Positioning *Place*: Exploring the Intersection of Social Constructivism and Humanistic Geography in Identity Formation

By

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Submitted to

Central European University

Nationalism Studies Program

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Supervisor: Dr. Ana Mijić

Vienna, Austria

2025

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ABSRACT. This thesis investigates the theoretical intersection between the epistemological approach of social constructivism with the field of humanistic geography to arrive at a more thorough understanding of how the identity-construction process operates. Past studies on identity-construction have given little agency to *place* as a generative element in this process. This study seeks to change that, by answering how does *place* affect the identity-construction process? This study was conducted using a series of narrative-based interviews with participants coming from the post-Yugoslav space. The transcripts of nine interviews were analyzed using a combination of thematic content analysis and objective hermeneutics, which revealed that *Place* is just as much a contributor to our identity as social processes. Moreover, this study highlights the importance of situating *place* more centrally in discussions pertaining to identity-construction within the social sciences, revealing that identity and *place* are co-constructed through ongoing dialectical social processes.

Keywords: **Identity • Identity-Construction • Lifeworld • Place • Social Constructivism • Epistemology • Humanistic Geography • Yugoslavia**

Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, Cory Dudka, candidate for the MA degree in Nationalism Studies declare herewith that the present thesis titled "Positioning *Place*: Exploring the Intersection of Social Constructivism and Humanistic Geography in Identity Formation" is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography.

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Vienna, 06 June 2025

Cory Dudka

Preface

This project had many ebbs and flows, and several of my friends and colleagues can surely attest to some of my delusional ambitions that I had for this brainchild of mine. This was an incredibly frustrating process, but it was one of the most rewarding and challenging experiences in my academic career. What I attempted to do was personally challenging; I utilized theoretical approaches that were largely foreign to me, and at times uncomfortable, but I was genuinely intrigued by these perspectives and how they could be employed to make sense of the world around me. I am saddened at the prospect of letting this research go; I sincerely hope this is only a temporary farewell, for there was so much more that I wanted to explore. On that note, I owe thanks to many individuals, for whom without, this project would not have been possible.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Ana Mijić, for whom I am deeply grateful for. Throughout this entire process you provided me with the guidance and encouragement that I needed, even when at times my thoughts were a bit scatterbrained.

I want to extend many thanks to Isaja Karadakovska, who let me bounce ideas off her throughout this entire process; our endless ramblings were like a lighthouse in a sea of confusion and self-doubt. Thanks a bunch.

Roberta Koleva, there is no way in hell I would have stumbled upon the works of Doreen Massey or have been introduced to humanistic geography without your initial literature suggestions last autumn, I sincerely thank you.

To all my friends, Abijah Ahern, Deven Toothman, Dóra Oprics, Elene Kajaia, Gentian Doçi, Jainaba Kurz, Lior Zerdoun, Nazerke Kanatbekova, Omar Henderson, Paolo Phillips, as well as many others, thank you for making the past two years in Vienna wonderful.

For the silent operators, Borbála Pál, Maria Gabler, Sanjay Kumar, and Tünde Csákvári you don't get enough recognition; thank you for all you have done behind the scenes.

And last but not least, I would like to sincerely thank my mom and dad for supporting and loving me from an ocean away. Whether it be our bureaucratic phone calls or hour-long phone calls about the same few geopolitical events, you kept me going.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction 1

2. Theoretical Framework 5

2.2 Socialization & Lifeworlds 9

2.3 Why Humanistic Geography? 11

2.4 Placing *Place* 13

2.5 Harmonizing *Place* & Identity 18

3. Methodology 23

3.1 Data selection & Justification 24

3.2 Method 27

3.3 Data Analysis 27

3.4 Ethical Considerations & Limitations 28

4. Historical Context 29

5. Analysis 34

5.1 The Physical Aspects 35

5.2 The Structural Aspects 42

5.3 The Temporal Aspects 52

5.4 The Social Aspects 60

6. Theoretical Discussion & Concluding Remarks 67

7. Bibliography 69

1. Introduction

I find the theoretical implications of place, and what it can mean for the construction of an individual's identity to be immensely fascinating, and it is by way of a personal anecdote that I want to start of this exploratory discussion. These brief reflections that I have had with myself concerning place-identity were the inspiration that culminated in this research project. The positionality and interconnectedness of Arlington in relation to neighboring entities, such as Virginia, DC, and Maryland plays a tremendous role in my perspective and interest in theorizing place as a concept.

Depending on who I am speaking with, whether that be someone from Northern Virginia, DC, another US state, or a foreigner, I have tended to alter where I say I am from. Despite living less than fifteen minutes away from the White House, I am not technically from Washington, DC, but if I am talking to someone who is not from the DC Metropolitan area, I usually say that I am from DC, until I begin socializing more with that individual. However, what is particularly annoying is when both people from Virginia and DC, or Maryland, assert that I am not from those places, but then proper outsiders declare that I am "just from DC"—what is the correct response, or rather is there one?

This place that I grew up in, whatever it may be called, is now very foreign to me. Arlington, Virginia, has changed substantially since I last permanently lived there back in 2018, which was not that long ago. I watched it change over time, but most strikingly, it was when I was detached from that place during my undergraduate studies across the country that I started to notice substantial changes and ruptures within both the social and physical fabric of Arlington when I occasionally returned. The social connections that made that place "home" had degraded and a

lot of the physical structures had changed with it. Taken together, such shifts had made my once home, now feel like a place that now exists as a living memory. It is through my own positionality and relation to Arlington that I have come to think a lot about the role of *place* in the identity construction process—how such entities can hold vastly different meanings from individual to individual, group to group, and across generations.

The role of *place* in the identity construction process of individuals has been undertheorized in the predominant discussions in the social sciences. I believe that the respective disciplines of sociology and human/humanistic geography have not yet tapped into each other's potential to help strengthen their own work and perspectives. While these disciplines have been put into discussion with each other previously (see Harvey 1988; Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994; Thrift 2008; etc.) there is still a need to further explore and understand these fields' intersection points more comprehensively.

Before progressing further, I would like to briefly introduce and clarify what the field of humanistic geography is. Human geography and humanistic geography are two closely related fields; in fact, the latter is a subfield of the former. Human geography is a branch of geography which seeks to examine the relationship between humans and their environments. The field is related to urban and cultural geography. While human geography aims at understanding broad social patterns of how humans and space/place help to shape one another, humanistic geography emerged as a reaction that emphasized human experience, meaning, and perception of spaces/places. As I am interested in theoretical questions pertaining to identity, I find the latter to be an incredibly valuable field to harmonize with social constructivism.

This research employs a social constructivist lens to expand upon the existing literature in the field of humanistic geography. The theories within social constructivism are apt towards

addressing the themes of space and place because it helps to address the issues of human perception, subjectivity, and experience regarding things that are typically thought of as concrete and preexisting manifestations—independent of social processes. In this project it is my aim to answer the following, how does *place* affect the identity-construction process? To achieve this theoretical inquiry, I have chosen to look at the ex-Yugoslav space. I find this space to be theoretically rich due to the series of tumultuous changes that have occurred in the region during the recent past. Such a climate has fostered significant changes to the everyday lives in which people operate—call them ruptures. These sociocultural ruptures that transpired in the wake of the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY, or Yugoslavia for short) I posit had a lasting and transformative effect on individuals' critical socialization periods, which in turn has changed their relationship to how they perceive and understand places. It is this precise relationship between the identity construction process and *place*, often time bound in our manifestation, that fascinates me. Moreover, while this research's scope is the ex-Yugoslav space, there has been overwhelming research that has pushed a national or Yugonostalgic[1] lens onto this region. This research has tried to actively not impose nationally framed, or leading, intrinsic questions onto participants, rather I would only follow-up with such framings if the participant considered it to be important to their narrative. Additionally, a point I must stress is that this research project is first and foremost theory driven. The aim of this study is not to develop empirical takeaways which can be applied to my chosen case-study, or any other.

A humanistic geographical conception of space relies on the assumption that *places* are interconnected and in a process of constant flux and negotiation with each other and with society

[1] Yugonostalgia is a form of nostalgia in which an individual longs for the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In particular, feelings of fondness, loss, or idealization are often juxtaposed with the political, social, or economic conditions of the post-Yugoslav states.

(Massey 2005). These theoretical assumptions demand that research be conducted by putting disparate *places* from across the ex-Yugoslav space, and likewise individuals, into dialogue with each other. This was done by conducting and analyzing a series of semi-structured narrative-based interviews from research participants living in the ex-Yugoslav space in an attempt to more holistically understand how identity construction operates in accordance with *place*. The transcripts from nine interviews were analyzed using a combination of thematic content analysis and objective hermeneutics. Coding these interviews posed to be challenging due to significant leeway being given to the participants to guide the interview. However, objective hermeneutics allowed me to more thoroughly interpret, process, and connect these subjective and highly individualized experiences to each other without imposing my own biases and presumptions, as much as I would have otherwise.

Both social constructivism (see Berger & Luckmann 1966; Schütz & Luckmann 1973, etc.) and humanistic geography (see Massey 20005; Tuan 1995; Soja 1989, etc.) have discussed aspects of identity construction at length, and in different ways. Importantly, I see that there is room for advancing preexisting theory in these fields, precisely because humanistic geography and social constructivist literature have not holistically engaged with one another. The ways in which Berger, Luckmann, and Schütz discuss identity construction, in relation to the dialectic of social construction and the construction, interpretation, and institutionalization social reality can be paired harmoniously with humanistic geography to better understand how we approach, construct, and make sense of our environment. These theories and their theoreticians will now be discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I will lay out the theoretical foundations of my topic, by way of discussing core literature, concepts, and the middle-range theories that will assist me in tackling the interrelatedness of *place* and the identity-construction process. As this research hinges on a particular understanding of *place*, I will argue that it is precisely the conceptual framing of *place* that can reveal something about our own identities which can lead us to a more holistic understanding of the social processes of the world around us bring us closer to answering, how does *place* affect the identity-construction process?

This chapter consists of four sections. Section 2.1 starts of the theoretical discussion by introducing the middle-range sociological approach of social constructivism (Berger & Luckman 1966). This section fleshes out the processes behind knowledge production and construction of our reality, via habitulization and institutionalization. Section 2.2 pivots towards discussing the construction of subjective realities via socialization and interweaves the conversation with Schütz and Luckmann's concept of the *Lifeworld* (1973). I start with these sociological approaches because they are crucial steppingstones towards understanding how I will be approaching the field of humanistic geography and how I conceptualize and utilize *place* for my own research. Having laid out the sociological precursors of the social construction of reality, and provided my working definition for what identity is an object of analysis, section 2.3 introduces the perspective of humanistic geography and why I find it useful for this study, more so than other disciplines. Section 2.4 pivots towards specifically looking at the conceptualization of *place* that I find most appropriate towards addressing the identity-construction process. Section 2.5 proposes a new way of looking at *place* and identity, one that holistically

incorporates the theoretical takeaways of the previous sections to put forth a schema for how I understand and utilize these concepts for my own research and analysis.

2.1 Knowledge & Reality

I would like to begin this theoretical discussion by concretely laying out what I mean when I speak of identity, specifically as an object of analysis. I cannot adequately discuss the field of humanistic geography nor *place* as an object of analysis without firstly discussing the precursors of the identity-construction process. Additionally, by stipulating how I will be approaching and utilizing the concept of identity, early on, I hope to avoid confusing and essentialist notions of identity when I begin to discuss humanistic geography. For the purpose of my research, I approach the concept of identity from strictly a social-constructivist approach. From this perspective identity is perceived as a socially produced construct; identity is produced through a dialectic between internalizing and externalizing both subjective and objective realities of individuals (Berger & Luckmann 1966; Jenkins 2000). To understand the identity-construction process I will now turn towards looking at the sociology of knowledge and the social construction of reality, as these veins of intellectual thought are an essential precursor to my theoretical framework.

It is from the early essays of Karl Marx that the foundational proposition of the sociology of knowledge originates, that is to say, an individual's existence is a social activity, and therefore, what an individual makes of himself, he also makes for society, with the consciousness of himself acting as a social being (Marx & Engels 1988, 105). This proposition carried further stipulates that both knowledge and reality must be context specific, within the societies that produce and maintain them. Berger and Luckmann argue that the sociology of knowledge

investigates whatever individuals in a society consider to be "knowledge," whether it is factual or not. Since all knowledge is produced and disseminated through social interactions, the goal of should be to understand how individuals come to see certain ideas as "reality" (1966, 15). Under this framing knowledge and reality are not such distant concepts but closely intertwined, and by the end of this chapter I will argue the same interrelatedness of these processes and *place.*

In order for knowledge to become the objective social reality, the only one in which an individual can imagine and operate in, Berger and Luckmann propose that it must go through several processes, habitualization and institutionalization. Once knowledge has gone through these paces it becomes enshrined as "how things are done" in a particular social reality (1966, 77). Knowledge in all of its forms is a biproduct of human activity, and human activity is subject to habitualization, or the process in which an action that becomes frequently repeated becomes a known and repeatable pattern (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 70-71). This process can work on the individual-level or group-level, whether that be me learning how to shuffle a deck of cards or a group of individuals internalizing what name refers to their riverside settlement. But it is when these repeatable actions become interdependently typified by multiple parties of a group that it becomes institutionalized knowledge; this riverside settlement becomes known as "Dunaj" (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 77). Let's take this example a step further, focusing on a particular square in Dunaj. Individuals begin to gather in this square to sell their goods, and after repeated instances of doing so, it becomes habitualized as a *place* where trade is conducted. Over time, as these gatherings keep occurring in the square, there becomes an expectation among the group of what this *place* is, not as something else, such as a spot for public executions, it becomes typified as a Marketplace. After a firm consensus of this *place* having been established, it becomes institutionalized as a marketplace and other activities or meanings associated with this square

become discouraged. This square in Dunaj has become an objectivized piece of knowledge in this group's *lifeworld*, and as other individuals or groups come into contact with this piece of knowledge through socialization they internalize this *place* into their own subjective realities (Schütz & Luckmann 1973).

