part to Slovenia, this thesis pays little attention to the other parts of the Slovenian Croatian borderline. The valley consists of two branches, one along the Kolpa river and the other along its tributary, the Čabranka river. Cut deeply into its base, the Čabranka-Kupa valley (or in Slovenian the Upper Kolpa valley) is located between two markedly mountainous, isolated, economically underdeveloped and sparsely populated zones of Gorski Kotor on the Croatian side and Dolenjsko and Notranjsko on the Slovenian side. The underdevelopment of the two mountainous regions arises partly

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[60] Pelc, "Slovene-Croatian border as past, present and future generator of marginalization.", 281
[61] See the Appendix 1

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from the fact that the primary transit routes from the continental inland to the Adriatic bypassed them. Central European countries found and exit to the Gulf of Trieste through low land central Slovenia while the road to Adriatic sea followed the Una river valley. It was only in the time of the Ottoman threat that the route from the Croatian interior to the Adriatic sea moved to the west, i.e. Gorski Kotor area, where the traffic was carried mainly with horses. The first modern roads through Gorski Kotor were only constructed in the eighteen and nineteen centuries. The upgraded Lousiana[62] road through Delnice corridor together with railroads moved the area to the forefront. The central transit importance of the corridor has been enhanced by the Zagreb-Rijeka highway. On the other hand, the Slovenian mountain region remains isolated in terms of transit. This area is bypassed by all of the major Slovenian routes that connect Ljubljana with Zagreb and the Gulf Trieste.[63] These natural, economic and transit factors have had a great, negative impact on the economic and overall social development of the valley itself. People on both sides of the border have mainly gravitated to two centers, Delnice on the Croatian side and Kočevje on the Slovenian side. In the past the choice to live in one of the two settlements did not depend upon nationality but employment opportunities. After the establishment of international border in 1991 it has become more difficult to work in a neighboring country, thus the emigration abroad has decreased. Nevertheless, many people on Croatian side emigrated to Slovenia since the economic position of the latter is much better than in Croatia.

In political terms, the Upper Kolpa area was always a single unit under various administrations, and it was only in 1990 that the area became divided between the two states. The current border is not drawn along ethnic but purely economic-historical lines. It is in fact a feudal relic and the result of the Carniolan Čebranka district being bought by the Frankopan

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[62] First built in 1809
[63] Ivan Crkvenčić, "Certain socio-geographic characteristics of a Croatian-Slovenian border region (along the Čabranka-Kupa valley)," *Acta geographica Croatica* 35 (2000): 97-105.

and Zrinski noblemen in the mid-17th century and annexed to the Hungarian part of the monarchy of that period. In those times the Upper Kolpa valley was Slovene as far as its language and inhabitants were concerned.[64]

Changes that took place after the independence of Slovenia and Croatia in 1991 have had a great impact on the local population on both sides of the new border. The main part of the borderland's infrastructure has remained on the Croatian side of the border, however, the greatest difficulty represents the insufficient traffic network. This has caused inaccessibility of some settlements on both side of the border only from the opposite side, which has additionally increased the peripheral character of the area and, in turn, led to its depopulation. Moreover, due to the the lack of legal border crossings and the increase of surveillance, the new border has significantly affected the daily migration of borderland population. It is rather an obstacle in everyday's life of local population and the same holds for international traffic flows. However, as it is not a closed border, the border itself does not cause marginalization of the studied area. Peripherality, unfavorable geographical factors and new conditions established after the independence together with the negative effects of the border can produce some marginality. In order to examine the extent of the impacts of the new border on the local population, this thesis carries out numerous qualitative interviews with the locals on both sides of the border.

As the thesis is concerned with the effect of the newly delineated border on the multiple identifications of people living in the Upper Kolpa Valley, the analysis of everyday ethnicity among borderland communities focuses on their social, cultural and economic networks, language practices, everyday migration, employment opportunities, area's provision, various cross-border interactions and the impact of the border on their everyday

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[64] Damir Josipovič, "Razprava o odnosu center - periferija: peripanonski slovensko-hrvaški stik v sistemu širitve EU," in *Razvojne priložnosti obmejnih območij Slovenije = Development opportunities of Slovenian border regions* (Koper: Založba Annales□: Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko, 2009), 197-211.

lives. In regard to the other areas of Slovenian Croatian border, the Upper Kolpa valley is of a special interest, as it constitutes a historical settling area in which communities on both sides of the river (border) speak the same local dialect. Furthermore, the Croatian part of the Upper Kolpa is one of the rare areas in Croatia, where the Slovenes still exceed three percent of the local population. Despite the historical unity of the region, the new border does not represent a new opportunity for the people, especially in terms of economic and commercial exchange, but rather a great obstacle/barrier in the trans-border cooperation and harmonious regional development of the Upper Kolpa valley.

5 NATIONALISTIC POLITICS FROM ABOVE – MEDIA DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

As Berger and Luckmann argued some time ago, social reality is not 'out there', but it is "constructed by individuals from raw materials provided to them by the social context in which they live."[65] In this process of construction media representations play an important role in the conception and legitimation of group identity by constructing a common imaginary and complicity. They influence values, beliefs and forms of behavior in the society, which are essential for one's identity and group membership. Since the media are not the mirror image of the world, but rather they offer various representations of the world, in order to understand the meaning of these representations, one must actively engage in the process of interpretation.

Therefore, the task of this chapter is to critically examine the role of the media in the process of reproduction and construction of national identity. More precisely, the study of media reporting on the border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia tries to illuminate the question of how and to what extent the media has contributed to the reconstruction of national discourse and the portrayal of neighboring nation as the enemy of "national interest". The analysis examines the ways in which category of a Croat, or a Slovene is constructed, imposed and discursively articulated by the Croatian and Slovenian leading daily newspapers. The study draws largely on the methodological framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA) developed by Fairclough and van Dijk. It is clear that the horizons of this study are limited since I have chosen to restrict the analysis only to printed media representations in the leading Slovenian and Croatian newspapers.

The following media discourse analysis focuses mostly on reports by the two leading

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[65] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge* (Penguin Books, 1991).

daily newspapers in Slovenia, Delo and Dnevnik,[66] and three Croatian newspapers Jutarnji list, Vjesnik and Vecernji list in the period from 17 December until 24 December 2008. This was the time when Slovenia blocked Croatian negotiations to the EU, which caused an intense and extremely heated debate among Slovenian politicians, intellectuals and within civil society. Although both Slovenian daily newspapers can be regarded as rather leftist, they adopted nationalistic discourse in reporting on the blockade, constructed by politics. Among Croatian newspapers Jutarnji list is the leading leftist, while Vecernji list is the leading conservative newspaper in the country. However, when it comes to conservative press, the attention is also given to Vjesnik which sometimes publishes articles that portray the situation from a different angle. Nevertheless, the majority of the articles in Croatian media will come from Jutarnji list since it has also been the most frequently quoted in the Slovenian press.

In order to represent a more unbiased picture of media reporting on the relationship between Slovenia and Croatia, and consequently on the construction of nationhood in connection to the neighboring state, the analysis also focuses on the events from 11 September until 25 September 2009, when the first steps towards resolving the dispute were made. The discourse of the media had changed in the second half of 2009 due to the change in the political atmosphere among the states. Jadranka Kosor replaced Ivo Sanader in the position of prime minister, thus softening the rhetoric between the two governments following pressure from the European Union and the US. Nevertheless, although the situation settled down both Slovenian and Croatian media adopted the dominant discourse of politics in representing the border dispute as a question of "national interests". By evoking nationalist sentiment, the media contributed to the conception and legitimation of national identity and the portrayal of the neighboring nation as the "Other".

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[66] There is no leading conservative newspaper, although Delo was considered as adopting right views in the period of Janez Janša's government (2004-2008).

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5.1 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Based on Gramsci's notion of hegemony, CDA investigates the extent to which "discourse (re)produces social domination, that is, power abuse of one group over others."[67] According to Foucault, discourse does not only create the social reality by shaping one's perception and behavior towards others, but also generates knowledge and 'truth' by structuring language so as to set boundaries for what is accepted as 'true' knowledge and what is not.[68] Following Foucault's notion of discourse, Fairclough argues that since language and ideology are intertwined, a systematic analysis of the language of media texts can reveal the systems of domination and subordination inside specific social structures.[69] As power produces the framework of knowledge, discourse becomes the basic tool through which people become constituted as individuals and social subjects. Ideological aspects and power relations behind the language usage are often invisible and only tacit, therefore the task of CDA is to make these aspects of the discourse visible.[70] In this respect, CDA has a clear emancipatory aim to modify the existing power relations. Thus, it is not to be seen as an objective social science but an integral part of political activism directed against racism, sexism and other discriminatory practices. As an interpretative and qualitative sociological method, the results of the analysis is always individual interpretation of the researcher. The aim of CDA is therefore not only to describe but also to explain how discourse becomes shaped through power relations and ideologies and how it influences social identity, social relations, knowledge systems and value systems.

According to CDA, discourse is seen as a form of "social practice, which implies a

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[67] Teun S. Van Dijk, "Critical discourse studies: a sociocognitive approach", in Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009), 63.

[68] Michel Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge and The discourse on language* (Barnes & Noble, 1993).

[69] Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak (1997), "Critical Discourse Analysis", in Teun A Van Dijk, *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (SAGE Publications, 2011), 258.

[70] Ibid., 258-259.

dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it."71 In short, discourse is socially constituted as well as socially conditioned, "it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people."72 In the framework of van Dijk's sociocognitive approach, social representations73 play the key role in connecting the social system with the individual cognitive models. The latter are the "interface of the individual and the social, and explain how group beliefs may affect personal beliefs and thus be expressed in discourse."74 Put differently, social representations are often mediated by these mental models in order to appear in discourse, and "such discourse has social effects and functions only when it contributes to the formation and confirmation of social attitudes and ideologies."75 Although media institutions often purport to be neutral in that they provide space for public discourse, they play an essential role in the (re)production of the dominant ideology in the society. Media as one of the major fields of struggles for the prevailing interpretation of reality, construct reality, which is infinitely vulnerable to qualification, distortion and manipulation by the context in which media images are used.[76] As van Dijk argues, language use always presupposes the intervening mental models, goals and general social representations therefore the study between discourse and social structure, such as racism, should also include the level of cognition.77

Methodologically, this study relies on the combination of van Dijk's and Fairclough's

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71 Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (eds.), "*Critical discourse analysis: history, agenda, theory and methodology", in* Wodak and Meyer, *Methods of critical discourse analysis.*, 5.
72 Ibid., 6
73 Collective frames of perception – knowledge, attitudes, values, norms and ideologies as different types of social representations.
74 Teun S. Van Dijk, "Critical discourse studies: a sociocognitive approach", in Wodak and Meyer, *Methods of critical discourse analysis.*, 78.
75 Ibid, 82
76 Caroline Brothers, *War and photography: a cultural history* (Routledge, 1997)., 19.
77 Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (eds.), "*Critical discourse analysis: history, agenda, theory and methodology", in* Wodak and Meyer, *Methods of critical discourse analysis.*, 14.

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approach to CDA. It focuses on the question of who speaks, what and how they speak, whose views and interpretations are reproduced by media discourse, and which implicit assumptions underline the analyzed newspaper articles.

5.2   SLOVENIAN BLOCKADE OF CROATIAN NEGOTIATIONS WITH EU

5.2.1   ANALYSIS OF SLOVENIAN MEDIA

The reason for Slovenia's blocking eleven negotiating chapters was that Croatia had provided maps and documents in the EU negotiations that would have pre-judged a solution to the maritime border dispute. The documents were, as Slovenian foreign minister Samuel Žbogar repeatedly argued, an attack on "our vital national interests".[78] Although the Slovenian government never clearly specified which national interests were under attack, the media immediately adopted the discourse of "national interests".[79] In numerous reports dating from the start of the blockade on 18 December 2008 till the end of 2008 "the vital national interests" were used as the main arguments of Slovenian prime minister, Borut Pahor, and the foreign minister responsible for delaying the Croatian accession to the EU. Thus the government used nationalistic discourse in protecting its interests, which was uncritically adopted by all the Slovenian media. Croats were portrayed as the enemies of the state, who would not redraw maps and documents that prejudge the border by stubbornly insisting on their claim to justice.[80] On the other hand, Slovenes, as members of the EU, which ranked them on a higher position regarding the Croats, were labeled as the victims, whose

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[78]   Aleš Gaube, "Božični premor med Slovenijo in Hrvaško: Pahor želi čimprejšnje srečanje s Sanaderjem," *Dnevnik,* December 20, 2008. and "Pahor: Zaščitili bomo svoje nacionalne interese," *Delo,* December 13, 2008: available at http://www.delo.si/clanek/72713
[79]   Ibid.
[80]   Ibid.

neighboring country wanted to take away their forty six kilometers of coastline despite the one thousand seven hundred kilometers of Croatia's Adriatic coast.[81] As Rotschild argues, by categorizing the "*Other*" who serves the principle of a scapegoat, politicians preserve their social power and authoritarian role.[82]

The authoritarian role of the Slovenian government in Delo and Dnevnik was preserved by constantly undermining the status of Croats as a candidate state, thus glorifying the position of Slovenia as a member of EU. By referring to Slovenian powerful position as an EU member state,83 though at that time Croatian diplomacy was much better at lobbying, the media portrayed Slovenia as dominant in relation to Croatia. Such representations coincide with the perception of Slovenian identity. As identity is "always based on differentiating one's self or one's group from an Other, on the dichotomy discourse of inclusion-exclusion, group formation and group differentiation,"[84] a crucial part of Slovenian identity is its differentiation and distancing from the Croats, namely former Yugoslav republics in general (The Balkans). Therefore, the media by means of specific discursive strategies of dichotomization, essentialization and naturalization of dividing the world on "good" and "bad", adopted the dominant discourse on the "good" Slovenes and "bad" Croats. The maritime border dispute thus represented an effective means to redirect attention from the economic crisis to the question of national identity and national interests. Although, politicians first used the nationalistic discourse, Delo and Dnevnik uncritically adopted it.

Therefore, the heated debate quickly moved from the sphere of politics to the public

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[81] Ibid.
[82] Rotschild (1981) in Gerd Baumann, *The multicultural riddle: rethinking national, ethnic, and religious identities* (Routledge, 1999), 61.
[83] "Foreign Minister Samuel Zbogar said in Ljubljana the EU was 'obviously not paying enough attention to the interests of member states, which it should be representing, but [was] looking to reach results in the area of enlargement'." Published in Delo and Dnevnik, December 19, 2008 And in Zoran Potič, "Ko zadonijo fanfare," *Delo*, December 18, 2008.
[84] James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity" *International Organization,* 54, no. 4, (2000): 851.

arena. Although politicians were at the beginning of the blockade initially full of hope, claiming that "the compromise will come soon ... it is a question of a couple of weeks, months...we have just taken some time for reflection on solving the problem,"[85] the border dispute sparked what some called the Facebook wars. Over 40,000 Croats joined a group on the social networking site calling for a boycott of Slovenian products. Moreover, the anti-Slovenian group on Facebook "*Svi mrzitelji Slovenije i glupe slovenčadi!*!!" gained more than 2,000 members in just one day.[86] In opposition to Croatian based groups, Slovenes launched "Red Light to Croatia",[87] which supported the government's tough line. Media coverage of such groups contributed to the increase of tensions between the two nations. Dnevnik dedicated a two sided article in its weekly edition to the Facebook war, quoting comments from the page, such as "Fuck the country that a chicken can fly over in two days", "Slovenian women are stealing our men ... primitive ... but true!" or "Let's build a wall along the border, so they'll stop moving to our country".[88] The author of the text referred to both nations as two different *tribes* by which he evoked memories of the ethnic hatred that had resolved in bloody wars in the territories of the former Yugoslavia. The author revived the *ethnic nationalistic* discourse by comparing the boycotting of Slovenian products to the "classic strategies of the former Yugoslav republics".[89] Furthermore, he evoked the comparison between the boycott and Slobodan Milošević, the former authoritarian leader of Serbia. Such comparisons contribute to the portraying of the Croats as a "crazy nationalistic tribe" which would at any given opportunity attack the Slovenian nation and identity. Such use of discourse can be described, to some extent, as a form of media moral panic. The concept of moral panic

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[85] The above mentioned articles and internet articles in *Delo, Dnevnik*, December 18-30, 2008.
[86] Blaž Mazi, "Iščem jo na zemljevidu, pa je ni nikjer," *Dnevnik,* December 20, 2008. And Available at: http://www.dnevnik.si/novice/slovenija/1042231585 and "Hrvaška kot konstruktivni igralec, Pahor pa *bad guy*," *Delo,* December 18, 2008.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Translation: Klasika odnosov med nekdanjimi jugoslovanskimi republikami.

denotes a short period during which a specific group of people or an event is defined as a threatening element, which leads to the adoption of extreme positions.90 Although the analyzed case study does not evoke such extreme connotations, moral panic is invoked in the texts by emphasizing the well known ideological objectives of "Us" and the "Other", over representing negative behavior of Croats and accentuating the positive one of the Slovenian population.

Furthermore, the dispute entered even the sports arena. A Slovenian team of young karate fighters did not participate in the annual Christmas tournament in Zagreb because of the safety question due to the political tensions between the countries.[91] As one sees the tensions erupted not only in the political sphere, but embraced all the areas of public and private life, which were reflected even in opinion polls. Only a couple of weeks after the Slovenian blockade of Croatian negotiations, the polls showed that 73 percent of Croats argued that Slovenia represents the biggest threat to Croatian interests. Regarding popularity, only 2.5 percent claimed to have a positive feeling towards Slovenia with only Serbs being lower represented.[92] The percentage had worsened in the following months, when Slovenia became the most hated neighbor, overcoming the ancient enemy of the Serbian nation.[93]

Although Dnevnik and Delo mostly followed the nationalistic discourse of politics, the newspapers also published views opposing the dominant discourse on the border issue. One journalist was critical of the Slovenian approach to solving the maritime border dispute. As he argued, Slovenian proposals had been built on a rotting basis.[94] According to Kovač,

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[90] Roman Kuhar, "Media Representations of Minorities", in Brankica Petković, *Media for citizens* (Peace Institute, 2006), 135.

[91] Milan Jakšić, "Elektronska pošta s finančnega ministrstva: Skrivnostni poziv k bojkotu slovenskega blaga na Hrvaškem," *Dnevnik,* December 22, 2008.

[92] Miran Lesjak, "Vox Populi: Hrvaška naj gre v EU brez referenduma, 15 odstotkov manj Slovencev pri naših sosedih," *Dnevnik,* January 26, 2009.

[93] Dnevnik, Delo June 2008

[94] Dejan Kovač, "Partija mejnega pokra s Hrvaško," *Dnevnik*, December 20, 2008.

the only decent Slovenian contribution to the solution of the dispute was 2001 Drnovšek-Račan agreement, which had not been ratified by the Croatian parliament due to the strong opposition of Croatian legal experts.[95] Under the agreement 80 percent of the bay would be given to Slovenia in order to maintain the continuity of its sea border with Italy. The agreement had never become legally binding, although it represented a solid compromise between the states. Furthermore, the newspapers published the views of those politicians who opposed the blockade of Croatian negotiations, such as the member of the European Parliament, Aurelio Juri, and the coalition member Franco Juri. Both were critical of the Slovenian blockade claiming that "nationalistic hysteria, originating from the blockade, is leading to a situation where different voices are forbidden."[96]

As time passed, less and less optimistic voices were heard and the tensions increased. In the middle of January 2009 Croatian president, Stipe Mesić, said that "[i]f Croatia had not freed Trst, Slovenia would observe the sea from a 20km distance."[97] The statement caused a tense debate among politicians who used history for their own interests to trigger the dormant negative sentiments between the nations. Although most of the Slovenian politicians, including the media, tried to ignore the statement, the negative relations had been set off.

5.2.2   ANALYSIS OF CROATIAN MEDIA

When reporting on the Slovenian blockade of Croatian negotiations Jutarnji list used words such as Slovenian "final judgement" and "red light",[98] stating that "EU membership

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[95] Ibid.

[96] Milan Jakšić, "Na Hrvaškem tekmujejo v iskanju načina, kako kaznovati "trmasto" Slovenijo," *Dnevnik,* December 19, 2008.

[97] Delo, Dnevnik, January 13, 2008, available at: http://www.dnevnik.si/novice/svet/1042236007, http://www.dnevnik.si/novice/slovenija/1042236301(accessed on April 22 2011).

[98]   Jutarnji list, December 17, 2008, available at: http://www.jutarnji.hr/slovenija-presudila--blokada-

will not be bought with Croatian territory".[99] Similar discourse was used in other media. Internet portal Index.hr labelled the blockade as "Slovenian blackmail" and described that Slovenia's decision is "far from the principles of solidarity and friendly relationship between neighbors."[100] Since the choice of words and the structures most directly influence the mental models of attitudes, and "hence may have the most obvious social consequences,"[101] such choice of words represents Slovenia in an extremely negative way as a blackmailing country.