Institutionalization implies historicity and control. When actions and knowledge are reciprocally typified, they become hard to question and part of "reality" (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 72). Although institutionalization is the name assigned to a step in this process, it needn't rely on institutions, a hegemon, or laws—it is society itself that reinforces pieces of knowledge through a consensus on established patterns, such as an expectation that that particular square in Dunaj is a marketplace and not a sheepfold. This brings us to the passing down of knowledge through socialization. Our shared reality, in which we construct, alongside our identity, is a dialectic between "how we identify ourselves, how others identify us, and the ongoing interplay of these on processes of social identification" (Jenkins 2000, 7). The same basic processes of social constructivism laid out by Berger and Luckmann regarding the social construction of reality can help to inform us about how group identification and social categorization function.

Let me briefly extend these theoretical implications I have been discussing to group categorization before I return the discussion back to socialization. Richard Jenkins helps to explain how group formation works by proposing a schema for how individuals operate in relation to and between various social phenomena. We as individuals identify ourselves, but we also "identify others and are identified by them in turn, in the internal-external dialectic of *self-image* and *public-image"* (2000, 8). This self, versus group identification revolves around internally-oriented and externally-oriented modes of categorization that all actors are subject to. These actors operate within and between several "orders" of social phenomena, the *individual,*

the *interaction,* and the *institutional* orders. The individual order is the world of how we see ourselves within our head, in response to how others perceive us. This is closely related to George Herbert Mead's theory of the self, in that there is no truly isolated sense of self, merely products of social construction. In brief Mead lays out two interrelated components, the "Me" as he posits is the part of the self that is shaped by society, and the "I" is the individual's response to the "Me," (Mead 1934). Seen from this framing the *institutional* order can be seen as comparable to the "I," or an individual's response to what society has created. This brings us to the next and final order. The interaction order is the world of relationships between imbodied individuals, i.e. the foundation that allows for provinces of reality to become fashioned. The last order is what unfolds when ritualized, routinized, and enshrined in our collective being. The institutional order holds our entire social stock of knowledge, i.e. what we take for granted in our daily operations, such as patterns, symbols, customs, etc. (Jenkins 2000, 10).

2.2 Socialization & Lifeworlds

With these theoretical implications established, the final piece to the sociological puzzle is the process of socialization and concept of the *lifeworld.* According to Berger and Luckmann an individual becomes a member of society only after he has fully internalized its norms. This process, called socialization, is how individuals are systematically introduced into the shared reality of a society or one of its parts (1966, 150). Primary socialization is the most important type of this process for the individual as it constructs the groundwork for the world in which he operates in. It is during the initial process in childhood in which he is introduced to an objective social structure, or *lifeworld* (Schütz & Luckmann 1973). Social identity is predicated on the assumption that it is inherently relational and context dependent and it is through these lifeworlds or provinces of reality in which social identities are created, maintained, and transformed. The

lifeworld, a term first coined by Edmund Husserl, was described as the foundation of all knowledge and lived experiences (Husserl 1970, 111). This concept was further refined by Schütz and Luckmann when they emphasized the importance of intersubjectivity in creating such lifeworlds. For them a lifeworld is described as the reality that seems self-evident to men operating "within the natural attitude," the everyday lifeworld is "the province of reality in which man continuously participates in ways which are at once inevitable and patterned" (Schütz & Luckmann 1973, 3). Importantly the strongest of these realities of everyday operation are the ones created under primary socialization.

During primary socialization the individual encounters his significant others that impose a certain objective reality onto him, and a child's internalization of his significant other's world becomes the only existent and conceivable world out of many possible worlds (Berger & Luckman 1966, 154.) This entrenchment of a particular lifeworld or reality in an individual's being is where my academic interest lies. Through these processes of socialization we as individual "not only live in the same world" through shared situations and reciprocal understandings, but "we participate in each other's being," (Berger and Luckmann 1966 150) we create different provinces of reality from that of other groups, and I think this theoretical framing can be extended to *place.*

In this regard my interest in identity construction and primary socialization stems from the fact that the worlds we construct in our adolescence are insurmountably hard to shake from our daily operation, it would take "severe biographical shocks to disintegrate the massive reality internalized in early childhood," where in comparison the worlds constructed in secondary socialization, or "sub-worlds" are relatively easier to shake in comparison (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 158 & 162). Social identities are dependent on the relative stability of these *lifeworlds*.

And such severe shocks that Berger and Luckmann speak of that individuals experience force us to transition to a reality that they once perceived as finite to another, and foreign, province of meaning (Schütz & Luckmann 1973, 25). I want to use these same processes of the sociology of knowledge to argue how *place* can be conceptualized as a similar socializing agent as discussed in the processes of the social construction of reality; likewise I argue that just as different *lifeworlds* and subjective realities exist and can be adopted and exchanged by the individual, so to can different senses of *place.*

2.3 Why Humanistic Geography?

The field of Humanistic Geography is useful to me because of the ways in which it critically engages with the world around us, as the social-constructivist approach does. The field puts emphasis on human experiences, meaning, and subjective perception of *place*, going beyond physical or economic characteristics. By conceptually engaging with *place* in this more humanizing and qualitative manner more minute insights can be brought to the forefront of discussions in the social sciences. Specifically, it is through utilizing this field that my study aims to make *place* an active agent in the identity-construction process. humanistic geography is a subfield of human geography and is focused on the subjective meanings and experiences people attach to *place*, whereas human geography places emphasis on the spatial organization of human activities like urban development and migration. I find this field's conceptual framing of *place* to be important and useful to me, as opposed to other fields and disciplines because it lends credence to giving our environment some degree of agency in the social processes that construct the individual and reality.

Within the field of migration studies, *place* plays an important role, but it is often not the primary object of analysis of the research being conducted. Migration studies focuses on understanding the drivers behind migration and the ways in which these individuals experience both the journey and subsequent arrival and/or integration, but *place* is of secondary importance (e.g. Glick Schiller & Çağlar 2009; Mijić et al. 2024). On a more abstract level, Marxist and poststructuralist philosophy has also focused on *place* as an object of analysis, but the lines of inquiry tend to dwell on the production, shaping, and control over space. Heidegger's concept of the *Dasein,* or "being in place" (Heidegger 1962) and Lefebvre's spatial triad on the production of space laid out much of the groundwork for what questions humanistic geography would begin to grapple with, but importantly, like migration studies, these approaches within philosophy situates the importance of meaning on social relations, space is secondary. Lefebvre introduced the proposition that *place* is not stable, but something which emerges from the dialectical production of space via power structures and social relations (Lefebvre 1991), a perspective which is a critical proposition in humanistic geography, but the same problem exists from my perspective, *place* lacks agency in such processes.

humanistic geography, in contrast to this brief snapshot of other disciplines, has produced research which has attempted to give equal weight to both the individual, social relations, and their lived environments. humanistic geography critically engages with the environments that we inhabit, and in recent years the field has emphasized a pivot towards linking "meanings of place and aspects of the self" (Antonsich 2010, 129), a move which is attempting to give the individual and *place* more equal footing as objects of analysis. Most recently, and closest to my own theoretical conception of *place,* Adam Moore has taken the theoretical implications of this reweighting a step further and called for *places* to be conceived as generative, not passive

(Moore 2025). Building off his predecessors, namely David Harvey and Doreen Massey, he suggests that,

> "Places are characterized as a 'bundle of trajectories (Massey 2005, 119), but we get no sense that they have any role in the bundling. They are 'woven together' out of stories (Massey 2005, 131), but not part of the weaving process. In focusing the eventfulness of place, my concern is less what place is than what place does" (Moore 2025, 6).

This framing is similar to how I conceive of *place,* it should be seen as an essential aspect of the dialectical processes of the social construction of reality. It is from this premise, the core of my theoretical framing—that *place* should be an active part of this "weaving process"—that I would like to return to the most basic conceptual questions within the field, what is *place*?

2.4 Placing *Place*

Yi-Fu Tuan, one of the pioneers of the field of humanistic geography, urged that human geography should pivot towards having a more subjective and phenomenological approach to how humans perceive and interact with the world around them. This approach calls for an emphasize on understanding the human experience of *place* through prioritizing how individuals perceive, feel, and make sense of their lived environments. Tuan helped to conceptually differentiate the ideas of space and place, suggesting that Space is commonly seen as a symbol of freedom and an open and unconstrained expanse, put more eloquently, "it is like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed" (Tuan 1977, 54). While space is seen to represent unfettered movement, and perhaps that of a vulnerable and exposed positionality, place is conceived by Tuan as static, and a "calm center of established values," a safety blanket of sorts, "it is an object in which one can dwell" (Tuan 1977, 54 & 12). He puts the two concepts into conversation with

one another, asserting that humans need both the boundedness of place and the exposure of space for healthy life (Tuan 1977, 54).

Place from this perspective is perceived as rootedness and stability, but *place* should not be seen as static, in fact it is quite the opposite. This dichotomy proposed by Tuan in the 1970's was misplaced because he essentialized individual experiences; Tuan inadvertently categorized a plethora of potential experiences into two boxes; yet this theory was groundbreaking in terms of differentiating between these terms which were previously devoid of humanizing characteristics. By the 1990's humanistic geographers had begun to adopt relational perspectives and asserted that places are social constructs. Such a pivot entailed rethinking how we view geographical concepts such as place, region, or territory, as open-ended and interrelational stretching beyond the confines of any one place (Moore 2025, 3). This development also brought in other theoretical perspectives such Marxist and Feminist critiques. One of the most prominent scholars from this wave of Humanistic Geographers was Doreen Massey.

Massey almost completely flips Tuan's distinction of space and place on its head. She believed that the emphasis on relational perspectives could be significantly expanded upon. If many of these essential concepts of geography were being pushed to be thought of in relational terms, then it seems counterproductive to constrain *place* to being a bounded and rooted entity; it is for this reason that I both prefer, and will embrace, Massey's theoretical approach, as opposed to Tuan's for this study. By asserting that "place is a calm center of established values," Tuan is limiting the effectiveness of this unit of analysis (Tuan 1977, 54). Massey's critique with this definition begins with its boundedness. She posits that instead of looking at *places* as an area with boundaries, it would be more fruitful to imagine them as "articulated moments in networks of social relations" where such relations and experiences are constructed far beyond the

imagined boundaries of the *place* itself (Massey 1994, 154-155). She also proposed four considerations to as how to view *place* moving forward, which are articulated as follows, 1) Places are conceptualized by social relations and therefore cannot be static entities. 2) *Places* themselves do not have boundaries as they are interconnected with other *places* and expansive networks of social relations, the concept of boundaries may be useful for certain disciplines studying place but *places* themselves lack such constraints. 3) *Places* have no singular identity, the contestation of *place*, whether that be over its past, present, or future is integral to the dialectical processes with social networks. 4) The "Uniqueness" or specificity of a place is continually reproduced, and it is by no means restricted to the domains of some internalized history, many factors contribute to a *place's* specificity (Massey 1994, 155), and as I will go on to show, much of the focus should look at the social interactions and processes that occur in relation to *place*.

To summarize the meaning of these two concepts, space is merely a precursor to place. In its simplest conception, *place* is a lived space—it is through social interactions that a *place* in its truest sense comes into being. A *place* is a location in space that has become imbued with meaning via a net of social relations. According to Massey, a *place* becomes instilled with meaning when a constellation of social relations begins to actively engage with a particular location in space. Meaning is created both through the dialectic with these social networks, but also with the location itself; this creates what Doreen Massey has coined "a global sense of place" (Massey 2005, 131). A global sense of *places* urges for a perspective that instead of thinking of a *place* as a bounded or as a defined unit, we must acknowledge that it exists in its present form because of all the other *places* it is connected with through flows of social and physical capital, and importantly a *place* has multiple identities as a result of the different actors

engaging with it. A particular conception of *place* exists in the objective reality of a certain lifeworld, and it becomes institutionalized among particular groups operating in each of those lifeworlds (Schütz & Luckmann 1973). The *place* is a meeting point for various interlocking, but distinct stories, identities, and temporalities (Massey 2002, 294). With these differences in meaning comes the constant negotiation between groups over the institutionalization of a particular perspective of a sense of place, producing "an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories" (Massey 2005, 151). How this process of institutionalization works will become expanded upon in the next subsection.

To speak of a *place's* character seems rather simplistic, but I believe it captures what I wish to discuss. In an eloquently written article by Doreen Massey, she explains how *places* "are always constructed out of articulations of social relations…which are not only internal to the locale but which link them to elsewhere," moreover, the various adopted senses of *place* often indicate a "disruption between the past of these places and at least some elements of their present or their potential future" (Massey 1995, 183). There also often exists a presupposed relationship between the assumed identity and history of a *place*, which is a result of the maintenance of particular lifeworlds over time. Individuals engage with both their environment and in social relationships, and all as a result are imbued with an updated identity. This produces an identity of *place* which is has always and will always be in a process of formation (Massey 1995, 186)

But according to Massey, this constant evolution of *place* is not embraced so easily by individuals. Place-maintenance, something which is dependent on nostalgia and tradition is an attempt at freezing "a (particular view of a) place at a (selected) moment in time" (Massey 1995, 184). *Place*-bound identities are reliant on the stability of a sense of *place* and a particular lifeworld. Changes to place are inevitable as all places are always in a transformative process.