All the analyzed media adopted the views of the government and the opposition who unitedly represented the dispute as the "question of vital national interest."[102] Vjesnik constantly portrayed the prime minister Sanader in a positive and optimistic manner by criticizing Slovenia's position on the Croatian negotiation with EU. Compared to Slovenian media reports[103] Croatian press dedicated much more attention to the views from European Union. They reported on the opinion of European Commission whose spokesperson expressed sorrow that "Slovenia was unwilling to accept compromise brought by the French presidency, which stated that all the bilateral issues should be resolved bilaterally and not affect the negotiation process."104 Moreover, they quoted articles from the Austrian Wiener Zeitung, which portrayed Slovenia in a negative way as blocking the enlargement process.[105]

pregovora-s-eu-u-11-poglavlja/280307/ (page accessed on April 20 2011)

99   Ibid
100   Index.hr, December 2008, available at: http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/quotslovenska-blokada-je-ucjena-koja-ce-dugorocno-ostati-upisana-u-kolektivnu-memoriju-hrvatskequot/414014.aspx (page accessed on April 20 2011)
101   Teun S. Van Dijk, "Critical discourse studies: a sociocognitive approach", in Wodak and Meyer, *Methods of critical discourse analysis*., 69.
102   Index.hr, December 17, 2008, available at: http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/quotslovenska-blokada-je-ucjena-koja-ce-dugorocno-ostati-upisana-u-kolektivnu-memoriju-hrvatskequot/414014.aspx (page accessed on April 20 2008)
103   Dnevnik, December 18, 2008, available at: http://www.dnevnik.si/novice/eu/1042230829 (page accessed on April 22 2011)
104   Jutarnji list, 18th December 2008, available at: http://www.jutarnji.hr/komisija-zali-sto-je-slovenija-blokirala-hrvatsku/280399/ (page accessed on 17th April 2010)
105   Jutarnji list, December 23, 2010, available at: http://www.jutarnji.hr/wiener-zeitung--slovenija-kao-kukavicje-jaje-u-eu/281048/ (page accessed on April 19 2011)

Jutarnji List even called upon people to boycott Slovenian product,[106] an action that was only later called as unacceptable by prime minister Sanader and the opposition leader Zoran Milanović.[107]

As one can see, the dispute quickly spread to other spheres of public life. Couple of days after the boycott the Croatian Football Association decided to no longer use Čatež in Slovenia as a training camp of the Croatian national team. Although the chairmen of the Association resorted to a friendly discourse, they did express disappointment with the Slovenian decision and stated that they "were obliged to follow the *pulse* of the Croatian public."[108] By reporting on the establishment of the anti-Croatian group on Facebook,[109] the analyzed Croatian media contributed to the increase of tensions between the two nations. Even those articles that aimed at representing an objective view of the issue were titled in a way that represented Slovenes as the enemies. For example, Inoslav Bešker, one of the leading Croatian columnists, who rationalized the fact that no positive outcome can result from the blockade of the Slovenian products, titled his article "Primitivism of Slovenian blackmail".[110]

Compared to Slovenian press, but in a reverse manner, Croatian press adopted discourse that depicted Slovenes as enemies and portrayed Croatia as a truly European state.[111] Similar to both, Slovenian as well as Croatian press, is their use of generalization.

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[106] Jutarnji list, December 17, 2008, available at: http://www.jutarnji.hr/slovenija-presudila--blokada-pregovora-s-eu-u-11-poglavlja/280307/ (page accessed on April 20 2011)

[107] Jutarnji list, December 18, 2008, available at: http://www.jutarnji.hr/premijer-ivo-sanader--nemojte-bojkotirati-proizvode-iz-slovenije/280476/ (page accessed on 17th of April 2010); Jutarnji list, December 18, 2008, available at: http://www.jutarnji.hr/milanovic-o-slovencima/280432/ (page accessed on April 20 2011)

[108] Jutarnji list, December, 19 2008, available at: http://www.jutarnji.hr/hns-ukida-pripreme-u-catezu-/280577/ (page accessed on April 20 2011)

[109] Jutarnji list, December 19, 2008, available at: http://www.jutarnji.hr/slovenija--facebook-grupa--crveno-svjetlo-za-hrvatsku-/280677/ (page accessed on April 20 2011)

[110] Jutarnji list, December 20, 2008, available at: http://www.jutarnji.hr/primitivizam-slovenske-ucjene/280660/ (page accessed on April 20 2011)

[111] Vjesnik, 19th December 2008, available at: http://www.vjesnik.hr/pdf/2008%5C12%5C19%5C02A2.PDF

Although, as has been mentioned many times, groups are never "unified or singular, but multiply, constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions,"[112] the media represent Slovenes or Croats as a concrete, tangible and bounded 'groups'.

5.3   TOWARDS AN AGREEMENT

5.3.1   *ANALYSIS OF SLOVENIAN MEDIA*

In the period between January and September 2009 the European Union offered its mediating services, but none of them were successful. In January 2009, Slovenia welcomed the initiative by the European Enlargement Commissioner, Olli Rehn, to solve the border issue and allow Croatia's EU accession negotiations to continue. In June 2009 Croatia withdrew from the process led by Commissioner Rehn.[113] The rhetoric changed in the beginning of July 2009 when Jadranka Kosor became the Croatian prime minister by replacing Ivo Sanader. As early as 31 July Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor and his new Croatian counterpart Jadranka Kosor met for the first time and on 11 September reached an agreement regarding the framework for solving the border dispute. The Prime Ministers reached agreement on two objectives. Firstly, on the continuation of Croatia's negotiations with the EU by solving the issue of prejudices, and secondly, on the resolution of the border dispute with the facilitation of the EU.[114]

As political strategy to settle the disagreement moved toward "silent diplomacy", the media discourse changed from the previous populist nationalistic rhetoric. The media had

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(page accessed on April 18 2011)

[112] Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who needs Identity?" in Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, *Questions of cultural identity* (SAGE, 1996), 4.

[113] Republic of Slovenia: Government Communications Office; available at: http://www.ukom.gov.si/en/media_room/background_information/foreign_affairs/border_issue_between_slovenia_and_croatia_december_2009/ (page accessed on April 18 2010)

[114] Ibid.

been less involved in inspiring nationalistic sentiments, and more prone to rationalizing the development of the negotiations process. Delo and Dnevnik adopted the position, taken by both prime ministers, that "the reaching of an agreement marks a beginning of a new chapter in the bilateral relations of two friendly states ... thus friendly relations and respect can lead to a resolution of problems."[115] Whereas before they presented an enemy nation, the media now portrayed Croatia as a friendly partner. Although there were objections against the agreement, especially from opposition parties in both countries, the media discourse changed toward settling the tensions between the two countries. As Kovač ironically commented, the dispute had been useful in the winter period, but when the summer came with the disastrous consequences of the economic crisis, politics was put aside.[116] The disinterest of Croatian and Slovenian citizens regarding the dispute was reflected in the results of various public opinion polls. Although the polls showed that both sides believe that the other side gained more with the Pahor-Kosor agreement, the striking fact is that more than fifty percent of Slovene and 40 percent of Croats have no opinion.[117]

What is striking is also the change of politicians' opinions. Whereas before Sanader opposed the Rehn arbitration agreement, he congratulated the new prime minister Kosor on the settlement of the disputed issues. Croatian president Ivo Mesić called the agreement Jadranka Kosor's victory, more precisely, he said that the "prime minister scored the goal."[118] Furthermore, Mesić argued that access to international waters had never been questionable. Although there were still arguments against the Pahor-Kosor agreement by opposition parties

[115] Vesna R. Bernard, "Slovenija bo umaknila blokado, Hrvaška sporne dokumente," *Dnevnik,* September 12, 2009.

[116] Dejan Kovač, "Blagohotni učinek washingtonske naveze," *Dnevnik*, September 19, 2009.

[117] "Tako Hrvati kot Slovenci verjamejo, da je dogovor v Ljubljani bolj naklonjen drugi strani", *Dnevnik,* September 22, 2009. Available on: http://www.dnevnik.si/sport/drugi_sporti/1042301091 (accessed on April 17 2010).

[118] Delo, Dnevnik, available on http://www.dnevnik.si/novice/svet/1042298483 and http://www.delo.si/clanek/88121 (accessed on April 17 2010)

and some legal experts,[119] the media had focused mostly on legal aspects of the settlement. The nationalistic discourse was not in the forefront of media coverage on the dispute anymore as had been the case in December 2008. Delo and Dnevnik represented the new agreement as based on renewed trust between the two countries and negotiated in good faith.

5.3.2 ANALYSIS OF CROATIAN MEDIA

Similar to Slovenian media, Croatian newspapers Jutarnji List, Vjesnik and Večernji list reported on the agreement between Slovenian and Croatian prime ministers in a positive manner larifying the details of the resolution of the dispute.120 The newspapers published positive views on the agreement coming from the Croatian politicians and lawyers as well as from the members of the international community. Croatian president Stjepan Mesić triumphantly declared that "Kosor scored with the agreement."121 Equal reactions came from the international community, especially from the Swedish presidency of the European Union122 and from the United States.[123]

However, the friendly, positive and somewhat surprising discourse changed significantly as soon as it became clear that the two parties were interpreting the agreement differently, which is best represented in the statement of the Slovenian foreign minister, who said that "Slovenia

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[119] Tatjana Pihlar and Vesna R. Bernard, "Slovenija bo umaknila blokado, Hrvaška sporne dokumente," *Dnevnik,* September 15, 2009. and Vesna R. Bernard and Tatjana Pihlar , "O drugem Rehnovem predlogu za reševanje mejnega spora sta neenotni tako Slovenija kot Hrvaška" *Dnevnik,* September 17, 2009.

[120] Jutarnji list, September 11, 2009, available at: http://www.jutarnji.hr/sto-je-premijerka-obecala-sloveniji/309473/ (page accessed on April 20, 2010) Vecernji list, September 11, 2009, available at: http://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/win-win-ljubljani-ali-bez-trijumfalizma-clanak-17364 (page accessed on April 20 2011)

[121] Vecernji list, September 12, 2009, available at: http://www.vecernji.hr/regije/mesic-premijerka-kosor-je-zakucala-gol-clanak-17499 (page accessed on April 21 2011)

[122] Vecernji list, September 11, 2009, available at: http://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/reakcije-eu-svedani-hvale-puk-odusevljen-ek-socijalisti-oprezni-clanak-17222 (page accessed on April 21 2011)

[123] Jutarnji list, September 18, 2009, available at: http://www.jutarnji.hr/hillary-pohvalila-kosor--rjesavanje-spora-ne-bi-bio-moguce-bez-vas/310209/ (page accessed on April 21 2011)

would not unblock all the negotiating chapters."[124] Moreover, the leaders of the opposition soon became suspicious regarding the exact text of the agreement, with some of them even demanding Kosor's resignation.[125]

Nevertheless, the dissatisfaction was no longer directed towards Slovenes but the Croatian government, more precisely towards the Prime Minister Kosor. Although the opposition criticized the agreement, it did not do it in a by awakening nationalistic sentiments. Therefore, it could largely be concluded that the representation of the Slovenes as the "others" lasted only during the most politically tense moments, with nationalistic feelings becoming much calmer as soon it became clear the dispute would be resolved and Croatia would continue with its European path.

5.4 ANALYSIS FINDINGS

Media discourse analysis shows that the Slovenian as well as Croatian newspapers adopted the dominant discourse of politics in representing the border dispute. In the end of 2008 Slovenian and Croatian politicians represented the blockade of Croatian accession negotiations with EU as a question of "national interests", therefore the media reproduced the dominant nationalistic discourse on the blockade. The issues of "national interests" and national territory came to the forefront of media coverage, thus contributing to the heated atmosphere between the two nations. Slovenian media helped to (re)construct the *deeply rooted* image of the Croats as the 'Others', as the enemies of Slovenian interests, which has

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[124] Vecernji list, September 14, 2009, available at: http://www.jutarnji.hr/zbogar---hrvatskoj-cemo-odblokirati-samo-10-od-14-poglavlja-/309789/ (page accessed on April 21 2011)

[125] Vecernji list, September 16, 2009, available at: http://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/pusic-izvijestiti-javnost-sadrzaju-dogovora-sa-slovenijom-clanak-19644 (page accessed on April 21 2011) and Jutarnji list, 16th of September 2009, available at: http://www.jutarnji.hr/kajin--kosor-nakon-dogovora-s-pahorom-treba-podnijeti-ostavku/309947/ (page accessed on April 20 2011)

always been an essential part of Slovenian identity. On the other side, Croatian portrayal of the 'Other' transferred from the categorical Serbs to Slovenes who were depicted as the enemies of the Croatian people.

As the discourse of politics transformed, the media turned away from the nationalistic discourse towards a more rational rhetoric. With the arrival of Jadranka Kosor on the position of Croatian prime minister, the relations between Slovenia and Croatia became more constructive and less tense. After only couple of weeks as a prime minister Jadranka Kosor and her Slovenian counterpart Borut Pahor reached an agreement regarding the framework for solving the border dispute. The media announced an agreement as a success for the bilateral relations between the states, though sustained critical approach in representing the content of the agreement and following developments in solving the border dispute.

In opposition to the earlier reports on the border dispute,[126] the media distanced themselves in the second half of 2009 from the nationalistic discourse. Once quite heated atmosphere had softened due to the friendlier and more constructive relations between the two governments.

To conclude, by means of specific discursive and narrative strategies the media reproduce the ideology of dominant political discourse, which is represented as a commonsense interpretation of the world. Therefore, the media as the major field of struggles for the prevailing interpretation of reality play a crucial role in the process of a positive self-presentation and a negative presentation of the "Other".

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[126] From the period between end of 2008 until the middle of 2009

6   THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The first part of the present thesis emphasized the theoretical approaches to the study of borderlands and everyday ethnicity. By providing a historical and geographical overview of the analyzed borderland of the Upper Kolpa Valley[127] this study already shed some light on the social dynamics in the area. However, in order to assess people's intimate understandings of ethnicity and nationhood an empirical study of the borderland had to be done. This chapter presents the objectives of the research conducted in the Slovenian Croatian borderland in April 2011 and its results.

The aim of the empirical research is to study the effects of the rather newly established border on the everyday lives of people living on both sides of the border in the Upper Kolpa valley. By questioning a variety of people's interactions across border the study examines what the border means to people, more specifically, which meaning people ascribe to it. Moreover, the objective of the present study is to examine how *common*[128] people experience ethnicity and nationhood in their everyday settings. From afar, ethnicity and nationhood can be easily seen. Objectified in symbols, flags, monuments, border crossings, and performed in public demonstrations, holiday celebrations, and commemorations, ethnicity, and especially nationhood, seem to be all around. But do they matter in everyday lives of *common* people?

By conducting in depth qualitative interviews with people living in the borderland (both those belonging to the constituent nation as well as members of the minority) this research explores how visible nationhood and ethnicity are in the daily lives of people on

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[127] In Croatian Gorski Kotor.
[128] The word "common" refers to inhabitants of the Upper Kolpa Valley border and by no means describes the interviewed subjects in any way.

both sides of the border, especially after the establishment of the international frontier in 1991. It examines people's understandings of the 'new' border, its cognitive and affective meanings, which shape people's lives and forms of socio-spatial identification that can be interpreted as the 'border in people's minds'.[129] It does so by questioning people about their preoccupations, social networks, language practices, everyday cross-border migration, employment opportunities, and (dis)advantages of the border, without explicitly referring to ethnicity or nationhood. In this respect, the research tries to answer when, how, in which settings and why ethnicity and nationhood matter to the locals in the borderland. The task of the present thesis is thus to grasp the social processes through which ethnicity is (re)produced in everyday life.

6.1 THE STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH AND THE SAMPLE

This thesis adopts a cross-border perspective, in which the main unit of the analysis is the Upper Kolpa Valley region on both sides of a state border. The research takes place in two municipalities in the Upper Valley Kolpa, one in Croatian Gorski Kotor and the other one on Slovenian side of the border. The first municipality Kostel is situated in the Slovenian side of the borderland, and consists of fifty two smaller settlements, each of them having some tens of inhabitants. The whole municipality comprises of approximately six hundred fifty people. As this thesis is primarily interested in the study of areas directly connected to the border, the research focuses on settlements that are separated only by the river, which actually represents the state border.[130]

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[129] The term is taken from Anke Struver, "Bor(der)ing Stories: Spaces of Absence along the Dutch-German Border" in Henk van Houtum, Olivier Thomas Kramsch, and Wolfgang Zierhofer, *Bordering space* (Ashgate, 2005).
[130] See the Appendix 1

In April I conducted interviews with fifteen people in the municipality of Kostel, more precisely, in the settlements Vas, Potok, Pirče, Vrh, Fara, Kuželj which lie in close distance to the state border.[131] According to the 2002 census twenty nine people live in Fara, fifty four in Kuželj, twenty two in Pirče, seventy one in Potok, twenty two in Vrh and sixty seven in Vas. These settlements were chosen because over five percent of the whole population are Croats.[132]

Across the border I conducted interviews with seven people in the settlements Brod na Kupi, Kuželj and Grbajel, which are situated in the Primorsko Goranska county. According to the 2001 census two hundred forty eight people live in Brod na Kupi, twenty one in Grbajel and thirty five in Kuželj. The three settlements were chosen because there are one of the rare areas in Croatia, where the Slovenes still amount to around three percent of the local population. According to the census, fourteen percent of the population in Kuželj are by nationality Slovenes, and in Brod na Kupi the figure varies around 2.8 percent.[133] Moreover, the studied Slovenian and Croatian settlements were selected as they are geographically situated opposite to each other, divided only by the river Kolpa. Most of them are in proximity to the border crossing Petrina, and others such as Slovenian Kuželj and Croatian Kuželj are connected by a bridge. Many people from both settlements obtain special passports that allow them to cross the border, for all the others who do not have these passes, crossing the bridge is illegal. After the establishment of international border in 1991, more precisely when Slovenia entered Schengen regime, many bridges that previously connected Slovenian villages to the Croatian side of the borderland were destroyed.

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[131] See the Appendix 1

[132] Damir Josipovič, *Slovensko-hrvaški obmejni prostor□: etnične vzporednice med popisi prebivalstva po letu 1991* (Ljubljana, 2010), 123.

[133] Ibid.

6.2 RESEARCH LIMITS AND HYPOTHESIS

The first intention of the research was to compare understandings of ethnicity and nationhood of both Slovene majority and Croat minority on Slovenian side of the border, and of Croat majority and Slovene minority on Croatian side. Due to the time and fund limits the research failed to collect a representative sample of all the aforementioned groups. Moreover, after conducting several interviews, it seemed irrelevant to base the analysis on the comparison of these groups due to the high mixing of the population on both sides of the border. Almost all interviewed subjects come from interethnic backgrounds or have married spouses of different nationality. In this respect, the research examines the populations of both sides of the border as one unit, and only subsequently focuses on differences between different national belongings.

Respondents were chosen with the help of dr. Stanislav Južnič, historian, whose main subject of interest is the history of Kostel.[134] Although the original choice of the interviews followed the demographic structure of the studied settlements, the sample is not representative since many people refused to be interviewed. Considering the time and fund limits, it was impossible to get more people who would be willing to participate in the research. Thus, instead of having fifty, I conducted only half of the planned interviews. Even more disappointing was the fact that younger generations were not willing to participate in the research, which means that the sample includes only few respondents younger than thirty five. I believe that a comparison between younger and older residents of the borderland would shed some light on the future social dynamics and cross-border interactions in the Upper Kolpa Valley borderland.

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[134] Dr. Stanislav Južnič is a historian. At the moment he works at the Kostel municipal office. Although he is primarily interested in physics of Carniola Jesuits, he has written many publications on the history of South Central Slovenia. His latest book "Kostel" examines the genealogy of the region.

Nevertheless, certain parallels can be drawn on the basis of the existing sample of twenty two interviews. To anticipate the results, neither Croats or Slovenes on either side of the border interpret their everyday concerns and problems in ethnic terms nor do they consider their nationality as a significant category. Although they acknowledge their nationality, it does not represent a meaningful feature for their cross-border or inter-ethnic relations. More likely, people in the Upper Kolpa Valley identify themselves as Croat or Slovene in a particular context at a particular moment, without being nominally Slovene or Croat. Furthermore, people in the Upper Kolpa Valley have always felt more interconnected with others across the border than with the co-nationals from other parts of their constituent nation-state. Yet, the establishment of an international border has changed everyday practices of people in the borderland. Once intense friendship relations across border as well as daily migration to the neighboring side have significantly decreased. The perception of the border as an obstacle in people's minds modified the social dynamics of the area. By analyzing these changes in the historical and cultural memories of people living along the border, the thesis provides with an overview of possible scenarios for future development of the border areas.

6.3   METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

As the reader has already noticed, although the thesis does not take ethnic groups for granted as bounded entities, it does not refrain from the use of the concepts "the Slovenes" and "the Croats". The two terms are most commonly used in the text as a distinguishable criteria. When speaking of Slovenian schools or Croatian newspapers, one cannot avoid such categorization. The terms are used in a generalizing way, and by no means do they refer to substantive groups. Moreover, the concepts Slovene or Croat also refer to a nominal, context-

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independent categorization, meaning that if asked so, one would consistently identify herself as a Croat or Slovene. On the other hand, such categorization can be also context-specific, which means that someone identifies herself as Slovene in a particular situation.

Before analyzing the results of the research some concepts have to be explained first. As it has been mentioned many times, the present study examines ethnicity and nationhood through everyday social experience developed by *ordinary* social actors. Thus the everyday social experiences – practices - are hard to register as they are often understood as a form of unconsciousness. The aim of this thesis is to study these everyday experiences as categories of analysis instead of categories of practice. Following Bourdieu, practices are ways of thinking and doing things, generated and regulated by people's *habitus,* something neither controllable, nor open to direct observation.[135] People act according to their practical sense, an acquired system of preferences, of cognitive structures. *Habitus* is thus a mediator between objective structure and subjective constructions since practices are never only objective rules nor simply subjective decisions or intentional consciousness. In this regard, *habitus* produces commonsense which directs everyday experiences of social actors. It is up to the researcher to find out what these common schemes of perception are and how they organize people's subjective systems.

In order to understand how ethnicity works in everyday practices, this analysis does not take Slovenes or Croats as groups, but deals with them as categories. Doing so suggests a different set of questions than those that come in mind when one begins its analysis with groups. The way how people categorize everyday experience is thus both a mental and social process.[136] As a cognitive process, it involves "*perceiving* or *conceiving* someone *as* a member of a particular category."[137] As a social process, it implies *characterizing* or

[135] Houtum, Kramsch, and Zierhofer, *Bordering space.*
[136] Brubaker, *Nationalist politics and everyday ethnicity in a Transylvanian town.*
[137] Ibid., 209.

formulating the identity of a person in this way.[138] In order to determine the cognitive dimension of categorization, the questionnaire is designed to examine how and when people identify others in ethnic terms. When searching for the discursive aspect of categorization, one has to study how people attach certain action or stance to a pre-existent ethnic categories. The categories Croat and Slovene do not always appear as a part of the same system of classification. In certain contexts, Slovenian can refer to citizenship, and in others to ethnicity. The same goes for Croatian. To put it differently, ethnicity operates in and through various acts of categorization, but not all categorization is ethnic.139 Ethnicity is just one among many kinds of categorizations.