Any particular place is not fixed or contained spatially or bounded by a point, they are social constructions and imagined, shaped by global processes and historical flows; place is therefore better seen as an event (Massey 2005, 141). Contestations that arise over *place* usually draw upon particular and/or rival interpretations of the past, and these different interpretations of an identity of a *place* come about due to a individual's or a group's position on the power-geometry spectrum and their associated mnemonic communities (Massey 1995, 185).

These different senses of *places* are produced by ever-shifting trajectories of identity. Individuals inhabiting the same *place* and in close proximity to each other are by no means guaranteed to have the same sense of *place* nor are they bound to share the same lifeworld. This is where Doreen Massey's concept of "power-geometries" becomes incredibly useful. Power-geometries refers to the state that individuals and groups are subject to in their lived environments, from a poststructuralist and postcolonial perspective. Massey proclaims that space isn't neutral, but that it is shaped by power relations. Individuals navigating power-geometries are subjected to varying degrees of access to physical and social capital and the flows of these resources. Such networks determine who can move, who can stay, who controls movement, and who gets excluded from participating in the creation of place (Massey 1994, 149). These flows have all been greatly influenced by a phenomenon which is referred to as "time-space compression." This phenomenon originated out of Marxist and postmodernist thought, and posits a geographical stretching-out of social relations and to our experiences in accordance with it (Massey 1993, 59-60). Distance under this compression is shrinking both in terms of emotional perception and socially as our ability to move and communicate increases, which fundamentally changes how both individuals and groups navigate the power-geometries of *place*.

But even if certain groups or individuals are excluded from the conversation, they begin to form their own dialogues that are separate and distinct from the more hegemonic and institutionalized senses of *place*. This allows for the creation of different lifeworlds to exist concurrently with one another and for the same place to operate within the dialectic of social identity construction, but this *place* is importantly being utilized and interpreted in vary distinct ways from individual to individual and from group to group. Such distinctions of where an individual falls on the power-geometry spectrum will be further investigated in the analysis section my research, and will prove critical towards understanding what participants choose to focus on and discuss from their early childhood.

2.5 Harmonizing *Place* & Identity

Now, having laid out the important theoretical implications of both of these fields, I think it would be opportune and of great aid to transition the concerns of social constructivism away from knowledge production and towards the concept of *place.* By looking at a particular *place* through the process of the social construction of reality we will be able to better understand the benefits and rational behind humanizing *place*. To translate and these processes back to my case study, lets take the example of Yugoslavia, and see how one would typify, habitualize, and institutionalize "Yugoslavia" as a *place.* Starting with typification, as individuals engage in face-to-face and repeated interactions with one another things such as actions, behaviors, and roles begin to become typified, or categorized, and as these social relations unfold—*places* also become recognized concepts and are typified (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 45-48) like that of Yugoslavia. Over time, as individuals make repeated reference to the spatial concept of Yugoslavia, beyond that of the SFRY, the association can be more abstract in its relation, Yugoslavia becomes a habitualized *place*. Among a certain group of individuals, Yugoslavia has

become conceptually defined as a *place,* and what it represents in our collective stock of knowledge. Beyond this point, from each subsequent social interaction Yugoslavia does not need to be defined anew, it has been subsumed under its previous definitions in social networks (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 70-71). Finally, this brings us to the institutionalization of Yugoslavia as a *place.* Once Yugoslavia as a habitualized concept and is reciprocally typified by individuals it becomes institutionalized—the *place* becomes a shared and agreed upon concept (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 72). Furthermore, the *place* is now apart of objective reality, like it or not, Yugoslavia is an institution that cannot be wished away, it is a persistent element of one's reality. It also only exists in the external reality, an institutionalized concept cannot exist solely in the subjective reality of one's own being, it is something that must be learned about in the social world. Yugoslavia is created by social interactions; we internalize our subjective understanding of that *place* and then our subjective understanding feeds back into a constructed and updated collective and objective understanding of Yugoslavia. This dialectical process is continuous, but now Yugoslavia is sedimented into a groups objective reality (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 78).

Having laid out the important theoretical considerations and definitions that I am working with, it seems that there is a natural progression point by way of a gap that I see in social constructivist literature. With these discussions over environments and *lifeworlds*, sociologists have given little credence to the discussion of spaces and places and their role in the identity construction process. This is where I see the field of humanistic geography being quite useful for strengthening our understanding of the identity construction process.

It is my intention to show how humanistic geography's theoretical perspective on both socially constructed and physical environments is useful towards broadening our understanding of the identity-construction process. Theoreticians in the disciplines of sociology and humanistic

geography (Antonsich 2010; Berger & Luckmann 1966; Jenkins 2000; Massey 2005; Moore 2025; Schütz 1944; Schütz & Luckmann 1973; Tuan 1977) have both focused extensively on the crucial role that social relations and place have on shaping identity, but they have not yet used each other's disciplines to help strengthen their own work and perspectives. I will now be exploring the intersecting points of these disciplines by theorizing how the concepts of space, place, and time can be used to influence identity construction.

Connecting these definitions of space and *place* back to social constructivism, Berger and Luckmann argue that reality is not fixed, but a fluid product of social processes (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 13-15 & 166-182), and so too are space and *place*. This overlap is actually expanded upon by Schütz and Luckmann when they discuss "zones of operation" or the spatial arrangement of both the temporal and social stratifications of the lifeworld. These zones are used to show the proximity to which individuals are positioned in relation to objective experiences, put differently:

> "a person already has at his disposal a stock of experience to which there also belongs the category of distance, and the taken-for-granted knowledge that distance can be overcome through acts, namely, changes of locations that directed to that goal" (Schütz & Luckmann 1973, 42).

But what is missing in this framing is how place itself should be considered as part of this dialectic of socialization, as it is just as much a repository for collective knowledge as social networks. The ways in which we understand the world is constructed by social interactions and the ways in which the world around us is objectivized, or thrown into doubt, relies upon what concepts, social norms, and values are institutionalized, habitualized, and enshrined as "natural" and/or "given" (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 70-85).

Moreover, the power structures of the institutionalization process that maintain what is considered to be reality I find to be applicable towards understanding what a consensus of *place* is (Berger & Luckmann, 1966 72). This dialectical process that I am discussing demands looking at individuals as no passive, but active participants in the socialization process, they are active drivers of constructing and maintaining the social reality and norms of certain lifeworlds. This perspective is useful towards exploring how a conception of a *place* changes overtime with the evolution of the constellation of social relations interacting with it. Through these ongoing social interactions, certain aspects of our environment become institutionalized by groups of individuals, and as a result a consensus of *place* is produced and upheld by that group. This institutionalization process is in a constant process of redefinition from lived experiences of individuals navigating different senses of place and by hierarchical forces (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 110-122).

The identity of a *place* is inexorably bound up in what stocks of knowledge are chosen to be reproduced from a *place's* past, how they are reproduced, and for what purposes. Seen through this light, the temporality of *place* is in and of itself in dialectic with itself, with other places, and with webs of social interactions, throughout past, present, and future, more simply put, when "trying to understand the identity of a places we cannot – or, perhaps, should not – separate space from time, or geography from history" (Massey 1995, 187).

Establishing continuity between different moments of a place, from the present to a particular past requires the reproduction of the conditions of that time and lifeworld through both nostalgia and tradition. While this way of looking at place is both essentialist in its framing and unattainable, the desire to do so has proven potent. As I am trying to describe how *places* are interconnected with the identity construction process, the topic of nostalgia as a driver of place-

identity must be discussed if we are to have a thorough understanding of these processes. Nostalgia attempts to encapsulate a *place* "in one neat and tidy 'envelope of space-time,' it does not recognize the interconnectedness of a *place* in terms of both its temporality and spatiality (Massey 1995, 191). Nostalgia is a tool by which individuals and groups use to draw throughlines from the past to the present, a topic which has been extensively theorized by Svetlana Boym (2001).

Boym distinguishes between two types of nostalgia, reflective and restorative nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia seeks to reconstruct the past and is driven by a desire to rebuild "lost" homelands, traditions, or idealized versions of a place's past. Restorative nostalgia is often taken up by nationalist revival movements and utilizes "invented traditions," a term coined by Eric Hobsbawn, to fill the gaps from then till now (Boym 2001, 41-42). These traditions are ritualized and routinized so that they become institutionalized in a group's social stock of knowledge, regardless of factuality, these elements become a core part of the groups lifeworld in which they operate on a daily basis. Reflective nostalgia, by contrast, does not aim at reconstructing the past, rather it "lingers on ruins, the patina, of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time" (Boym 2001, 41). Reflective nostalgia embraces fragmentation and discontinuity and is more introspective in nature, it seeks to explore the past's meaning and emotional resonance with actors in the present (Boym 2001, 49-50).

Now while Boym argues that "reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory," rather than restorative nostalgia being more collective-driven, I would argue that the group and individual are inseparable, as has been a concurrent theme for much of the theory covered thus far (Boym 2001, 49). Where I would be more so inclined to agree with Boym is in her argumentation that "reflective nostalgia has a capacity to awaken multiple planes of

consciousness," but even within nationalist camps are there disagreement over conceptions of the past and place (Boym 2001, 49). The important aspect of Boym's theory for me, is that nostalgia in totality creates various collective frameworks of memory, or as Zerubavel would call them, mnemonic communities (1996). Nostalgia is a tool for both creating and harnessing different lifeworlds from a past which no longer exists, and often place is an integral piece of this puzzle.

With all these theoretical implications laid out, we should understand that *place* has a multifaceted role in the identity construction process. *Place* is a part of the dialectal process of the social construction of reality. As individuals engage with each other, they also engage with the places around them. These interactions then imbue both individuals and *places* with an updated identity which are continuously in flux. Just as identity is fluid, so is *place*. We change over time in accordance with our environment, and our environment should include both the aspects of social interactions as well as equal weight put on the places with which these interactions are occurring and make reference to. Understanding the identity-construction process need not be constrained to the realm of sentient actors but should include all elements of our environment in which we engage with.

3. Methodology

In the following four subchapter I present and discuss my methods. In the first section I explain and justify the scope of my research project and why I have chosen to look at the individuals that I did. In section 3.1 I discuss how my participants were selected and my justifications for doing so. In section 3.2 I formally introduce and discuss the chosen methods that I used to conduct my qualitative research—qualitative narrative-based interviews. In section 3.3 I present my method of analysis, which is a combination of thematic content analysis and

objective hermeneutics. Lastly, in Section 3.4 I explain the ethical considerations that I took into account for this research project as well as addressing limitations that this study encountered.

3.1 Data selection & Justification

The scope of this research project was individuals from Yugoslavia. More specifically, the scope focused on individuals whose primary period of socialization occurred in and during Yugoslavia, whether that be from Slovenia to Macedonia, or anywhere in between. From this requirement one obvious question arises: do these participants still need to be living in the ex-Yugoslav space in the present? No. The participants were a mix of individuals who currently live in the ex-Yugoslav space, grew up there but have moved away, individuals who have moved away but have returned, and individuals who have internally moved within the space. Participants were gathered from the various regions of Yugoslavia, but as this project's primary concern is not ethnicity or nationality, obtaining participants from each national/administrative unit, or in equal weighting, was not a critical concern. Because I am primarily interested in individuals who have experienced seismically different lifeworlds from Yugoslavia, compared to the present, I needed participants who have vivid memories of life in Yugoslavia. I set a requirement that my participants had to be born no later than 1985, making participants be over the age of 40.

I conducted nine interviews with individuals who grew up in Yugoslavia. My interview sample consisted of five men and four women. one of my participants is from Bosnia and Herzegovina, two of my participants are from Croatia, one of my participants is from Kosovo,

two of my participants are from Macedonia (North Macedonia)[2], one of my participants is from Serbia, one of my participants is from Slovenia, and one of my participants labelled himself as once having Yugoslav citizenship. Categorizing these participants based on where they are "from" is inherently essentializing and many of these participants could be considered from several of these *places*, and as aforementioned conceptualizing places as bounded runs counter to the theoretical framing that defines this study. This breakdown is not intended to be an absolute marker of identity, rather an approximate guide for data spread and the reader's convenience. Moreover, the participants' ascribed nationality was determined based on whether they self-identified as such during the interview or if it was not brought up by the participant, I asked them what their nationality was. The act of categorization was perhaps not necessary, but was done to serve as a guide for the reader throughout the analysis chapter. Categorizing my participants helps to inform and contextualize the lifeworlds and experiences that each participant discusses, to a degree (Jenkins 2000, 8). Lastly these interviews were conducted both in-person and online, four of my interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams and five of my interviews were conducted in person. My in-person fieldwork was conducted in Bitola, Pristina, and Zagreb. All my research participants have been given pseudonyms, and any identifiable pieces of information have been altered or redacted. All the participants' relevant information discussed above can be found in Figure 1.

[2] Both participants, in their interviews, refer to North Macedonia as "Macedonia." Given that this study focuses on understanding how the identity construction process works in accordance with places, this informal name will be used for the duration of this study instead of North Macedonia, as that is what the transcripts reflect.

Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Interview Format
Ante	81	Man	Yugoslavian	Online
Blagoja	54	Man	Macedonian	In-Person
Ljiljana	73	Woman	Serbian	Online
Marko	45	Man	Bosnian	Online
Meho	57	Man	Slovenian	Online
Mirjana	58	Woman	Croatian	In-person
Shpresa	52	Woman	Kosovar	In-Person
Slavica	53	Woman	Macedonian	In-Person
Tomislav	54	Man	Croatian	In-Person

Figure 1. Relevant Participant Information

In the early stages of constructing this research project, I had considered conducting interviews in several languages, with the help of individuals who were willing to help me translate. However, as my project progressed, I began to come to terms with some structural limitations. One structural limitation that translators would introduce into my project is the disruption and restriction of the content being discussed. Narrative-based interviews would become very disjointed, and a lot of the meaning would be lost in the time taken to translate and the translation process itself. The last reason I decided to conduct all my interviews in English is simply for ease and practicality, given the time limitations for how long I had to conduct my fieldwork and compile all of my interview data—however, at times during my fieldwork participants' family members would assist in translation.

3.2 Method

The chosen methodology for this research project was determined because of this research's theoretical requirements. As I am approaching my research from a social constructivist and humanistic geographical lens, there is an inherent need to understand my research participants' experiences on an individual and personal level, with care taken to understand each participant's emotions and lived experiences in accordance with the places that they are discussing. Qualitative research is therefore an obvious choice for approaching this topic. To this end, a series of semi-structured narrative-based interviews were designed and conducted to listen to the participants' individual experiences and emotions related to the places that they discussed. Narrative interviews allowed me to elicit subjective experiences that may be hampered if a more structured interview format were used. Such an approach allows participants to share their experiences in a less structured but more comprehensive fashion compared to more structured, and question/response-based interview formats (Flick 2009, 177). It should be noted that while an interview guide was constructed and used for these interviews, the guide was primarily intended to act as a backup method to provoke more freeform responses, if dialogue faltered. In almost every interview the intrinsic questions follow-up questions to the participants' narratives proved to be more essential than the prepared extrinsic questions from the guide itself.

3.3 Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected, transcripts from nine interviews, was analyzed using a combination of thematic content analysis and objective hermeneutics (Flick 2009, 2014; Wernet 2014). By utilizing these two methodologies I aimed at better understanding and reflecting on what the participants said in greater detail. Thematic content analysis helped me to organize and

structure my data into manageable themes and categories. With a distilled down version of my data, I could then focus on specific utterances and statements using objective hermeneutics. Using this methodology helped me to uncover the latent meaning of my participant's narratives, that would not be possible if I had only applied a thematic content analysis. This methodology prioritizes the constructive processes of the data over the reconstruction of the factual events within the narratives; the primary focus of analysis is on how participants construct reality (Flick 2009, 346-47), and it is for this reason that I find this methodology to be useful when paired with thematic content analysis. The thematic groupings that I have constructed were determined by the initial process of open coding. During this process, I identified what the main focuses of each interview were. I subsequently initiated a cross comparison of all the transcripts to identify similar codes and commonalities between my participants' discussions. During the next phase of analysis, I utilized axial coding to decern any overlaps and relationships between the initial codes to produce overarching theoretical categories of analysis.

3.4 Ethical Considerations & Limitations

Before interviews were conducted, interview consent forms were presented to the participants, and once terms were agreed upon, the forms were signed. These forms are all accessible upon request. Furthermore, all data that was collected and handled for this research project followed the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR),[3] as such all recordings and transcriptions were strictly used for analysis purposes and are kept confidential, and as previously mentioned, all participant's names and personal data was anonymized along with any identifiable information.

[3] https://gdpr-info.eu/

This research project had several limitations. As I was unable to conduct interviews in the participants' native languages, research participants needed to be proficient in the English language to be eligible. Secondly, because of my age requirement, many of the participants that I had access to via my snowballing network were not ideal candidates due to their lack of English proficiency. However, in some cases my participants asked English-speaking family members for help during the interviews. Although my sample pool was initially broad—comprising anyone who had grown up in Yugoslavia—it became restricted as I needed participants to be over the age of 40 who were also proficient in English. This inevitable narrowed what type of individuals I had access to, making it more likely that my sample size would be drawn from specific segments of the population. Ideally, I would have also preferred to have a larger sample size. Given the breath, time constraints, and financial limitations of this research project, I believe these shortcomings are justifiable when weighed against the quality and relative diversity of the collected data.

4. Historical Context

My participants in this study are from various former Yugoslav republics, as well as Kosovo, many of whom have vivid memories of the wars, most of them being in their mid-twenties at the time of the start of hostilities. To better understand both what they are referring to as well as to provide some brief context as to the worldviews that they grew up with, I would like to briefly touch upon a few important historical discussion points that will become as the analysis chapter progresses. I have postponed contextualizing Yugoslavia till now, because this study is primarily theory-driven and exploratory. This case study was chosen to aid and further develop theory pertaining to identity construction. My study, as I must reiterate, is not meant to apply theoretical implications on the region for empirical takeaways. This is by no means intended to be a

comprehensive analysis of Yugoslavia, in fact it will larger focus on only particular aspects of the Yugoslav Wars, the 2001 insurgency in Macedonia, and the system of parallel institutions in Kosovo in the 1990s. With this being said, I have chosen to utilize only one source for this section, and this is Catherine Baker's *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s,* as I find it to be a balanced and concise presentation of this history.

The collapse of Yugoslavia meant something more than a state collapsing; for the individuals who grew up in Yugoslavia it entailed a "collapse of their complete life world." (Mijić 2022, 1115). Having one's objective reality vanish overnight is more than just a shock, it is a rupture that forces an individual to reconstruct a different objective reality as an adult. Moreover, it matters not if the individual viewed Yugoslavia in a positive or negative light, it is the mere fact that they underwent primary socialization in that particular lifeworld and lost their entire system of social and spatial orientation (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973), this is what is of interest to me as I provide this context. I am not going to dwell on the reasons of Yugoslavia's collapse, specific events, or acts of brutality, instead I am going to provide a rundown on how each republic/province faired, beginning with Slovenia and working my way southward, based on participant representation.

Slovenia faired the best out Yugoslavia's collapse. On June 25th 1991, Slovenia and Croatia jointly declared independence and began securing their own borders preparing for the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) to prevent their secession from the federal republic. Slovenia's war of independence lasted for a mere ten days, beginning on June 27th when JNA force attempted to regain control of Slovenian border posts. The casualties were low at the fighting was limited in scale; the Slovenia's territorial defenses forces were able to repel the JNA, and on July 3rd hostilities had ceased, and Slovenia had secured its independence (Baker 2015, 49-51).

The situation in Croatia was far more complex and affected significantly more individuals both directly and indirectly then in Slovenia. The areas of heavy fighting were concentrated in the areas of Eastern Slavonia, Krajina, and later the Dalmatian coast—all areas which had significant Serb minority populations. Within these three fronts military losses were substantial, and the participation of both Croatian and Serbian paramilitary groups severely complicated the situation on the ground, leading to massive human rights violations committed against both Croat and Serb civilian populations, such as ethnic cleansing and forced displacement. After some mobilization delays over concerns that the Croatian National Guard (ZNG) were not well-trained enough at the onset of the conflict, the ZNG went into action by blockading and securing JNA barracks and arms depots across Croatia, which "greatly strengthened the Croatian arsenal" giving them the ability to eventually secure their independence in 1995 when JNA forces capitulated (Baker 2015, 51-53).

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was even more volatile then in Croatia. War in BiH broke out in late March, shortly after its parliament had issued a declaration of independence, and when JNA forces—alongside Serb paramilitary groups—began besieging towns in regions of BiH with significant Bosnian-Serb populations, in areas in modern-day Republika Srpska, i.e. on the northern and eastern edges of BiH. The capital of Sarajevo was quickly targeted by the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) and the JNA. The siege of Sarajevo would last from 1992 till 1996, to which civilians endured daily shelling and sniper fire from the surrounding hills and apartment blocks (Baker 2015, 66-68). Other cities across BiH faced a similar degree of brutality. This conflict cannot be explained simply looking at the motivations of each of the various ethnic group in BiH, whether that be Bosniaks, Bosnian-Croats, or Bosnian-Serbs, and such discussions "miss important points about each side's aims and composition,

(Baker 2015, 63). What is more important to stress is the human toll from this conflict. The war in BiH was marked by ethnic cleansing campaigns, forceful population transfers, systematic sexual violence, and the displacement of millions of BiH's inhabitants.

When examining Kosovo in the 1990s, two particularly important years stand out: 1991 and 1999. While 1991 saw Kosovar Albanian's issue a declaration of Independence from Yugoslavia, which went on recognized at the time, this was preluded by Slobodan Milošević revoking Kosovo's provincial autonomy in 1989, and the subsequent revoking of Albanians' previous cultural rights such as Albanian newspapers and language schools in 1990 (Baker 2015, 80). This led to massive public outcry in Kosovo and saw the beginning of the creation of a "parallel state." Kosovar Albanians began setting up their own parallel institutions within Kosovo, in 1991, to look after the needs of an increasingly marginalized local population, such as schools, hospitals, and public offices. Running concurrently to these events, Yugoslavia ramped up their own efforts to assert control and dominance over Kosovo by increasing political oppression, leading to arbitrary arrests, a massive surveillance campaign, and an increased presence of JNA forces within the disputed region (ibid.). A couple of years later the Albanian diaspora "had started funding, arming and recruiting a guerrilla force," the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to defend the interests of an independent Kosovo, a group which Yugoslavia had designated as a terrorist organization (Baker 2015, 81).

By the mid-1990s the KLA had begun launching attacks against Yugoslav police stations and public officials, and by the late-1990s these skirmishes had descended into all out war between KLA and JNA forces(ibid.). This conflict displaced thousands of civilians who fled to neighboring Albania and Macedonia. After failed negotiations and an increase in brutality, in 1999, NATO had made the decision to move into Kosovo, starting a bombing campaign against

Yugoslavia that would last 78 days. Subsequently JNA forces withdrew, after suffering heavy losses, from Kosovo and a UN mission and Peacekeeping force was deployed. From then until 2008 The United Nations would administer Kosovo and living conditions for Kosovar Albanians improved, this shift encouraged refugees to return to their homes from abroad (Baker 2015, 82-83).

Lastly, I would like to discuss the situation in Macedonia. Macedonia was the only constituent unit of Yugoslavia to peacefully secede, issuing their own declaration of independence a few months after that of Croatia and Slovenia. The Albanian minority in Macedonia, comprising of approximately 20-23% at the time, boycotted the elections, as the proposed constitution did not recognize them as a constituent nation along side that of the Macedonians, which sparked fears among the Albanians that they would be politically and culturally marginalized from society (Baker 2015, 84). These concerns would fester under the surface for the next decade. But first Macedonia had a more pressing issue, its own name. Since the very beginning, when Josip Broz Tito established the People's Republic of Macedonia in 1944, Greece has persistently argued that the use of the name "Macedonia" inadvertently makes territorial claims to the Greek region of Macedonia. As such, Macedonia was not able to obtain international recognition until 1993 under the provisional name "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia." This naming dispute essentially boils down to "which national group had the right to claim ancient Macedonia and its past" (Baker 2015, 85), a dispute that persists to this day. FYROM was used up until 2019 when Greece and Macedonia signed the Prespa Agreement, which resulted in Macedonia changing its name to "North Macedonia," ending a decades long naming dispute. This agreement also allowed Macedonia to join NATO and progress with EU accession talks.

In 2001, Macedonia would face another challenge, and armed insurgency from Albanian rebels demanding more autonomy and rights within Macedonia. In 1999 two KLA members born in Macedonia founded the "National Liberation Army" (NLA), using left-over weapons from the war in Kosovo and their preexisting recruitment and smuggling networks in Macedonia. In 2001 the NLA would launch a series of isolated attacks on police stations and villages in the northwest of the country, similar to how the KLA operated in Kosovo and southern Serbia. While only lasting half a year, this insurgency would have profound effects on interethnic relations in Macedonia. The insurgency ended with the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which created provisions for consociational governance and co-official langue rights with the Albanian minority (Baker 2015, 85-86).

5. Analysis

In the following chapter I will present the main findings from my research, by analyzing the nine transcripts of the interviews that I conducted. Each section focuses on a particular thematic takeaway which is tied towards answering this study's research question, how does *place* affect the identity-construction process? Section 5.1 looks at the physical aspects (Environmental characteristics, neighborhoods, and interconnectedness/proximity. Section 5.2 looks at the structural aspects (Citizenship, Nationality, rejection, economy, and corruption). Section 5.3 looks at the temporal aspects (Perceptions of Yugoslavia, Yugoslavia as a demarcation point, and childhood). The final section, section 5.4 looks at the social aspects (family, rootedness, attitudes towards life, and internationalization) of how *place* affects the identity-construction process. What should become apparent by the end of this chapter is that all these aspects and characteristics are interconnected with each other and cannot be fully separated. This structural takeaway ties back to my research's theoretical implications, in that *place* and the identity-

construction process are inexorably linked; conversations surrounding the physical, structural, temporal, and social aspects are all largely intertwined in the statements that participants made. These categories of analysis should not be taken as distinct and definitive but should rather serve as signposts for the reader.