6.4   THE STRUCTURE OF INTERVIEWS

Most studies of ethnicity and nationhood that focus on ethnically or nationally marked places have analyzed the views of activists, journalists, politicians, scholars and others who are equipped and motivated to articulate understandings of ethnicity and nationhood. If scholars have given any attention to *common* people, they have done it simply by asking them explicitly about ethnic matters. Even if certain events and moments were not directly connected to ethnicity and understandings of nationhood, scholars formulated their questions in ethnic or national terms. As this thesis tries to decenter ethnicity and nationhood - to find them in their everyday contexts –, the interviews are not intended to explicitly refer to questions of ethnicity and nationhood.

Therefore, the research itself consists of 'life story' semi structured interviews. The subjects are asked to give their short life story after which they are encouraged to speak about

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[138] Ibid.
[139] Brubaker, *Nationalist politics and everyday ethnicity in a Transylvanian town., 237.*

their own everyday practices and events related to the research. This enables them to discuss everyday concerns, problems, preoccupations, social and other networks, without directly referring to ethnicity or nationhood. Only later, they are asked in what way and to what extent their experiences are related to ethnicity and national identifications. The idea of such qualitatively structured interviews is to avoid well formulated opinion answers that are framed by categories imposed from above.[140] Moreover, by avoiding talking about these categories it enables the researcher to interpret the *story* without framing it in advance.

Although interviews were open ended, a questionnaire of approximately ten questions was designed in advance. The provisional list of topics represented a guideline for the researcher. Most of the questions were covered during all interviews although they differed depending on individual experiences and stories.

The topics focus on people's kinship and friendship networks, employment opportunities, shopping habits, celebrations of different holidays and commemorations, sociolinguistic, media and leisure practices, the effect of the border on everyday lives and everyday migrations. The provisional questionnaire was structured as follows:

2. How do you view the border? How has the border changed your everyday practices?

3. What are the disadvantages of the border and which are the advantages?

4. How would you describe the meaning of the border before 1991 and after?

5. How do you remember the events of 1991? What is your opinion on the independence of both nations?

6. Can you describe your friendship and kinship networks?

7. How often do you cross the border? What for? Is there any difference since 1991?

8. Which media do you follow?

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[140] These categories are formed by state policies, political struggles, social movements and media discourses.

9. What are your main preoccupations?

10. What is your opinion on Slovenian and Croatian state centered politics? What is the effect of politics on the region?

11. How do you view the future of the borderland?

The analysis of the interviews is interested mainly in the specific practices that are understood and experienced by subjects in ethnic terms. It focuses on the ways in which people use ethnic categories. Moreover, by analyzing people's *life stories,* their choices and everyday experiences the present study examines *how* relevant ethnicity and nationhood are in the lives of ordinary people in the Upper Kolpa Valley.

6.5   ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

6.5.1   INTER-ETHNIC MIXING

The Upper Kolpa valley has always been distanced from the main centers of both nation-states. As the political elites have never created the conditions for the area to become more central, people largely depended on themselves. Hence, mostly for functional reasons, people have maintained intense kinship and friendship cross-border relations, which is reflected in a high level of interethnic marriages and cross-border migrations in the region.

Majda Kolenc met her husband while working in Dipo[141] in Brod na Kupi. She was born in the municipality of Kostel, ten kilometers from her current location in Vas. Her husband moved from Croatian to Slovenian side of the border but continued to work in Brod na Kupi. Majda changed many jobs in her life[142] thus the side of the border never played a

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[141] A factory that has closed down in 1990s.
[142] She worked both on Slovenian side and Croatian side of the border.

role in her decision of employment. Pajnič Vlasta from Slovenia also met her husband, a Croat by nationality, in Dipo, although after the wedding she moved to him to Brod na Kupi. Their three children all live *"there"* as Vlasta expressed herself, meaning on Slovenian side of the border, in Banja Loka, Lož, and in Kočevje. It is meaningful that although she is Slovene by nationality she denotes the Slovenian side of the borderland as *there*. In this respect, Vlasta does not perceive her identity in terms of belonging to a particular nation neither does she see ethnicity as bounded and unchanging entity. As she has lived most of her life in Brod na Kupi, she identifies primarily with the Croatian part of the borderland. For her the other side of the river is a world distant from her everyday experiences.

Goran Repič, Croat by nationality, identifies himself as a Brojan (a person from Brod). For him as for many other borderlanders, local identification is the most significant. Although he does not interpret identity in ethnic or national terms, he still believes that ethnicity is connected to descent rules of group membership. This became evident when he could not understand why his friend, who has a Croatian mother and a Croatian father, but is married to a Slovene, identifies herself as a Slovene. As Miha Lisac from Pirče says, "we were all very mixed with Croats, we were marrying each other, in the end, my wife is Croat."[143]

Ante Abramović, a retired baker from Brod, is also from a mixed family. His mother used to come to Croatian Kuželj when his father worked there as a baker. They fell in love and got married. As Goran Repič argues, "love does not have borders... I like women from *this* or the *other* side of the border."[144] Sixty years old Ivanka Lisac from Fara remembers how in her young days "boys and girls from Kostel used to go to the *other* side to dance, and *they* to *our* side, but *we*, the girls, used to visit *them* more often. Often there were fights

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[143] Orig. "Mi smo zlo mešani s Hrvati, poročal smo se, jst mam Hrvatico za ženo."
[144] Kostel dialect. "Kaj ma pa to veze (granica), ljubav nema granice. Kdor se je poznu, se je poznu, in meni so všeč iz te strani in iz une."

between *our* boys and the ones from the *other* side, because we liked them better. Those were the nice days."[145] And as she says, "many girls have married Croats. From *our* family two sisters married to Croatia, and moved to Bela."[146] Although Ivanka constantly uses the distinction between us and them, the terms do not refer to ethnic group membership but more likely to regional, gender and kinship membership. The border thus geographically signifies differentiation between two sides of the river. Nevertheless, due to the historical and political influences the categories Croat and Slovene, or before Croat and Carniolian, have always existed in the borderland.

Ana Rački from Kuželj confirms Ivanka's memories. "Boys stayed on their location, while girls from both sides went to the other side quite often. Boys on both sides of the river did not let each other to cross the bridge. Only girls were allowed to cross... Most of my female neighbors are Croats, who moved to this side of the border."[147] Also younger people, who attended high school in the time of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, remember that "they used to go out with friends from across the river all the time."[148] Jože Rauh from Vas recalls that in his high school years friends used to go out to Brod na Kupi. Lidija Janeš from Potok, who lives now in Ljubljana, says that "when I was going to school, we did not feel the border, we were all one. We had friends on both sides, even after the establishment of the border, we used to go to the discos together, one was on Croatian side and the other on Slovenian side."[149] Although the establishment of the state border did not immediately effect friendship

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[145] Kostel dialect. "Ako vam bi povedala od nazej, punce Kostevske, pa fantje smo hodili tja na ples, in onej sem, sam bl mi tja. Pa so se fanti stepl, k mi smo mele bl piko na hrvatske, pa je bilo mau dreganj... smo se strašno lipo imeli."

[146] Kostel dialect. "Ljudje so se dosti poročal s Hrvati. Iz naše hiše so se dve hčerki poročile na Hrvatsko v Belo."

[147] Slo. "Fantje so ostajali na lokaciji, punce so šle pa na drugo stran. Pa so tam gor sedeli, pa čakali, če bodo Hrvatje prišli sem k našim puncam. Samo punce so lahko šle."

[148] By Goran Abramovic (Croat by nationality) in Slovenian: " Jaz sem se z vsemi čez reko poznal, z vsemi sem se družil."

[149] Slo. "V času moje osnovne šole se meja ni čutila, mi smo bli vsi eno, prijatelje smo mel na eni in na drugi strani, ko se je meja vzpostavila, smo mi še vedno mel tendence, smo skupaj v disko hodil, eden je bil na hrvaški strani, eden na slovenski strani, tako da nas to ni takrat mlade razdvojilo."

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networks, it eventually "diminished cross-border friendship interactions... My generation still married across the border while I do not know anyone from my sister's[150] generation that would marry someone from the other side of the border."[151] Also Goran Abramović acknowledges that the formation of the state border has had a significant effect on the cross-border social interactions. "While we still were highly interconnected, my brother[152] did not have any friends across the border." His brother confirmes that.

As one can see, a substantial number of Croats or Slovenes are intermarried. In these interethnic environments as well as in other settings Slovenes and Croats interact, not as Slovenes or Croats, but as colleagues, spouses, and friends. Ethnicity is rarely evoked, and often completely meaningless. Indeed, the border has always played a function of connecting rather than delineating people from the both banks of the river. At least until 1991 when the establishment of the international border created not only a new political reality for the populations on both sides of the border, but also significantly modified cross-border socio-cultural relations.

6.5.2   LINGUISTIC PRACTICES AND REGIONAL IDENTIFICATIONS

Religion and similar dialect have immensely contributed to the intense cross-border socio-cultural interactions. As both state nationalisms are based on catholic religion, language is recognized as the main criterion in distinguishing between Croatian and Slovenian ethnocultural membership. Thus, language cannot be seen as a reliable set of cues to ethnicity in the Upper Kolpa valley since people on both sides of the border speak the same dialect.

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[150] Born in 1982.
[151] Slo. "Šele ko se je meja ustalila, je to prineslo neke spremembe... Moje generacije so se poročale čez mejo, če pa pogledam sestrino generacijo, se pa nihče ni več poročal."
[152] Born in 1988.

Goran describes the language as being "neither Slovenian nor Croatian, it is mixed, a special dialect."[153] For Ana Rački, who was not born in the municipality of Kostel, "the language has a lot of Croatian words." As Lidija claims, "it was not the border that delineated the dialect, or more preciselly parole, but Srebotnik ob Kolpi. Where the border between Slovenian municipalities Kostel and Osilnica is located, there is also the historical border between the two dialects."[154] In this respect, the border historically never represented a dividing line between two different languages. The language of the region was differentiated on the basis of geographical and not ethnic belonging. At least until 1991, when the establishment of the state border not only demarcated the territories of the two newly emerged states but also delimited the language of the studied borderland. Ante Abramović who owns the only bakery for both Slovenian and Croatian side of the borderland observes that "the border delimited the mixed language of our region. When people come to buy bread, they do not speak *our* language anymore."[155] Also Majda Kolenc notices that "when I go to buy bread to Brod, the youth speaks only Croatian, no one knows the language anymore."[156]

In this respect, Kostel dialect is the unmarked[157] language while the use of official Slovenian or Croatia is actually the marked language. The language boundary is in line with regional boundaries. In the case of Upper Kolpa Valley regional categories function like ethnic categories. They implicate origin or descent, and thus are even more ethnic than ethnonational categories. Although Kostel and Osilnica are situated on Slovenian side of the border, Jože Kolenc argues that "we were never connected to Osilnica which gravitates more

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[153] Dialect. "Ni slovenski, ni hrvaški, dialekt, enako pa govorimo mi in oni preko."
[154] Slo. "Pojmovanja besed so drugačna, meja ne loči dialekta. Kolpa ni razdelila narečja ali dialekta, ampak Srebotnik ob Kolpi, tam kjer je občinska meja, je tud zgodovinska meja med obema govora."
[155] Cro. "Jezik je mešan na tem koncu, po meji se je jezik razmejil."
[156] Slo. "Ista govorica na obeh bregovih, jaz grem večkrat po kruh na Brod, in ko čakam tam za kruh, ta mladina na Brodu, to vsi več pravo hrvaško govorijo, ni več tega dialekta."
[157] The classification of marked and unmarked categories follows Brubaker;s approach to the study of everyday ethnicity. Brubaker, *Nationalist politics and everyday ethnicity in a Transylvanian town*.

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to the Croatian side, to Čabrank. They speak different dialect, we call them *gebarji*."[158] For Jože, Osilnica is the *other* side, more interesting although he is Croat by descent, he labels the Croatian side as the *other* side. Also Ivanka considers Osilnica as the other side, "but they are no worse than us, they are same as us." She is very proud of her dialect. According to her, "a real inhabitant of the borderland is one that speaks the dialect of Kostel. Those who come from abroad, from Ljubljana, Kočevje and other Slovenian cities, not across the river, will never be true Kosteuci."[159] For her foreigners are those who come from other regions of Slovenia and not across the border.

As analyzed, language practices in the Upper valley Kolpa are not seen as a vehicle of ethnicity, at least amongst older generation. Moreover, people have always felt more interconnected with others across the border than with the co-nationals from other parts of their constituent nation-state.

6.5.3   RELIGION IN THE BORDERLAND

Churches have always played an important role in the social reproduction and transformation. They have either reinforced the social and cultural unity of religiously homogeneous nation-states or they have divided religiously heterogeneous societies. In the case of the Upper Kolpa Valley, where religious and state boundaries do not coincide, church has represented an important element in uniting both ethnic groups and promoting cross-border relations. Therefore, church has had a big impact on the informal social relations in the studied borderland. For example, many people from Slovenian Kuželj go to the church to

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[158] Slo. "Ni neke povezave z Osilničani. Osilnica je bolj na Čabrank, bolj na hrvaško stran... Oni majo drugačno govorico, drugi dialekt, gebarji jim pravmo..."
[159] Kostel dialect. "Včasih so rekli, keri boste dlje ostali, ne bo več kostelske besede slišat, se bodo priselili ljudi ki bojo kupli hiše, pa ne mislim Hrvati, al iz druge strani, to so naši ljudi iz Kočevja, Ljubljane, to niso Kosteuci. Sej mi smo prijazni, sam kokr rečemo, rabiš eno ero, da si Kosteuc."

Croatian side because "it is closer, and the time is more convenient for us."[160] Moreover, people from both sides of the border celebrate Christian holidays together. For the Assumption of Mary[161], one of the biggest Christian holiday, they organize a two days festival in Fara. "In the past the festival used to last four days, and bands from both sides played," remembers Marija Bizjak from Croatia. Jože Rauh recalls that his father prepared around thirty five lambs. "Those were the nice days," says Ivanka, "but today there is no more people left. The ones who have stayed, do not interact as we used." Bine Likar sees the future of the region in tourism. "People cannot live out of air, the municipality should help people to start their businesses."

6.5.4   THE EFFECT OF THE 'NEW' BORDER – THEN AND NOW

This subchapter examines how the establishment of an international border in 1991 changed people's everyday lives in the borderland in relation to their perception of nationhood and ethnicity. When people were asked how the 'new' border affected their everyday lives, the immediate response was that the border did not change anything. After discussing their live stories and everyday practices in depth it became obvious that the existence of the official border brought new routines and patterns into their lives.

For Majda Kolenc not much has changed after 1991. "I personally do not feel the border, we never had any problems, my husband is from the *other* side and since we don't have a bakery on Slovenian side, we go *there* to buy bread. For *us*[162] nothing changed although some have problems with crossing the border."[163] Majda perceives the border from

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[160] Slo. "Jaz hodim na Hrvaško v cerkev, Fara nam je predaleč, pa še taka ura je, ob 9h, v Fari pa ob 10h."
[161] People call it Velika Maša.
[162] Referring to her family.
[163] Slo. "Jaz osebno ne čutim meje, nismo mel nobenih problemov, hodimo tja po kruh, mož ma žlahto tam. Za nas se ni spremenil, čeprav eni majo probleme pri prehajanju."

the institutional and legal perspective, and not as a dividing line between two ethnic groups. When she says that "some have problems with the border" she refers to illegal migrations, smuggling or "crossing the border by driving an unregistered tractor."[164] In this respect, she acknowledges that the state border changed previous practices of border crossing as now people have to pay attention what they are allowed to carry across border, and what not. "The same rules apply as they used to count for Slovenian Austrian or Slovenian Italian border." Actually, as crossing the border today demands more coordination, "it became popular after 1991 to go to the market, or the *place* as we call it, to Delnice in Croatia to shop, exchange goods or just to meet up with friends... Our family has always been more linked up with the Croatian side, it is just closer... We also bought the material for our house in Delnice since the town is around ten kilometers closer than Kočevje."[165]

Ivanka Lisac agrees that the border brought some changes to cross border interactions. "When the border emerged, we did not feel very comfortable since before we were like one, we even speak very alike. It divided us, but we adjusted to it quite quickly, so now it is as nothing changed. The only novelty today is that we have to carry our identification cards all the time and pay attention what we carry across the border."[166] Nevertheless, Ivanka admits that these institutional constraints have decreased her contacts with friends across the border. "People don't want to go through all these processes very often, thus my friends don't come to visit me as often as they did, neither do I visit them that often."[167]

People in the borderland have accepted the political reality of the new border without

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[164] Slo. "On edini menda v Kostelu ma probleme – Lisac, ma probleme, gnoj je šel z neregistriranim traktorjem vozit, pa so ga tam na Žabjeku, na poti do Fare, ustavili."

[165] Slo. "Gremo v Delnice v četrtek na plac, nakupovat, to je bl kot en sejem, prodajajo, tekstil, kramo. To je zdaj popularno od 91. Tud po material za bajto smo hodil na Hrvaško, Delnice so 20 km, Kočevje pa 30, tud zarad stroškov, mi osebno smo bili bolj vezani na uno stran, nam je bilo bližje."

[166] Kostel dialect. "Mi smo bili eno isto vsi, čisto isti, smo hodili tja na ples, ko se je pojavila meja, se res nismo dobr počutili, ko je enkrat meja prišla, k prej nis niti vedu, kdaj je meja, pa skor isto govorimo, imamo dosti istih besed. Nas je malo presekalo, samo smo se strašno navadili, kot da je isto kot prek. Edino moraš osebne pokazat."

[167] Kostel dialect. "Jaz mam svoje prijateljice, k tam živijo, pa one rečejo, je treba it peš..."

any resistance. "Before people did not even know what the border was, today we have to obtain permission for each time we cross the border."[168] Some, as Ana Rački, acquired special passes which allow them to cross the border at unofficial border crossing. "In Kuželj we do not have problems with crossing the bridge, we all have passes. Just yesterday someone died in Croatia, and we went to the funeral. We do not have any problems with the *other* side. But we have to carry our passes all the time."[169]

Lidija Janeš looks at the new border from a more critical perspective. "The only thing that the border has not diminished are kinship relations, all other interactions were gradually destroyed. For example, before the establishment of the border it did not matter on which side one went shopping, today due to the border crossing we go on Slovenian side." Goran Abramović regrets the establishment of the border since it divided the borderland. "Before 1991 we gravitated mainly to Slovenia. As Kočevje was closer than Zagreb, my mother did her driving license there. Moreover, we went to Kočevje to buy food and clothes, we even had our hairdresser there. After the independence of Slovenia it was much harder to cross the border, we were constantly checked, and gradually we changed our everyday shopping and other practices."[170] His father agrees that the borderland used to be "one state". Goran believes that "this valley should have been one unit. The Gorski Kotor borderland should belong to Slovenia."[171]

As one can see, people in the Upper Kolpa Valley do not perceive ethnicity and nationhood in the same way as the nationalist rhetorics of the state elites propagate them. In the studied borderland ethnicity does not matter in people's everyday lives. Withstanding

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[168] Citation by Ivanka Lisac.

[169] Slo. "Pri nas mi nimamo problemov, mamo mi te obmejne, glih včeraj je na Hrvaškem en umro, pa smo šli... Sam brez tega prepustnice ne grem ven."

[170] By Goran Abramovic (Croat by nationality) in Slovenian "Pred mejo smo predvsem gravitiral na Slovenijo, nam je bližje, Kočevje nam je bližje od Zagreba, Rijeke, mami je delal vozniški v Kočevju, po fasango, za obleč, k frizerju, potem ko se je Slovenija osamosvojila, je mau težje, te skoz pregledujejo, pa se ti mau zamer vse skupi, pa se na drugo stran usmeriš."

[171] "Jst sm še zmer mnenja, da bi moral biti ta Gorski kotor, sploh 5 km obmejni pas, da bi moral biti pod Slovenijo."

underdevelopment and depopulation of the area, or precisely in spite of them, locals on both sides of the bank have always been interconnected. At least until the establishment of the international border in 1991, when they have gradually started to perceive the border as an obstacle.

Although the border did not alter people's understandings of ethnicity and nationhood it caused division within a rather united community. Due to the institutional constraints of crossing the border, employment and educational structures as well as linguistic and friendship cross-border interactions have modified. This has significantly influenced younger generations whose cross-border interactions have almost diminished. As Goran's brother argues, "we never socialized with children from the other side of the border. The school did not organize any common activities with the Slovenian school as this was the practice before 1991."[172] Indeed, when Goran was a pupil, the school organized cross-national competitions in football, table tennis and chess. Such activities significantly contribute to later cross-border social interactions which have become almost non-existent amongst the young generation. Today, the school system and the border per se provide a powerful institutional structure for ethnically patterned friendship networks. In the long run this can lead to an ethnically endogamous social environment in the borderland.

6.5.5   POLITICS IN THE BORDERLAND: THE EVENTS OF 1991

The dissolution of Yugoslavia led to a series of conflicts and political upheavals that have significantly changed the geographical and political picture of the region. After Slovenia declared its independence in June 1991, a ten days war between the Slovenian Territorial

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[172] By Goran's brother, who also moved to Ljubljana to study.

Defense Force[173] and the Yugoslav People's Army[174] erupted. In order to establish its sovereignty, Slovenian government seized control of the republic's borders which enabled the TO to establish defensive positions against an expected JNA attack. Thus, the objective of this subchapter is not to provide an in-depth review of the 1991 events but to show how people in the Slovenian Croatian borderland perceive the emergence of two newly independent states, Slovenia and Croatia. By analyzing their memories and opinions on the 1991 events, this research examines what role, if any, ethnicity and nationhood played in the unfolding of the events.