5.1 The Physical Aspects

I believe it is apt to start things off by discussing the more concrete and physical aspects of how *place* affects the identity construction process. Many of my participants gave descriptions of the physical environments of the *places* that they were discussing, in particular Ante, spent great lengths describing the area around Rijeka, including Kvarner Bay, Učka mountain, and the Croatian region of Istria, in his words:

> *"It [Istria] has a really magical landscape, a mountainous area, a flat area, and of course it is surrounded by the sea, beautiful sea edge, very approachable and so on." (Ante, 81).*

Ante, in this regard was somewhat of an anomaly, as I will go on to show, as he focused extensively on the physical characteristics of *place* when explaining to me why Rijeka meant so much to him. Other participants, such as Ljiljana, would also provide me with physical descriptions of *places* that they hold dear, but after discussing social aspects of what tied them to such *places.* With Ante, he tended to keep things abstract, which he believed was a result of him being an architect, but I think this following statement deserves unpacking:

> *"The environment and the sense of free movement being on the sea edge played a very important role, I think for me, the sea, even today, I always live near the water all my life, one way or the other" (Ante, 81).*

Connecting this statement to Tuan's conception of space and place, Ante welcomes openness and change. In fact, many of his descriptions of this region were of the sea. He described how

different winds, whether that be the *Bura*[4] or *Yugo*[5], influence the sea's nature. The *Bura* brings a cold and dark blue sea, whereas the *Yugo* brings warm waters with a more yellowish color. For Ante, it is precisely that dynamism that he enjoys and I think this ties nicely with Tuan's suggestion that, space is a common symbol of freedom, something which invites action (Tuan 1977, 54), and for Ante the place that he cherishes is not a particular place, it's more of a boundless concept, he is not just speaking of Rijeka, it is something more general and undefinable.

Now besides Ante, my other participants were more explicit when they were referring to the physical aspects of place, and one commonality that my thematic analysis yielded was the focus on the neighborhood. The neighborhood is a particular type of *place*, it is a locality in which a specific community of individuals reside. Within the theoretical framework that I am utilizing I would conceptualize a neighborhood as a *place* within a *place*; a neighborhood is a more concentrated meeting point where frequent and repeated social interactions with the same group of individuals occur (Massey 2002). I would posit that it is both the frequency of encounters, and the time spent socializing in that space in which the neighborhood becomes a relevant unit of analysis. What I found interesting from my interviews is the neighborhood in which primary socialization occurred was not strictly the neighborhood of fixation for all of my interviewees, it seemed as if significant life events which occurred in *places* are also a relevant factor in a *place* being mentioned in accordance with one's identity. If we look a series of experts from Ljiljana, you can see that she is quite fond of Belgrade's Vračar neighborhood as well as the surrounding area:

[4] A cold, dry, and strong northeasterly wind.
[5] a warm, humid, and steady southeasterly wind.

> *"This particular neighborhood (Vračar) does not have the street trees, but each one has a small yard garden in front where they have trees, frequently, actually fruit trees, beautiful flowers and all this…There are streets in Belgrade, like they have Linden trees. It's very close by and you know when you walk in May or something and the smell and you go late at night and smell linden, it's just, I mean beautiful" (Ljiljana, 73).*

It is important to mention that Ljiljana has resided in the United States for much of her adult life and has not been able to visit Belgrade for a while, yet this physical description makes it clear that she has very fond memories of this *place* when she was living there. The smell of these Linden trees, or the Kvarner bay for Ante, are details that are recalled because these are some of the primary aspects that are internalized of the concept of these *Places* (Berger & Luckmann 1966). Just as when I think of Madison, Wisconsin, I first think of it as the *place* where I did my undergraduate studies, because that was how I was first introduced to it—additional attributes or memories are recalled and derived from this starting point. Knowledge, according to Schütz, is incoherent; we, as individuals, access different pools of knowledge based on what we are currently discussing, and if we acquired this knowledge as a child, it would trigger other pieces of knowledge within the same category in which it was internalized (Schütz 1944). These physical aspects that are discussed by my participants can then be explained by the primary relationships that they have with such a phenomenon.

But while being able to recall physical details is one important aspect, Ljiljana spent most of her time discussing another physical, but incredibly social aspect of Vračar, the tavern culture:

> *"Belgrade again, it's the neighborhood (Vračar). You know our culture, you have, not your personal, but a tavern that you are related to. That's a place where you go, almost, not everyday, but let's say you go four or five times a week. You don't have to make any kind of appointments with people, you show up there, this is kind of your table or your group's table and there will be somebody there and others will show up and all this" (Ljiljana, 73).*

This I believe description is an excellent example of how the process of the social construct of reality operates in action. In this example, Vračar is not the object or *place* of analysis, the tavern is the focus. For Ljiljana, a once trivial tavern has come to be important in the exact same way as a piece of knowledge. Initially her and other tavern goers typify the tavern by reciprocally acknowledging its existence, and after repeated visits, discussions or references to it, the tavern becomes habitualized by this group. Furthermore, an individual doesn't even need to go to the tavern or participate in its happenings for them to be involved in this process. They can merely be privy to the knowledge that other individuals they know go to this tavern, by extension they are implicated in the social construction of this place through the net of social relations that they are a part of.

On a larger scale than a tavern, let's turn to this explanation given by Marko describing how Brussels is littered with small pockets, or satellites, of social spaces:

> *"Well here [Brussels] each suburb has its own small center, and that makes a big difference because they used to be a kind of small town. So they look like satellites of the city center, and they have their own squares with historical squares, with shops, restaurants, cafes, bars, and you have life living actually in different places. The city center is more or less left for tourists. This was for the first time that I felt you can live in a place that is maybe rather peripheral geographically, but at the same time has its own lifestyle, it has its own center" (Marko, 45).*

So, while this description might be very descriptive of the physical layout of Brussels, what it is also showing is how localized communities help to create unique lifestyles that are different from *place* to *place.* But if we remove the social aspect from a place, and we leave ourselves with just the physical, what might someone who describes a *place* like this:

> *"[On life as a soldier in Serbia] You see your life only between four walls…you can try to go one time in months into the city, maybe for two hours" (Blagoja, 54).*

As Blagoja begin listing the places he had been to or lived in, he mentioned Serbia, briefly in passing. I was curious to more about that period of his life, because I had been told in past interactions that he served in the Bosnian War—so I asked him about it further. He told me that he had served in the JNA as part of his mandatory military service, and that he was part of one of the last call up years in Yugoslavia—serving during the Bosnian War. But when I asked him about his life on deployment in Serbia, he gave me almost nothing. He couldn't speak about it, because he had not socialized with anyone or spent much time in the town he was stationed in. This speaks directly to the theoretical implications of *place* discussed by Massey, if Blagoja limited experiences with this *place* in Serbia, he is less likely to incorporate it into his own identity, it was a brief and ephemeral aspect of his life. Most of his social interactions during this time period was with his fellow soldiers who were also confined to life "between for walls," which demonstrates just how important socialization with a *place* is for it to be incorporated into one's identity.

Turning to a similar example, Slavica describes how the physical aspects of a *place* changes based on the extent of the social relations that are currently present.

> *"Yes, it's like a city of ghosts, in the wintertime Yes, because you know Bitola, the city is full in the summertime. All of them are coming back for holidays…in the summer you think it's a different city" (Slavica, 53).*

The interconnectedness of *place* is both a physical and a socially maintained construct, the "geography of social relations forces us to recognize our interconnectedness" (Massey 1994, 122) and as seen in the expert above from Slavica, people go a long way in influencing a *place's* character, both in their presence and in their absence. But the physical ability to have access to these social relations is also an important factor to consider. In this example, it is also the ability

of movement to access these social relations that matter. The power-geometry of different social groups and their varying degrees of access to these flows of social capital are a critical point of consideration in the participation of the creation of *place* (Massey 1994, 149). Slavica can stay in Bitola, whereas diaspora groups or tourists are afforded the luxury of temporary participation in such production. A similar process was brought up in an example given by Mirjana:

> *"It was tough because my parents were in Varaždin and I lived in Zagreb and I wanted to have a connection with them and I traveled to Varaždin every weekend" (Mirjana, 58)*

> *"Northern Croatia where Varaždin is situated, wasn't that affected by the war as some other regions were. So it was good during the war" (Mirjana, 58).*

As can be seen from Mirjana's two descriptions, Varaždin and Zagreb's proximity to each other is an important factor for Mirjana's identity-construction by way of her parents. It was not only the desire to see her parents every weekend, but the ability to do so, especially during the tumultuous period of the Croation War of Independence, Vračar was positioned as accessible. Just like Ljiljana's repeated experiences with her tavern in Vračar, or Mirjana's own time spent in her family's flat in Zagreb, these are all steps within the social construction of reality, and involve not an individual's internal reality, but a shared external reality (Berger & Luckmann 1966). And now years later, Mirjana still participates in social relations with her parents, but whereas she may not be visiting them in Vračar by train every weekend, now she connects with them over WhatsApp, which is a concrete example of how the effects of time-space compression can render distance as less of an arduous roadblock to the maintenance of social relations.

This theme of interconnectedness was also voiced by Ljiljana, when discussing cities that she had lived in our visited in the United States. One of the first things that came up was that she never wanted to live on the West Coast because it was too far from Serbia and her family. Unlike

Mirjana, she did not have the luxury to hop on a short train ride to visit her family, a transatlantic flight was necessary, and the West Coast was simply too far. Regarding cities and their interconnectedness specifically, Ljiljana stated:

> *"The other thing is if you are in a place like this [Washington, DC], everybody comes to visit. If you are in Knoxville, TN, they will come only if they want to see you. Nobody passes through Knoxville, right? Everybody passes through Washington, so you see many people, right? That element is great"(Ljiljana, 73).*

This directly touches upon several things. For starters, it shows how a *place* can vary in terms of its interconnectedness, in accordance with other *places,* and perhaps more importantly, with social networks associated with and between other *places.* According to Massey's concept of a "global sense of place," all *places* are interconnected, and what gives a *place* its specificity is "not some long internalized history," but its construction from a set of social relations meeting at a particular locus and crafting an identity (Massey 1994, 154). But that does not mean that all *places* are on equal footing with each other. From Ljiljana's comments, she speaks of Knoxville as somewhere which is isolated in comparison to Washington, due to convenience. She is able to more readily access other *places* and social networks as a result of her being in a *place* that is more interconnected, and so too are the individuals that visit her.

These physical aspects of *place* that I have discussed are influential in contributing to an individual's identity, but within these discussions over the physical, some aspects which became apparent are more indicative of structural considerations. I would like to close off this section by briefly looking at a statement from Meho exemplifies the concern that distance has on identity:

> *"The organization is good, all the systems are working perfectly [in Dresden], the only problem is it's actually quite far away from Slovenia, and even farther from Bosnia—so it's a lot of traveling" (Meho, 57).*

Meho throughout his interview praised Dresden as a place he likes living, and yet, he still puts it in relation to places where he grew up and where his family members still reside. However, like many other of my participants it is his ability to return, or stay in regular contact, that keeps these *places* on their mind as a positive contributor to their identity. In the next section more concrete structural aspects will be discussed, and I will show that it does not matter where a *place* or individual falls on the power-geometry spectrum for it to significantly influence the identity-construction process.

5.2 The Structural Aspects

In this section I want to focus on statements or experts that were made by my participants that either directly or indirectly discuss the structural aspects of *place,* this includes discussion topics such as nationality, citizenship, rejection from somewhere, and concerns over the economy and corruption.

Turning to the topic of rejection, I want to look at and compare several different experiences of societal rejection. While their experiences differ substantially on the surface, there exist core commonalities in the way that they discuss these *places.* Only after the process of both open coding and axial coding did it become clear that the structural similarities in these narratives produced similar processes in the way that a sense of *place* is created, stemming from the alignment, or lack thereof, of an individual's self-identification of a *place* versus the external categorization by another group.

Blagoja is an electrical engineer from Bitola who has worked abroad in Leipzig, Magdeburg, and Vienna before eventually returning to Macedonia to work permanently in Skopje. In my interview with Blagoja, he spoke very highly of his time in Germany, stating that:

> *"The people who live in East German, they're similar to us. Behavior, the way of living. Family is important. Friends are important. Free time is important. And in West Germany it's only money—also in Vienna" (Blagoja, 54).*

This is indicative of an example where his self-identification with this objectivized piece of knowledge, i.e. the *place* of "Macedonia," overlaps with how another group has objectivized Macedonia as a *place.* There are different conceptions of what Macedonia is, but during his time in Germany he was subjected to positive external categorizations in relation to his self-identification in accordance to this *place* (Jenkins 2000). While both groups undeniably have a different construction of a sense of *place*, of the objectivized piece of knowledge which is Macedonia, an overlap in this case has positively reinforced Blagoja's identity.