According to Ana Rački, people along the border did not experience the war. "I didn't even know that the war started, my son's school notified me. We did not feel the war at all. At that time my husband worked on Croatian side in Brod, *ours* said he should be on *our* side, Croats said he should be there. In the end he was recruited by Slovenian Territorial Defense but went to work to Croatian side every day, back and forth." Goran from Croatian side agrees with Ana, saying that in time of the conflict there was no distinction between "ours and theirs... it was not important."[175]

Not all remember the June 1991 events with such an ease. Majda Kolenc says that "there were tensions. We saw how JNA bombed the military headquarters in Delnice. There was a man hiding his truck in our garage." Although Majda did not want to give details, it was clear that her family was giving shelter to number of members of Slovenian Territorial Defense Force. Jože Rauh and his wife cooked for the TO. He remembers one event when "the Slovenian prime minister Jelko Kacin announced on the Slovenian National Televison that the tanks are approaching Brod. One squat was at our place, and another went to check if the tanks really came to Brod. Of course, there was no one there, the tanks were still in

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[173] In further text TO referring to Slovenian translation: Teritorialna Obramba.
[174] In further text JNA.
[175] Slo-Cro. "Nimamo mi problemov, nimamo nič, ni blo nit prej prepucavanja za vreme rata, je naš al je vaš, ni blo pomembno."

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Delnice."[176] His wife added "after that I asked the soldiers what would they do if the tanks were really there. They answered that they would turn their cars back in the direction of Kočevje."[177] The works of war propaganda is best exemplified in an event portrayed by Jože's wife. "*They* said we should turn out the lights because there will be an air force attack, so there were no lights on our side, but Brod had lights. The next time it was the other way around, there were no lights in Brod, but we had our light on. And then we were talking with our friends from across the border, why did you have lights, why didn't you turn them on. This is what I remember from war." It is interesting how Jože's wife addresses the politicians as *them*.

Although people do not explicitly describe the 1991 events in terms of nationhood, these were the moments of moderately heightened groupness in the borderland. In the heated events of the ten days war between TO and JNA people's notion of Sloven-ess or Croat-ness did come to the front. As people had to choose which side to belong to, nationhood became a visible criteria that distinguished people in the borderland. As only a teenager, Lidija Janeš remembers that "we were confused after the break-up of Yugoslavia. We had to choose which side to belong to, we had an apartment on Slovenian side but all of our relatives lived on Croatian side. It was easier for me and my sister since we were going to Slovenian school, but father questioned a lot which citizenship to obtain. In the end we all got Slovenian citizenship... Funny, job was the decisive element in my father's choice."

As analyzed, although ethnicity and nationhood play an insignificant role in people's life decisions and choices in the Upper Kolpa Valley, there are moments when ethnicity and nationhood are invoked. The dissolution of Yugoslavia and the following ten days war were definitely such moments. When remembering the war, Ante Abramović clearly expresses his

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[176] Slo. "Pri nas smo za TO kuhal hrano, pa je Kacin na TV povedal, da so na Delnicah hodil tanki proti Brodu, en vod je bil pr nas 35, drugi pa na Brodu, pa žive duše ni blo tm, vse v Delnicah stalo, nič se ni premaknil."
[177] Slo. "Pa sm TO vprašal, kaj pa če res pridejo, pa so uni rekli, vse avte obrnemo prot Kočevju, pa pobegnemo."

perception of nationhood. "We heard the planes flying to Delnice to bomb the military headquarters... fortunately it was cloudy so *our* soldiers could take the guns for Vukovar on time."[178] Thus, paradoxically, the experience of the 1991 events at the same time connected people from both sides of the border since they were fighting against the same enemy, JLA under the Serbian command.

6.5.6 EVERYDAY LIFE AND POLITICS

Few borderlanders are occupied with politics, even fewer with nationalist politics. Nevertheless, politics comes up quite often in people's everyday discussions. This does not mean that people on everyday basis take part in substantive and well-informed conversations on political issues but when discussing economic situation and the future of the region or its peripherality, well-known political figures or disputes between the neighboring states one cannot avoid talking about politics. Hence, most of the interviewed subjects express distance from, and dislike for politics and politicians. Dissatisfaction with state politics is expressed through several topics, the prevalent one being disinterest of the state center in the development of the borderland.

Majda Kolenc argues that she follows politics "even too much." She believes that the state should improve the connection with Ljubljana, "only so young people will stay in the region."[179] Miha Lisac agrees that the "region is forgotten by the center, we are just too far." Many people in the borderland believe that the state should establish more job positions in the region. Ana Rački complains that "when Itas (the factory) was opened, many people lived

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[178] Cro. "Za vojno 1991, v Delnicah so avioni letal, srečom je bilo oblačno, da so specialci prišli, in vzeli orožje za Vukovar, to je bla JLA."
[179] Slo. "Spremljamo še preveč politiko. Tukaj bi bilo povezavo z Ljubljano treba zrihtat... pa bi blo več mladih v Kostelu."

her, but now, they all left." Jože Rauh claims that "if more firms would open, people would stay." Miro Petovar from Pirče lost all faith in the development of the region. He believes that the settlements will disappear since "only seventy, eighty, ninety years old people live here, and there is no sign of an increase of population."[180]

Due to the traffic isolation and distance from the major urban centers together with the negative historical legacy the Upper Kolpa valley always faced depopulation. Nevertheless, as people argue, the demographic situation worsened after the break up of Yugoslavia. As many factories had to close down, people were forced to move to bigger cities, either on Croatian or Slovenian side. Hence, they don't blame the emergence of the two independent states for region's bad economic situation but the change of the system. As Goran Repič argues, "the border is not the reason for the collapse of the borderland, it is the system. Today there is no difference in economic situation between this or the other side of the border. There is no job on either side. Everything got privatized."[181] Ante also sees the problem in the fact that the state centers no longer protect their economy, "Ljubljana and Zagreb are to be blamed for high unemployment... although *yours* are a bit better than *ours*."[182] Majda Kolenc and her husband think that "whatever politicians do, is bad. In communism everything was better, the relations between people were better, today people don't help each other anymore." Ivanka Lisac is also nostalgic of the previous system, "in socialism we lived very good. But today it is hard, at least for us, the common people."[183]

As examined, most of the everyday political talk does not have anything to do with ethnicity and nationalism. The nationalistic ideas of Slovenian and Croatian political elites

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[180] Slo. "Občutek je grenak, ker nikol ne bo nič v tej vasi, 70, 80, 90 let so stari ljudje, nič ne bo, pomrli bomo, če ni mladine, ni ničesar."

[181] Slo-Cro. "Ni zbog granice, propada, kle je meja, tam je meja, gremo vse privatizirat, dobi neki kredit, pa propade."

[182] Cro. "Za nezaposlenost so krivi gradovi, centri, Zagreb, Ljubljana, vaši so malo bolji nego naši, al je slično ko naši."

[183] Slo. "Česarkoli se lotijo, je nekaj narobe. In v komunizmu sem živela, in vidim, kaj se danes dogaja, takoj bi menjala, drgač je blo življenje, drgač so bli medsebojni od odnosi. Ko smo to bajto delali, nas je blo tok, da je bil drne, danes pa vprašanje, kok bi ti kdo pomagal, je neka foušarija."

are far from people's everyday cares and preoccupations in the borderland. Economic underdevelopment, peripheral character of the area, neglect from the main centers, and depopulation are topics that concern the population the most.

People in the borderland regardless of their ethnicity see ethnic conflict as something that comes from above and is stimulated by politicians pursuing their own interests. As Ivanka says, "we never called each other Croat or Slovene, maybe when we were joking. Politics is preoccupied with this distinction, not us." Goran is disappointed with politics since "politicians use nationalism for their own ends, no one ever asks us what we want."[184] Irrespective of their nationality, people in the Upper Kolpa Valley believe that Croatia should join the European Union and Schengen as fast as possible. Since all interviewed subjects perceive the border as an obstacle, their everyday life will significantly improve once border police will not control the area any more. Although all have accepted the new reality, they still have not adjusted to the constant control of the border police. Lidija Janeš is "extremely annoyed by the border police. The fact that I cannot visit my grandmother by bike irritates me. Although the police is nice and most of them know us already, I still question every time I cross the border whether I am carrying something I should not. It is definitely not a pleasant feeling." According to Ivanka, the biggest disadvantage of the border is that "one has to carry documents all the time. We joke that we have to carry them even when we go to the fields. But we really have to." Moreover, before "one could sell goods and animals to the other side of the border, now you have to know a certain person on the border to be able to sell them."[185] Most of the subjects expressed similar stories, hence citing them would not bring any new conclusions to the analysis.

All interviewed subjects claim that ethnicity is not a problem and has never been a

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[184] Slo.-Cro. "Oni so nacionalno nastrojeni, politika je kurba, nam je vseeno. Mi se vidimo, znamo sve, kaj čmo, nobenga od nas ne bodo vprašal. Tu baš nema provokatora."
[185] Slo. "Najslabša stran meje, k si mogu dokumente ven vlečt, včasih si čez kako živino prodau, zdej to ni možno, si prodal na Hrvatsko, zdej pa morš met določeneg človeka, k je na carini za te stvari."

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problem, even in the time of heated relations between the neighboring states. Of course, this discourse of everyday interethnic harmony can be found in many other settings, therefore only through analysis this research has shown that nationhood and ethnicity do not play a decisive role in the everyday lives of people in the borderland.

Nevertheless, as the study has shown, much has changed after the establishment of the international border in 1991. Due to the institutional constraints of the border regime private as well as institutional cross-border interactions have decreased if not completely disappeared. This has led to non-existent cross-border interactions among younger generations, i.e. those born in the late eighties and later. In order to anticipate the future dynamics of the Upper Kolpa borderland, a research of the everyday practices and (self)identifications of these younger populations should be done. As the current trend shows, people are moving out from the region to the hinterlands of the respective nation-states.

6.5.7 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The main purpose of the empirical research in the Upper Kolpa Valley was to accentuate ethnic and national (self)identifications of local people on both sides of the Slovenian-Croatian border. The ethnographic study verified locals' understandings of ethnicity and nationhood by focusing on their social, cultural and economic cross-border interactions before and after the establishment of the international border in 1991. As the original idea was to compare ethnic (self)identifications of inhabitants of Slovenian part of the border with those living in the Croatian side, for methodological purpose, the analysis took official state border as a hypothetical division of the two 'local nations'[186]. However, as it turned out, locals

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[186] The political border on the Kolpa river was interpreted by the scholars from the beginning of the twentieth century as a 'natural' historical separator between the two local populations from the fifteenth century on.

did not perceive the border as a dividing line between the two populations until 1991 when the new border regime was established. Having this in mind, accompanied with the failure of the research[187] to collect a representative sample of the populations of both sides of the border, the analysis examined the borderland as a bound social *locus*. From the perspective of the valley as one unit, conclusions were drawn on the basis of the existing sample of twenty two interviews. Interestingly, the research came to similar conclusions as a quantitative study of border communities along the river Kolpa, done in 1993 by Duška Knežević Hočevar.[188]

One of the key findings of the present research is the inconsistent nature of border peoples' ethnic and national (self)identifications. On the one hand, twenty out of twenty two189 interviewed subjects view the valley as one unit that was divided with the emergence of the new border regime in 1991. People primarily identify with the local identification, only later with the national one.[190] They emphasize that only their relatives and neighbors live on the other side of the border, although at the same time they admit the border regime has separated them radically. On the other hand, when they speak, for example, of the economic situation of the neighboring state, they refer to people across the border in national denominators, as Slovenes or Croats.[191] Nevertheless, all respondents claim that they have always felt more interconnected with others across the border than with the co-nationals from

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[187] Due to the time and fund limits together with unwillingness of many respondents to participate in the research, the latter did not achieve to form a representative sample of populations of both sides of the border. As the sample of interviewed subject in Slovenian side was satisfactory, too little people were interviewed from the Croatian side of the border.

[188] In Duška Knežević Hočevar, *Družbena razmejevanja v dolini zgornje Kolpe. Domačinska zamišljanja nacije in lokalitete (Boundaries in the Upper Kolpa Valley. Native Imaginings of Nation and Locality)* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 1999). Her investigation, conducted in 1993, focused on the perceived differences in feelings of belonging between the inhabitants of the two sides of the border along the river Kolpa. The sample included thirty residents from the Croatian side and thirty residents from the Slovenian side. By employing quantitative techniques, she tried to determine the intensity of the cross-border contacts in the region before and after the border imposition. The results showed that only formal business and economic contacts between the two cross border communities dropped significantly, but not so much the informal contacts.

[189] Younger respondents were neutral on this topic.

[190] This is in line with the results of the 1993 study. As Duška Knežević examined, only half of the respondents described themselves as first and foremost in accord with the national categories (Slovenian/Croat), while the other half identified first with the name of their settlement.

[191] This was especially evident in the case of interviewees in the Croatian side of the border.

other parts of their constituent nation-state. Due to the same spoken language on both sides of the river, intense kin- and friendship interactions combined with historical conditions[192] the border river has always functioned more as a site of communication than as a barrier. Indeed, areas on both sides of the border have always been highly socially and economically interconnected, even interdependent. As this study examines, ethnicity rarely matter in people's everyday settings.

However, the establishment of the international border in 1991 created not only a new political reality for the local populations, but has also in relatively short period caused division within once ethnically rather united community. People on both sides of the borderline perceive the border as an obstacle – an obstacle of cross-border socio-cultural relations and within peoples' popular imaginations. They are irritated by the presence of mobile border police and complications with crossing the border. Despite the formal complications, such as different currencies, border control, border passes, properties on the 'other' side, people complained also about the changes in their informal ties. Although kinship relations across the river remained rather strong, friendship and economic cross-border contacts have significantly decreased. Compared to 1993 research that did not detect any significant drop in intensity of the cross-border contacts, one can see that eighteen years later the cross border interactions have almost diminished.

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[192] Traffic isolation, poor communication with the hinterland of both states.

7 CONCLUSION

The Slovenian-Croatian border along the river Kolpa is not a young phenomenon, quite opposite, it has existed for long time. It has been the site of a political border between the Holy Roman Empire and the Hungarian Hapsburg estates; between the Austrian and Hungarian parts of the Empire; between various administrative entities in the first Yugoslav state and between the Socialist Republics within the second Yugoslav state; until in 1991 it became the political border between sovereign nation-states Slovenia and Croatia.[193] Despite its long history of existence, the border has never delimited the populations of both sides of the borderline.[194] Although its historical and geographical characteristics led many scholars to view it as a 'natural' dividing line between two ethnic groups, Slovenes and Croats, the borderland always represented a bound social cosmos. Indeed, similar geographical and historical conditions as well as the poor communication with the hinterlands of the respective states resolved in uniting rather than dividing both banks of the border river. The key evidence for the *boundness* of the borderland can be found in the apparent similarities among various dialects on both riverbanks, which prove that the Upper Kolpa Valley was linguistically unified.[195] What is even more interesting, the differences among the dialects of the riverbanks did not exist alongside the border but were rather crosscutting it.

It was only due to the nation-building projects of both states, which viewed the nation as a politically and culturally homogeneous society, that the clear distinction between the local Croats and Slovenes was made. The rhetoric of these state nationalisms is largely adopted by the political elites, both Slovenian and Croatian, who perceive the border along

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[193] Duška Knežević Hočevar, "Local and National Narratives of a Border Regime Between Slovenia and Croatia" in Thomas M. Wilson, *Culture and cooperation in Europe's borderlands* (Rodopi, 2003), 171-194.
[194] See chapter 5.
[195] Duška Knežević Hočevar, "Local and National Narratives of a Border Regime Between Slovenia and Croatia" in Thomas M. Wilson, *Culture and cooperation in Europe's borderlands* (Rodopi, 2003), 171-194.

the river Kolpa as politically and culturally dividing two nations. Moreover, the dominant political discourse[196] in Slovenia interprets the border as a "barrier against the dangerous Balkans", a line between the "primitive Balkans" and the "civilized Europe".[197] As a crucial part of *Slovenian national identity* is its differentiation and distancing from the Croats, the political elites have by portraying the border as a barrier against the "primitive Other" contributed to the (re)production of Slovenian national identity. In a reverse manner, the discourse of Croatian political elites[198] depicts Slovenians as the "bad Other" by putting themselves in a dominant position.

In contrast to the nationalist rhetorics of the state elites, the locals on both sides of the Slovenian-Croatian border do not interpret ethnicity and nationhood in the same way as do the politicians in the state centers, at least in the Upper Kolpa Valley. The ethnographic perspective has shown that their (self)identifications do not fit into the fixed categorizations imposed by the state that enforces the perception of clearly bounded cultural and national difference between Slovenes and Croats. People in the Upper Kolpa Valley interpret their identity in terms of regional and linguistic identifications rather than in terms of national and ethnic identity. Their notions of national belonging differ significantly from exclusive state' conceptualizations of national loyalty and legally defined categories of membership. When people in the Upper Kolpa Valley identify themselves as Croat or Slovene, they do so in a particular context or at a particular moment, without being nominally Slovene or Croat.[199] The ethnographic study has shown that in certain contexts people say that they are Slovenian after their parents, but feel like Croat as they have married to a Croat, have children who are Croats by citizenship, and at the same time they are seeking to attain Slovenian citizenship.[200]

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[196] As also reflected in popular and media discourses.
[197] See chapter 4.
[198] As reproduced in the mainstream media, see chapter 4.
[199] See chapter 5.
[200] This was the case of Pajnič Vlasta from Brod na Kupi. Similar identifications, as in the example of Goran

These various identifications do not mean that they obtain *confused identity*, but that processes of national identifications in the Upper Kolpa Valley are perceived differently from the rigid conceptualizations that the nation-state wants to impose on its members.

However, as the empirical research has concluded, after the establishment of the international border in 1991essentialist understandings of nationhood started to manipulate (self)identifications of the borderlanders. The new border regime and consequent formalization of everyday life in the borderland brought declining of various cross-border contacts in terms of dynamics and structure of the region. Although the new border has not significantly affected the understandings of nationhood and ethnicity among elder generations, the new regime changed the perceptions of (self)identifications among young population. As there is little institutional as well as informal cross-border exchange, young people started to interpret the border from the perspective of state defined national categories. Nevertheless, a further research would be needed in order to confirm the latter observation.

To conclude, in the case of Upper Kolpa Valley, the rhetoric of state nationalism that views the border as a site of two separate cross-border national cultures is inconsistent with the reality of border locality. Therefore, the key to understanding Slovenian-Croatian borderland along the river Kolpa is in the reformulation of the border which is not to be seen as a dividing line between the nations but a political reality imposed from above. Nevertheless, the imposed border has activated national (self)identifications among locals and deepened the locally defined differences between the 'ethnic' communities on both sides of the river.

Abramović, were recorder in the study.

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9 APPENDIX 1

Map 1. Map of the Upper Kolpa Valley
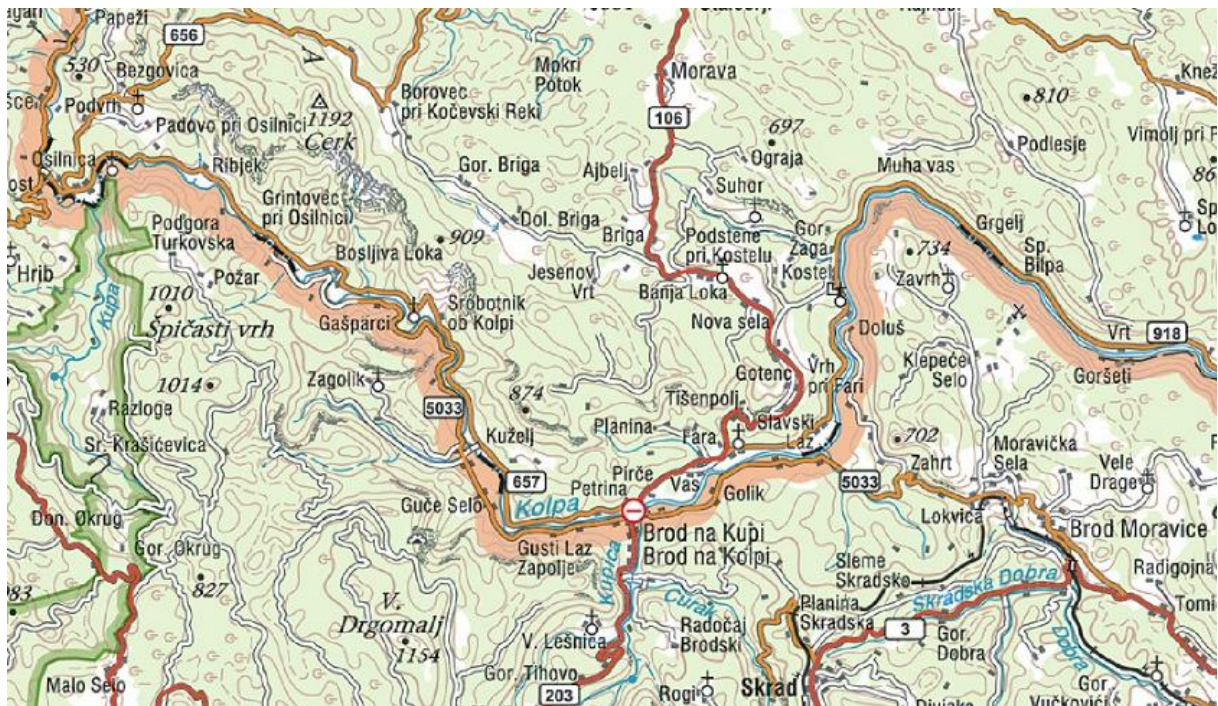
10 APPENDIX 2

Map 2. Map of the location of the Upper Kolpa Valley