This overlap of self-identification and external categorization leading to a positive sense of *place* in an individual's identity construction was also evident in my discussion with Marko, who moved to Brussels for work and got a permanent employment contract soon thereafter. He notes that:

> *"Once I decided to stay working here, that made me actually in a way, subconsciously obviously to accept Brussels as a home place. That is when I felt a shift happen in my orientation to as my original place of origin" (Marko, 45).*

Marko elaborated that it was it was obtaining a permanent employment contract in Belgium that changed his perception of Brussels, because during this time period of his life he was searching for somewhere that could provide him "with some safety net, some safety in principle" (Marko, 45), and Brussels offered him exactly that, a "calm center of established values" (Tuan 1977, 54) and certainty over his future. But connecting this experience back to Blagoja's, the social aspects of constructing a positive sense of *place* was still critical in this process. Marko speaks in length about how within his neighborhood, "you don't have many people from Belgium living there, its mainly an international community" (Marko, 45), which created a Mediterranean vibe, once

similar to that of his own upbringing. He would socialize with non-Belgians and found integration to be rather easy. Such an experience that Marko had was similar to that of Blagoja's, and the processes are similar. Take this additional example from my interview with Ljiljana:

> *"The money was coming [in Knoxville, TN]. Money for research was very easy to get. I mean, money was chasing me there. Once I went to Lehigh [University], it was a different thing. I had to worry about getting money because I'm electrical engineer and in our business money is everything in the research. So I mean very different life, but things were good. Everybody was comfortable. Everybody could enjoy life. Everything was 'peachy keen' as they would say" (Ljiljana, 73).*

In all these cases the people they interacted with, or the conditions they faced, positively reinforced their own self-identification of objectivized pieces of knowledge of *places,* none of these individual experienced challenges or ruptures to the lifeworld that they had constructed upon moving to these new *places.* But what would happen if that were not the case?

Returning to Blagoja's Narrative, previous to working in Eastern Germany he had his sights set on Vienna. In fact, he has relatives who live in Vienna and had encouraged him to join them. What follows is his recount of how that process went:

> *"When I ask for Visa in Vienna, I have good company behind me as well as full papers behind me, and the reason I was rejected was you cannot prove your working experience. Doesn't matter that the company knows me and work for this company. I gave thirty days for test period and they liked me. They wanted me to work. Somebody in the government needed my experience to know how. Austria is no democracy" (Blagoja, 54).*

What Blagoja experienced was a structural impediment, the decision of the Austrian government, had barred him from working and living in Vienna, despite him believing that he had a strong case for being granted a Visa. This experience affected his identity—despite his initial motivations for wanting to pursue a life in Vienna, he now only speaks of its negatives. His last statement, that "Austria is no democracy" is indicative of his larger distain for the European

Union (EU), which he brought up on several occasions and which I will discuss later. Moreover, Blagoja did not reveal to me that he actively tried to live in Vienna till the very end of the interview, for most of the interview I was left guessing as to why Blagoja disliked Vienna to such a significant degree.

Applying Jenkin's categorization theory as I did for the previous positive experiences, Blagoja was subjected to a negative external categorization by another group. In Vienna he was confronted with a *place* and a group (Austrians) that had a significantly different objectivization of knowledge pertaining to "Macedonia" then he did. Considering the lack of overlap between Blagoja's own self-identification with what the piece of knowledge of 'Macedonia' means to him, and the way another group objectivized and externally categorizes him as 'Macedonian,' this imposed identity is ultimately internalized by Blagoja. As a result, this process alters his subjective reality and reshapes how he perceives and relates to both of these *places*. But it isn't just objectivization, it was the fact that he was denied a Visa based on racist immigration policies that denied him entry because of his national identity. It is also this aspect that Blagoja has internalized as a part of his self-identification. This disparity in perspective and subsequent negative internalization by Blagoja is best summed up by the following:

"We have sachertorte, you have shit" (Blagoja, 54).

What this emotionally charged, and perhaps cheeky, statement highlights is that Blagoja is making is intentionally pointing out the inflated opinion Austrians have about their own culture and national identity, in comparison to his own. His own negative experience with and in Austria has led to him internalizing that Austrians are very close-minded individuals, in his interpretation they have denigrated him. With this construction he has negatively classified an entire city. It is

not that the physical city itself gave him a bad experience, it was the interactions he had there that did, which exemplifies that a *place* is nothing without the social aspects of its construction.

Like Blagoja, Shpresa faced a similar situation. As hostilities between the KLA and the JNA were ramping up into an all-out war in 1998, Shpresa's family had made the decision to flee from their home in Pristina southwards to seek refuge in Macedonia. This is what she had to say about her experience:

> *"We had a car and we left for the border [in 1999]. This was not easy. Macedonia. I was so upset, and it was so not nice from Macedonia. We were waiting on the free zone, between two borders. We left the Kosovo side, the Macedonian part, they were not letting us enter their territory because they were waiting for an agreement for foreign aid to be signed…The Macedonian border police only decided to let mothers and children across…I was so pissed off at Macedonia" (Shpresa, 52).*

Similar to Blagoja's experience with the Austrians, Shpresa also encountered negative external categorization from a group different from her own, the Macedonians, were not as welcoming and hospitable as she had expected them to be. This resulted in the same process of categorization and internalization for Shpresa as it did for Blagoja. As a result of her experience socializing with a group of people in that *place* (Macedonia), that *place* became an influential part of her identity-construction process. Both the *place* and her experienced social relations were critical to her identity-construction process. Macedonia had become imbued with negative meaning for Blagoja, something which she internalized. Speaking of her time in that *place* she explains that how:

> *"you cannot imagine this humiliation… you were considered kind of, this star associated me with Jewish. You have to stay at home, inside, apart, not like walking up and down the street in Macedonia—until you get this kind of ID, but for me I associated it to the star in Hitler's time, in 1999" (Shpresa, 52).*

I think it speaks towards a new reality that shpresa was operating under. Returning to Mijić's assertion that for individuals who grew up in Yugoslavia, its collapse entailed a complete disintegration of these individuals' lifeworlds (Mijić 2022, 1115). For Shpresa, her experience in Macedonia would have been one of the first confrontations and confirmations that this lifeworld had vanished, she was now being structurally and social challenged upon entering this *place.* This is a starker comparison of experience then to what Blagoja had experienced, as he was first "accepted" into German society and then later "rejected" from Austrian society.

These instances that I have just shown are also examples of attempts to "staticize" a particular sense of *place* by a group who has a significantly different sense of *place* then the individuals under discussion. These groups' objective reality of these *places* run counter to that of Blagoja and Shpresa, they are upholding their own lifeworlds by conceiving of these *places* as bounded and enclosed spaces, "defined through counterposition against the other who is outside" (Massey 1994, 168). This ability to uphold and enforce a particular lifeworld and sense of *place* ties directly back to power-geometries and the ways in which "different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections" (Massey 1993, 61) of a *place*. At one end of the spectrum, you have those who are in an advantageous position by being in control of movement and communication and who enforce how things are done. These individuals institutionalize and maintain a degree of firmness over a *place*, something which cannot be changed so readily (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 77). At the opposite end of the spectrum are Individuals like Blagoja and Shpresa, who may do a lot of physical moving, but are not in control of such flows; they are a migrant and a refugee, respectively, experiencing movement in search of a better life (Massey 1993, 61).

These concerns over interconnectedness, the control of *place*, and the associated flows of social and physical capital were reflected in Blagoja's statements when he spoke about the EU. We already know that Blagoja attempt to work in Austria did not work out, but even when he speaks about EU ascension in the present for his own country, he refers back to Austria as a point of reference for his frustration:

> *"We changed the name of Macedonia [to North Macedonia]. Now we have problems with Bulgaria. But now they [the EU] feel free to see what all we have to fix. You see what's EU? They have two faces. Why? Why do they change the rules now? Why? Why when Austria joined the EU it was very fast and very quick? What's the difference?" (Blagoja, 54).*

This additional statement by Blagoja also shows the degree to which he is not in control of the situation. He, and other individuals like him, are not positioned in an advantageous position on the power-geometry spectrum to alter their situation, which has provoked Blagoja to propose a solution:

> *"What is the name I'm Macedonian? Or I'm Serbian? I must prove, I don't care…what's the difference between a German and me? It's contradictory policy of the European Union. We live in the 21st century and we speak about nations. Which Nations? If I live long enough, I will make my state, independent. It will be Visa free, doesn't matter what nation, you're human" (Blagoja, 54).*

These structural aspects are very important for influencing an individual's identity, as I have shown in these past examples, but that does not mean these processes are that simple. It is not as straightforward as looking at a *place* for its structural "worth," because sometimes those factors are not what determines how an individual engages with *places.* Sometimes incoherent processes are at play, such as the decisions made by Shpresa:

> *"We went as refugees to Belgium, the three of us and my mother-in-law from Struga. We were going to build our life there. But now, after three months, NATO started bombing[6],*

[6] The NATO bombing of Yugoslavia occurred between March and June of 1999 and resulted in the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from Kosovo.

> *and we came back. So all of our papers were ready, but I regret that I did not get the passport…but it was very important for us, this is kind of the way of Kosovo, independence, liberty. Let's go back, let's build our life here" (Shpresa, 52).*
>
> *"We wanted to come back, it was our house. It is like when Kosovo is liberated. You don't care for money, you don't care for papers. I should have never have rejected, why not have this Belgian passport? I didn't care. I wanted to go back to Kosovo, to my country" (Shpresa, 52).*

In these statements Shpresa explains how her family was close to getting Belgian passports, but that she abandoned this pursuit to return to Kosovo. Her decision at the time was resolute, she wanted to return to Kosovo because it is a *place* that had become imbued with meaning for her via her lived experience in and with it, overtime it had become hers. But I found it fascinating that she prefaced each of these statements by justifications both to herself and to me over her decision to return, as both a way of justifying her decision and reflecting on her choice. What was clear, however, from my discussion with Shpresa, is that a structural element such as the passport can have great influence over one's own identity, an element which is intertwined with *place.*

But identity, constructed along national lines, in conjunction with citizenship, comes with a lot of nuances, as reflected in my interviews with Ante and Tomislav. Both discuss citizenship and nationality in a much more emotionally detached way than Shpresa, and I would suggest that this is again due to power-geometries,

> *"I have American citizenship, you know, and I used to have Yugoslavian citizenship" (Ante, 81)*
>
> *"My family and I, we always considered ourselves Croatian first, but when were a part of Yugoslavia, when we would go abroad, would say we're from Yugoslavia, but Croatia is a part of Yugoslavia, and when we were in a local setting we would consider ourselves Croats, from Croatia, which of course everyone knew was a part of Yugoslavia. My identity didn't really change from the way I perceive it, but it changed I guess from the outside, how we all present ourselves" (Tomislav, 54).*

Ante and Tomislav both grew up in Croatia, one of the wealthier regions of Yugoslavia, and now it is a member of the EU. Croatia, in comparison to Kosovo, is better positioned and more interconnected and its people have more agency in shaping it as a *place.* The same goes for Meho, who acted similarly with regards to obtaining Slovenian citizenship upon Yugoslavia's collapse,

> *"I lived in Sarajevo, but I was a citizen of Slovenia. So put simply, it was the obvious decision to go there because I can finish my study and live with my grandma, it was no big problem" (Meho, 57).*

Kosovo on the other hand is far more subject to external decision-making, remains peripheral, and is subject to the flows of aid, peacekeeping, and partial international recognition. When I place, with these aspects taken into consideration, is perceived as stable in one's subjective reality, it may have less of an influence on the identity construction process. Additionally, there is less of a need to defend the lifeworld that has been constructed around these factors. Even when talking with fellow Albanians, but from the kin-state of Albania[7], Shpresa felt the need to provide context to her situation in Kosovo, in this case as a part of Yugoslavia:

> *"Even in Albania, first kind of quarrel that I have with them, is that they say we have a good system, 'you had passport.' Yes, we had a passport, we always had a passport, but it was not easy, we were always under surveillance, depending on your family. My father was in prison as well" (Shpresa, 52).*

This conversation is slowing bleeding into my next subsection, where I will focus more heavily on the temporal aspects of how *place* influences the identity construction process, but I want to end this section by making a segway of sorts by highlighting my participants concerns over corruption and the economy. This was a common talking point among many of my interviewees,

[7] A country in which the majority ethnic group maintains strong ties and affiliations with an ethnically similar population living beyond its borders.

and it was often interwoven with the element of temporality. Let's start by looking at a statement from Tomislav,

> *"You tend to stay in one place…some generations still live in the same house. It's also connected to the economic situation, its hard to get money…People stay in contact and get in that sense attached to places as well because you can't just move to another place" (Tomislav, 54).*

These sentiments, echoed by Tomislav, reflect a culture in which it is common for multiple generations of the same family to live under one roof, even into adulthood. In this statement he is self-reflexive on how this economic limitation might contribute towards how individuals become attached to a *place*. A limitation on mobility constrains how we engage and perceive the world around us, it forces a subjective reality upon us that is more *place*-bound.

The last two excerpts that I would like to touch upon also address the economic situations in their respective countries, but they focus more explicitly on quality of life.

> *"I like to live here in Macedonia. If I look from this side down, yes, it's different. The past ten years, eight years since I've come from Vienna. But the system is not okay. Corruption is not okay in government. Many young people just pick up and go from this kind of system. If you have friends in government, you have. Good job, you have. State job, you have good money. If you work for private companies, little bit difficult" (Blagoja, 54).*

> *"Sarajevo has changed, very negatively…Let's say with a lot of problems. It's not organized. Put simply, the economy is zero…In Sarajevo you need to wait forever, or you need to know somebody, to put it simply" (Meho, 57).*

Both Blagoja and Meho speak of corruption and change, and in the case of Blagoja he speaks about how younger generations are trying to leave such *places* because of these structural conditions. But these undesirable conditions, spoken about and experienced in the present, are a reality constructed in comparison to another one: the past. That is where I would now like to take this discussion of analysis.

5.3 The Temporal Aspects

This section will primarily focus on how aspects of temporality of a *place* effects the identity-construction process of individuals. Specifically, the bulk of this section will focus on two aspects of Yugoslavia, firstly, I will unpack how my participants reflect on their life in Yugoslavia, and secondly, I will examine how these individuals use Yugoslavia's collapse as a demarcation point in their lives. One important aspect that I will also address in this section is the topic of childhood, which is inherently timebound in its framing, through this topic, I transition to the next and final section of the analysis, which explores the social aspects of the research.

One throughline across many of my interviews was that my participants spoke fondly of Yugoslavia, from across its various republics, including Kosovo. Considering how negatively Shpresa spoke about her experiences with this *place,* I was surprised when she stated the following:

> *"I remember [in Yugoslavia] when it was like 8x3. Eight hours of sleep, eight hours of entertainment, and eight hours of work. My point is that I started work from 7:00 till 16:00. Then you can do whatever, for like every month, your job was forever, permanent contract. Now we are more insecure. Nobody was starving, maybe nobody was rich" (Shpresa, 52).*

This concern of quality of life would be echoed by a few other of my participants, but for Shpresa living in a *place* that she both felt was her home and a hostile space, at least this aspect provided her with some degree of comfort and certainty.

Blagoja also focused on quality of life, when reminiscing about Yugoslavia, and I say reminiscing because it was clear throughout the interview that Blagoja was critically reflecting on his narrative (Boym 2001). Blagoja discussed several things about life in Yugoslavia, but one thing he was particularly proud of was his car,

> *"In this time [during Yugoslavia], I had Zastava[8] car. Like Zastava, this was a Porsche for me. Understand me, Mercedes-Benz, this was for me. I had this for 18 years. We were happier" (Blagoja, 54).*

I could tell that this car meant a lot to him, as can clearly be seen, but this car meant more to him than just an object to facilitate mobility, it represented a lifestyle. Surrounding this statement were discussions over what this lifestyle was like. He spoke about how everyone looked out for each other, if one day he didn't have money is friends would cover him and the next day he would cover them, in other words, if "I have cigarettes, you have cigarettes," (Blagoja, 54)—there was certainty and stability. And this went for other aspects of his life as well,

> *"My education in Yugoslavia was completely free. Health system was completely free. Good health system. Good standard. I don't know if we compared to these days. I'm not sorry for this. Many people from this time speak bad about Yugoslavia, 'it's dictatorship, it's many, many bad words,' but I don't know, people were happy" (Blagoja, 54).*

The way in which Blagoja phrased this statement I find to be very revealing, in fact, "it reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another" (Boym 2001, 49-50) and that affective memories can be reflected upon logically. Blagoja may not wish for Yugoslavia's return, as he has come to terms with its collapse, but he does remember those times fondly as a period of his life that was perhaps more certain than in the present, as Macedonia is still a young nation struggling to cope with the many challenges that are thrown its way.

Mirjana discussed something similar to what Blagoja referenced, but more specifically she spoke about egalitarianism[9] as a reason to why life in Yugoslavia made her happy,

> *"During Yugoslavia controls were bad and laws were different then today, but the society—we were children at the time, and so we were happy, I can't say that we were unhappy. The Yugoslav society emphasized egalitarianism. So like even if someone had*

[8] Zastava was a Yugoslav car brand.

[9] The tenet of egalitarianism in socialist Yugoslavia was a core ideological and cultural principle, rooted in the state's commitment to ensuring that all citizens had equal access to both social and material resources, regardless of class, ethnicity, or religion.

> *maybe more material wealth, it wouldn't show, they wouldn't show it off as much as they would today" (Mirjana, 58).*

With this statement, Mirjana takes a more critical stance towards her remembrance of Yugoslavia, in saying that "controls were bad and laws were different," which perhaps speaks to Blagoja statement that, "Many people from this time speak bad about Yugoslavia, 'it's dictatorship, it's many, many bad words," but nonetheless she remembers this *place* fondly. Their difference in interpretation of a *place,* Yugoslavia, again ties back to power-geometries, Blagoja and Mirjana were positioned in different nodes to this overarching *place* that they were involved in cocreating. Their positionality, via differing access to social and material capital, has led to the creation of different senses of *place* for these individuals, while both hold Yugonostalgic stances towards this *place,* they differ in terms of each individual's subjective reality.

Now while these previous statements are examples of how Yugoslavia as a *place* is viewed positively, I would like to now look at how it can also be seen as a demarcation point for an individual's life, and as a rupture point between lifeworlds (Mijić 2022). I am not suggesting that a particular moment should or can be analyzed, rather than a period of Yugoslavia and a period of post-Yugoslavia was deemed to be significant in my participants' responses.

Beginning With Blagoja's perspective, despite him saying that "we were happier" in Yugoslavia than the present, this following response reflects an element of critical reflection that goes beyond his own perspective,

> *"We were the luckiest state, and maybe we had good political leadership in this moment. We escaped this war,[10] till 2000, when we started a civil war in Macedonia. I was also activated in the civil war [for military service]. We had luck and this finished. Albanian people were in government with 25%, must be. The government started giving rights and language, universities. If I reflect on this distance now, we live in a better society, we don't have a problem, now we are all integrated" (Blagoja, 54).*

[10] The Yugoslav Wars (1991-1999)

I find this excerpt to be incredibly rich as it reveals several things about Blagoja's understanding of this transition. Firstly, I would like to focus on how refers to and engages with the 2001 insurgency. He uses the word "we," therefore categorizing the Albanians within Macedonia as a part of the same group. He sees them as compatriots in this *place's* construction, which runs counter to the predominant narrative that delineates this conflict as an "us" versus "them" typology (Jenkins 2000, 15-19), which is further reinforced by his labeling of the conflict as a "civil war," he sees, or at least he now sees, this event as an internal affair to a bounded *place.*

Moreover, reflecting on this particular event from the present, rather than his time living in Yugoslavia, he admits that "we live in a better society," because the insurgency resulted in a more integrated society. His opinions are contextual based on what information he is recalling and focusing on. When he speaks on the current situation in Macedonia, more generally, Blagoja states that, *"If our politics care more about people, not about pocketing money, maybe we will live good.* When comparing these two quotes directly, one can see that Blagoja has a far from straightforward interpretation of his current reality. The pieces of knowledge that he is drawing upon are contextual and situation dependent.

These discrepancies on how experiences are remembered is something that Schütz touches upon in his essay *The Stranger;* because the identity-construction process is continuously in development, through the processes of internalization and externalization, the worldview of a person should not be expected to be coherent, it is riddled with contradictions depending on what pieces of knowledge are being drawn upon in a situation(Schütz 1944, 2)—this is precisely what can be seen throughout Blagoja's interview. These contradictions aside, these statements show that this period is used as a transition point for how Blagoja's relates to both *place* and his own identity.

Continuing the conversation, Marko refers to this transition point more bluntly, leaving not much room for interpretation, as the following demonstrates:

> *"So when they [those who left Sarajevo during the war] refer to today's Sarajevo, they always refer in comparison to the 1980s, to the period before the war, of course for those who remember that period clearly…I don't actually have memory of reference here, to the period before the 1990s" (Marko, 45).*

What strikes me from this explanation is Marko's degree of removedness, via the use of the pronoun "they." As he was too young to experience pre-war Sarajevo he speaks on behalf of others in his social network, which I will touch upon more in the next section. But, despite him lacking the experience of this pre-war *place,* he nonetheless has knowledge of it, via the process of socialization and the internalization of this knowledge by extension (Berger & Luckmann 1966); all of which allows him to incorporate this sense of *place* into his own lifeworld and identity.

Compared to Marko narrative, Meho, being a bit older, does have direct experience of pre-war Sarajevo:

> *"I was born in Ljubljana, not living there long… I did all of my teenage years in Sarajevo…I finished the last year and diploma work in Ljubljana. So actually Sarajevo was like my place of where I grew up…so the good memories are Sarajevo before the war" (Meho, 57).*

As he has direct experiences with this *place* both before and after the war, he speaks of this knowledge directly, and as I will go on to show a bit later, his childhood and Sarajevo are incredibly interconnected in how his identity has been constructed.

Before expanding the conversation to directly discussing childhood, I would like to close the topic of the collapse of Yugoslavia as a demarcation point by returning to Shpresa's narrative. Her narrative is stark in comparison to the previous three individuals, as her lifeworld underwent substantial changes, both socially and physically.

> *"We [Albanian Kosovars] were considered as a minority, but since 1999, our mindset and everything has been changed. So, 1991, suddenly, Serbians became the minority. There was this shift in our mind, like we were now majority in Kosovo. We were a minority in Yugoslavia…We were very proud as having the same flag as Albania, the red with the black eagle, then after the UN entered we got our independence, blah, blah, blah, there was another shift, we have to say we are not Albanian, but we are Kosovars, this was also a big thing for us" (Shpresa, 52).*

> *"They [Serbians] always considered Kosovo as being a part of Serbia, so you have Yugoslavian passport, then Serbian Passport [2003-2006]. Now we have a Kosovo passport…sometimes I have feeling that I have lived in three centuries" (Shpresa, 52).*

From these two passages we can gather how her perception of *place* was significantly altered by the collapse of Yugoslavia. For Shpresa this transition radically changed what Kosovo was in terms of both the social dynamics and the physical characteristics.

Her group was now the majority in Kosovo, in Yugoslavia, they were the minority. Like Blagoja, the *place* is constructed as bounded by Shpresa. The difference, however, lies in the degree to which these *places* are constructed as malleable. For Shpresa there seems to be a stark break with the collapse of Yugoslavia. More weight is but on this *place's* independence from Yugoslavia. Blagoja acknowledges Macedonia's independence indirectly, but it is not the focus of the discussion, in his narrative this *place* still remains interconnected with Yugoslavia, in Shpresa's narrative it is clear that she has disconnected Kosovo from Yugoslavia as their continued interrelatedness does not fit with the sense of *place* that she has constructed.

This shift was clearly a shift in lifeworlds as well, as she spoke of each period being as if she had lived in a different century, and with this changing of lifeworlds came a need to socially and physically distinguish this *place*. No longer would she say that "we are Albanian," she was adamant and proud to now say "we are Kosovars." She also embraced their new flag as well as the Kosovo passport, as these symbols differentiated and made this *place* unique. As a result of these externalization and internalization processes, she was both constructing her own identity as

well as Kosovo's (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and most importantly to this research—Kosovo was also constructing Shpresa's identity.

Now as we increasingly move into the social aspects of place, which has unavoidably been making an appearance throughout this analysis, I would like to conclude this section by looking at how my participants discussed their childhood.

> *"You know, it's almost maybe when I go there [Rijeka & Istria] I become a child in a way, you know? I receive some of these memories because indeed, I was younger and that's what stayed alive" (Ante, 81).*

> *"When I think of Sarajevo, I think of childhood. It's like in a way like a period. When I think of that period, I think of periods without major burdens, without obligations, with, well just running in continuum, without pressure of binding myself in that society, everything was given" (Marko, 45).*

I begin with these two quotes because they are very closely related to each other in the way that these individuals relate childhood to a *place.* Both Ante and Marko feel as if they become different individuals when they return to these *places*. Ante even mentioned that he "became a child in a way." Later in my interview with Marko he stated that when he returns to Sarajevo he feels "very safe and easygoing." These individuals' feelings are very intertwined with these *places* and I would argue that it is a result of the effects of primary socialization and the lifeworlds that were created in these *places.* In *The Structures of the Life-World*, Schütz and Luckmann discuss various stratifications of the lifeworld, one of which being the world within potential reach, more specifically, the world in potential reach (1973, 35–51). We experience the world not only in the present but also in relation to what used to be within reach. Our sense of orientation—whether we are "here" or "there"—and our perception of time—past or present—are deeply interwoven with our potential experiences. The past, along with its associated experiences, is therefore not necessarily lost; rather, it remains potentially within reach (Schütz

& Luckmann 1973, p. 51). Returning to past *places*, such as those from childhood, can facilitate the actualization of this world in potential reach.

But some do not always wish to regain this lifeworld, some prefer to embrace change and look forward, such as Ante, who commented, "You don't notice the change, but the change is happening, and there's something invigorating about that." That is not to say that he does not remember his childhood fondly, in fact he felt that "the overwhelming feeling [of being young] was a good one, all the memories of running around, swimming, climbing mountains with friends." His point was that the repetition of the past was undesirable, take the following statements as examples:

> *"I wouldn't decide to go back [to Rijeka] to walk the same streets and buy bread on the same corner. To me, it's kind of a letdown to do it…I love the building that I grew up with…But I wouldn't want to go back and do the same things because I lived it and that's great, I want something else" (Ante, 81).*
>
> *"Going back to repeat steps of my childhood, it's not that appealing" (Ante, 81).*

Hearing these sentiments was interesting because Ante spoke very highly of Istria and Rijeka and even stated that he would return and live in the region, but he did not want to repeat the exact steps of his past.

What I think this section importantly shows is that the temporal aspects that my participants chose to discuss are subjective and unique, although thematically similar. When asking questions related to *place*, all of my participants discussed their past, but what they chose or wanted to recall was highly dependent on the context in which they were speaking.

5.4 The Social Aspects

Lastly, I would like to close off this chapter by discussing how the social aspects of *place* affect the identity-construction process. Now an obvious disclaimer that I think needs to be stated is that the last three subsections have in fact discussed and dealt with the social aspects of the identity-construction process, because at its core this process is a social phenomenon. Now I would like to home in on this specific aspect of analysis as it relates to *place.*

Returning to the topic of childhood, let me continue the discussion by looking at Slavica's description of her family's village in Macedonia. While my discussion with Slavica was on the shorter side, she did provide me with an emotionally rich description of that *place* and why it is important to her identity,

> *"It's the village [Sopotnitsa, Macedonia] where my mother and father grew up, they were born there…as well as my grandmother and grandfather, from both sides. That's the best place….My father died early. I was 14 when he died. I don't know. I cannot explain to you why, but when I go there, I feel very good. Like it's part of me" (Slavica, 53).*

Sopotnitsa is a place that has become imbued with meaning for Slavica due to the network of social relations that she is a part of (Massey 2005), but the importance of this *place* traces its way back to her childhood and to her primary socialization. This is a *place* that she is extremely familiar with, and instead of it being part of a world that is within potential reach, like Ante, it is a part of the world within actual reach (Schütz & Luckmann 1973, 36-37), as she still routinely visits this place, it is still a formative element in her lifeworld. Additionally, in her narrative she mentions that her father died when she was young, this is followed by a pause—as she struggles to frame her thoughts. She cannot explain why, but she feels happy in this village, as if it was a part of her. Despite the uncertainty in her statement, through listening to her narrative, it was clear that family is the reason why she feels this way about this *place*.

The importance of family in influencing one's relation to a *place* was also evident in Marko's narrative about another village, this one being in Montenegro. The relation that Marko has with this village is significantly different than that of Slavica, but I believe it is their differences that reinforce their similarities, as it pertains to these individuals' identity.

> *"It was only for half a year there [Brezojevice, Montenegro], but still like it was, I found it very significant. It's a very small place in Montenegro and half of my family lives there, so I still go there every year to stay there for at least a week. For me it's really about relatives and nature. I love being there" (Marko, 45).*

Unlike Slavica, Marko did not spend his childhood in Brezojevice. He first went to Brezojevice to say with his relatives when he was fleeing the Bosnian War. This would be the first time that he was forced to live independently and away from his family and home. This forced a change in his lifeworld, as he could no longer rely on his prior established objective reality (Schütz & Luckmann 1973; Berger & Luckmann 1966). But nonetheless, he does have family in this *place*, in fact this was the reason his parents sent him there initially, and he returns annually to this day. This shows the importance of pre-existing social networks in the production of *a place's* identity. For this *place* was connected to a more diverse network than the mere confines of the location of "Brezojevice." This connects back to Massey's assertion that *places* lack boundaries, they are inherently interconnected (1994). What primarily makes this place important for Marko, is one in of the same with what Makes Sopotnitsa important for Slavica—family.

This emphasis on family was also addressed by Ljiljana, but like many of the statements discussed in this chapter, I think there needs to be a closer analysis looking at her delivery,

> *"I would say something that my mother always said, she said she doesn't care about places. She wants to be where her family is. So that's the most important thing" (Ljiljana, 73).*

Ljiljana asserts that, through a saying of her mother's, that *place* doesn't matter, she wants to be where her family is. But therein lies the contradiction, for Ljiljana a *place* becomes significant

due to the presence of family. Whether it be Belgrade or Washington, these *places* are meaningful to her because of existing social networks. That brings me to another discussion point that Ljiljana raised, and that was one of community in shaping her identity,

> *"I come from a very anti-communist family. My two uncles were killed by communists. My father was imprisoned more than once for anti-communist activities, when he was a young student. But the thing that really made our life good is that there was this whole community of people like us, right? So there were these strong connections…there was this which was very tight that survived all this turbulence around us. It was really moral support more than anything. And the social life was great because that's what allowed people to survive in those difficult conditions" (Ljiljana, 73).*

Despite political oppression, what made life in Belgrade bearable was her support network of friends and family, which helped her navigate the turbulence of the 1970s under the state's harsh anti-communist measures. What can also be seen from this statement is that the attributes of the *place* itself help to shape the identity of an individual or groups, as was the case for Ljiljana; it was due in part to the *place* which yielded her to seek out and forge strong social connections.

The degree to which an individual stays interconnected with a *place,* and its network of social relations, also affects the degree to which they notice changes over time with that *place*, this was very evident in my interview with Marko,

> *"I don't think when I go to Sarajevo I notice major changes because I'm simply kept updated…That again speaks of my relation to Sarajevo, because every morning that I wake up, I check the news, so I'm quickly updated, and then I talk to my family and then I get some additional information" (Marko, 45).*

While Marko now permanently resides in Brussels, when he does go back to Sarajevo, nothing shocks or surprises him, because he is constantly kept in the loop via news reports and by talking with his family members. In a sense he is still a part of this *place,* as he is still connected to the narrative of Sarajevo (Moore 2025); it continues to shape his identity, despite Makro being some 1,000 km away from its geographic location.

I want to now discuss another social aspect that came up a lot in my interviews, and that is the topic of attitudes towards life. Many of my participants discussed *places* in relation to other *places,* but specifically how they differ in terms of their social dynamics. Let me return to Ljiljana's narrative, but this time with a focus on how she sees a difference in the social dynamics between Serbia and the United States,

> *"One thing that I always found puzzling (about Arlington, VA), you can be extremely friendly with somebody you know. They come for a glass of wine or whatever. Your neighbors. And then, they move on, and you never hear from them again. It is a different connection; it's a temporary connection. I think roots are much deeper [in Serbia] because of the history, you know people have been there for a long time" (Ljiljana, 73).*

In this passage, she speaks about the depth and longevity of social relations. It confuses her that in the United States a gesture of friendship can be much more superficial than how such situations would unfold in Serbia. These ephemeral connections confuse Ljiljana, especially given that weight that she puts on family and friends to construct a sense of *place.* This of course speaks to the different lifeworlds that these individuals are operating under. In the United States Ljiljana is not used to the processes in which these newly encountered individuals operate, their actions, customs, and habits have not yet undergone the processes of typification, habitualization, and institutionalization in her construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann 1966). She is forced to begin the process of secondary socialization in this new *place* to construct a sub-world, one in which she can comfortably operate.

A similar process, or the lack of said process, was also brought up by Shpresa regarding the Kosovar diaspora when they visit Kosovo. Shpresa explains that the diaspora:

> *"are like animals for me. They throw garbage, even cigarette butts on the floor. I'm sure they cannot do it in their country. The diaspora is not integrated, maybe the third generation will be, not my generation, but their children…they expect us to get one month off because they are here" (Shpresa, 52).*

What this shows is that the diaspora operates under a different lifeworld than the one of Shpresa, because they have drawn on different stocks of knowledge during their primary socialization (Berger & Luckmann 1966). Moreover, the diaspora has a significantly different sense of *place* of Kosovo when compared to Shpresa, because of these socialization processes. This manifests in such situations as what Shpresa described, one defined by the lack of integration.

I would like to look continue addressing this theme by looking at how other participants discuss the differences that they noticed in the attitudes towards life in *places* where they have little or no experience with during their youth, when they underwent primary socialization. Starting with Meho, he discusses this theme in relation to two *places,* one where he now lives—Germany—and the other where he has only visited—the United States.

> *"Yeah, actually in Germany, there is no meat for nothing. There they are only eating hot dogs, and it's catastrophic. So now I understand all the people who are vegetarian in Germany completely now, before I wasn't really understanding people who were vegetarian, but now I do" (Meho, 57).*

> *"I was also in the United States twice. I don't like it at all, it's a catastrophe of living…In the United States I'm afraid that I will only work there, earn a lot of money, and die before I am able to spend it" (Meho, 57).*

While Meho's critiques of these *places* are different, what it shows is yet again, a challenge to one's existing province of reality (Schütz & Luckmann 1973). While Meho has made the necessary adaptations to life in Germany, he has disregarded the possibility of living in the United States because it would force him to abandon, or significantly alter, the lifeworld in which he is comfortable operating in. This is also true for Tomislav,

> *"what I didn't like about the states was that everything weas kind of goal oriented and work oriented…Let's have beers, let's discuss things freely and then see what we can come up with. I would not trade this for and I think most people that didn't want to stay in the States, I think that was a big part of the reason that like the specific division between work and life" (Tomislav, 54).*

While Tomislav lived and studied in the United States, he told me that he would never move there permanently due to these differences in attitudes towards life. In this regard, it is the social aspect of a *place's* identity which is influencing how participants construct their own identities in accordance with the world around them. Instead of looking at statements where my participants address *places* that uncomfortable to them,

I would like to briefly pivot towards looking at the opposite case, through a statement made by Mirjana:

> *"I think I could live in any other town where we are now or near German speaking countries…We have a similar way of living, like Austrians. We were Austria-Hungary. We have a similar cuisine and tradition" (Mirjana, 58).*

In this statement Mirjana refers to the interconnectedness of *place*, both spatially and temporally. Every *place* is a site of multiple temporalities, and as Massey has asserted, "if the past transforms the present, helps thereby to make it, so too does the present make the past (Maassey 1995, 187). What Mirjana is describing is a reflection and acknowledgment of a set of past social and material connections that have created these various *places*, they share historical trajectories that have continued to influence the present social networks attached to these *places.* This is also true for Tomislav, who is another resident of Zagreb,

> *"Coffee was brought here and then we kind of become a part of the Austro-Hungarian kind of culture, which we are well, we are a part of it officially and it is the same type of culture that you still have people enjoy to this day" (Tomislav, 54).*

While his focus is different than Mirjana's, the same past is recalled, Austria-Hungary. I found this particularly fascinating because it demonstrates that a similar sense of *place* had been constructed in the minds of these individuals, drawing upon a very specific stock of knowledge.

It is at this point that I would like to discuss my last takeaway from this research project's analysis, and that is by looking at the subject of internationalization. While many of my

participants in the past examples have compared *places* in terms of their similarities or differences to others, there is an important throughline that must be acknowledged, and that is the phenomenon of "time-space compression." Our world has become an increasingly interconnected place as our ability to move and communicate across great distances has been made easier (Massey 1993,) and this feeling has not gone unnoticed by my participants. For example, Slavica pursued vocational training in Dubai to help her establish a business in Macedonia, speaking on this experience she notes that:

> *"How they are living [in Dubai], their culture, it was interesting, particularly for me. It was a very big experience because you know that world is different than our world—the Balkans and Europe" (Slavica, 53).*

In Dubai she was able to interact with individuals from across the globe, in a single *place*. This experience had woven together previously disparate social networks into a single node, and in turn both the *place* and the participating individuals were imbued with an updated identity.

The same goes for Marko. When he moved to Brussels he began to socialize in a particular neighborhood, and that is when he realized,

> *"The international nature of the neighborhood…you don't have many people from Belgium living there, it's mainly an international community…I would say it's the vibe which was created, kind of mediterranean vibe, which makes it an attractive place for me" (Marko, 45).*

For Marko he wasn't seeking out a "unspoilt" or "local" *place,* if you can even speak if such things. He found this neighborhood attractive because of how interconnected it was to other people, *places,* and experiences. The appeal is undeniably the social aspect of *place.* It is through interacting with his neighborhood and through the social networks it is connected with, that Marko assigns it value.

I think this section is best brought to a close with this final quote from Tomislav, "There's no way to know where you are because they [cafes] are losing their local identities." If I have done a thorough job in the presentation of my analysis, what we can now understand about this statement is that *place* cannot be thought of as something to which meaning is bestowed on. A *place's* identity is constantly in evolution through those who interact with it, and as these dialectical processes unfold so too does the individual get an identity bestowed upon them.

6. Theoretical Discussion & Concluding Remarks

This study highlights the necessity of incorporating a more comprehensive understanding of the identity-construction process—one that positions *place* in a more central role within current debates in the social sciences. Such refocusing is both beneficial and necessary, particularly in light of the intensified interconnectedness and globalization that we experience through the everyday effects of time-space compression (Massey 1993).

What is demonstrated by this research is that *place,* like identity, is a socially constructed phenomenon (Berger & Luckmann 1966). Both the individual and *place* are engaged in dialectical social processes, through which *place* is constructed in ways that directly shape identity, in turn an individual's identity simultaneously contributes to the ongoing social construction of *place.* These constructs are mutually reinforcing, continually shaping and reshaping one another.

Through analyzing these nine interviews I can discern several things. 1) the process of primary internalization of a *place* is significant towards how an individual constructs and later recalls their own reality. What follows from this point is that 2) the ways in which individuals interact with their environment is extremely subjective and contextual based upon their lived experience. 3) The degree to which the social processes of external categorization and self-

identification align, resulting from an individual's social interactions connected to a *place,* help to determine how that *place* is categorized and what sense of *place* is produced. Finally, 4) when individuals experience a specific shock to their finite province of meaning, whether that be moving across the globe or navigating the post-Yugoslav space, they must reconstruct their reality through secondary socialization, but importantly their identity and pieces of knowledge acquired during primary socialization remain prominent, and this is reflected in how these individuals relate to the concept of *place* in the present.

Lastly, what do I see as the next steps for this research? While this study has demonstrated that a more interdisciplinary approach should be taken towards understanding identity construction, I believe there is room to further expand on these findings. For starters, this study would have benefitted from a larger participant sample. By increasing my sample more narratives could have been taken into consideration. While this is not a quantitative study, my findings emerged through a cross-comparison of these narratives, and a larger dataset would have allowed for a more in-depth analysis. Additionally, given the theoretical and exploratory nature of this research, applying this framework to other case studies would help mitigate the subjectivities specific to the context of the post-Yugoslav space.

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