

Erika NAGY*

CONSTRUCTING AND CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN A NEW (?) EUROPE

Abstract: During the last two decades, discourses over the transition process shifted toward a theoretical diversity and a deeper understanding of 'how modernity was reworked in post-socialist context'. It was widely argued that changing social relations were shaped not only by norms and institutions of Neoliberal capitalism, but also by established networks, institutional and regulatory structures and actors that/who gave diverse responses to the profound and thorough transformation of the society. This paper aims at understanding how geopolitical discourses over the Balkan and its place in the 'new Europe' shaped social relations and produced daily practices nested into those webs, through the perception and interpretations of post-socialist transformation by Hungarian migrants who left the war-hit Yugoslavia.

Key words: post-socialism, transition, geopolitical discourse, Balkan, Hungary.

1. INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING THE DIVERSITY OF POST-SOCIALISM

During the last two decades, a large body of academic work has been done to study, interpret and theorise post-socialism. Discourses that were stimulated by and also *did* produce the transition process shifted toward a theoretical diversity and a deeper understanding 'how modernity was reworked in post-socialist context' (Smith, 2004). Modernisation theory that underpinned political and academic discourses, and largely shaped the transformation process in the former 'Soviet bloc' considered 'marketisation' (the Neoliberal scheme for transition) and 'democratisation' inevitable and as a process of 'returning to

* Erika NAGY, Centre for Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Bekescsaba Department, H-5600 Bekescsaba, Szabó Dezső, s. 42; Hungary, e-mail: nagy@rkk.hu.

Europe' and a development model (Hörschelmann, 2004). In this context, the EU-accessions in 2004 and 2007 were considered as the completion of the transition process (i.e. construction of the institutions of well-functioning markets and political democracy) and the successful repositioning of post-socialist countries inside Europe by the national political elites of the accessing countries and also in political rhetoric of the EU-technocrats (Clark, 2001; Moisis, 2002; Kostovicova, 2004).

This 'orthodox' approach was successfully exploited by national elites for governing and legitimising the transition process (i.e. institutionalising the Neoliberal market economy and making the high price of it paid by the majority of post-socialist societies accepted) (Smith, 1998). Nevertheless, it was increasingly criticised by academics, particularly, for ignoring different ('socialist' and 'pre-socialist') development trajectories and the diversity of social processes of the emerging capitalism in the post-socialist countries (Smith and Pickles, 1999; Smith, 2004; Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008). It was widely argued that changing social relations were shaped not only by norms and institutions of Neoliberal capitalism, but also by 'established networks, institutional and regulatory structures and actors operating under conditions of extreme uncertainty and chance [of the transition]' (Pickles and Smith, 1999, p. 119) that/who gave diverse (capitalist/non-capitalist, formal/informal/illegal) responses to the profound and thorough transformation of the society. Thus, post-socialist spaces should be considered as highly complex webs of relations that can be understood through everyday experiences and practices (Smith, 2004; Stenning and Bradshaw, 2004; Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008).

By taking the latter, non-essentialist view of post-socialist transition and of emerging diversity of capitalism in the former 'Soviet bloc', this paper aims at understanding how discourses over the transition shaped social relations and produced daily practices nested into those webs, through the perception and interpretations of post-socialist transformation by Hungarian migrants who left the war-hit Yugoslavia (dominantly, the multi-ethnic Vojvodina region, North Serbia). It shall be analysed how post-socialist discourses over the nation-state, ethno-cultural relations, and the contested idea of Europe shaped their lives, in particular, their relations stretching over national boundaries. It is difficult to estimate the number of Hungarians who moved to Hungary and particularly, those who still stay there. Thus, discussing their views, practices and reflections on post-socialist discourses might be considered as marginal. Nevertheless, this group constructed a highly complex web of social relations and a multi-layered identity rooted in their ethno-cultural relations, in their 'migrant past' tied closely to experiencing war, nationalisms and uncertainty of the transition, moreover, in the particular trajectory of Yugoslavia as a 'socialist' state, that makes us understand the 'multiple and differential strategies' that were at work in post-socialist societies (Smith and Pickles, 1999). The transition process shall be discussed through the lens of *migrant entrepreneurs* under post-socialism.

To understand how post-socialist discourses shaped complex networks of social relations and everyday practices of this social group, the political conflicts of the Balkan shall be discussed in the geopolitical context of the transition (section 2). Interpreting geopolitics as ‘...a discursive practice by which intellectuals of “state-craft” spatialise international politics in such a way as to present it as a “world” characterised by particular types of places, peoples and dramas’ (Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1992, p. 192), re-definition of the nation (interwoven with ethno-cultural problems), moreover, the re-positioning of post-socialist states in Europe shall be interpreted as tools of national political elites to support and legitimise the transition process (Smith, 1998; Moisio, 2002; Kostovicova, 2004). The conflicts of the former Yugoslav states that have been discussed in a wider geopolitical and historical context (e.g. by Ó Tuathail, 1999; Jackson, 2004; Kostovicova, 2004) shall be interpreted also as part of national and local political discourses in Hungary and Szeged (a border-town receiving migrants from Yugoslavia in a large number during the 1990s), that largely shaped the ‘material’ conditions¹ of and attitudes toward immigrants. The analysis rests on the review of earlier studies focused on the Balkan conflicts, moreover, on the survey and evaluation of discourses over the meanings of the nation and national borders in the programmes of Hungarian political parties, in national media, moreover, in local politics (Szeged), through semi-structured interviews (18) made with local politicians and intellectuals.

Geopolitical discourses over the transition did shape the perception, interpretation of rapid and profound changes of post-socialist societies and the responses given by the particular social groups. This process shall be discussed in section 3, through the analysis of semi-structured lifetime interviews made with immigrants who moved from the former Yugoslavia to Hungary during the 1990s, consider themselves Hungarian (that is their native language), and ran successful business(es) at the time of the interview (2006–2007). Due to the difficulties in finding them (for that, I used the ‘snowball’ method) and their reluctance to give an account of their life, only 8 interviews were (could be) used for the analysis. During the one-and-a-half/two-hour conversations, I focused on understanding the turning points their lives, the meaning of those events and their relations to post-socialist discourses, discovering and understanding the context of narratives related to Europe, nation, ethno-cultural identity, the history of the region, and to Neoliberal capitalism. In this way, the everyday practices that rest on diverse social networks, including formal and informal, local, global and cross-border were revealed to contribute the ongoing discourse over the diversity of capitalism (and of the transition process itself) in the former ‘Soviet bloc’.

¹ Particularly, conditions for gaining citizenship, purchasing property, getting a job, running businesses etc. These conditions were stressed as highly important by the immigrants interviewed.

2. THE BALKAN WARS IN THE 'NEW EUROPE' DISCOURSE

From the late 1990s on, academic research shifted from considering post-socialist transition as series of institutional reforms toward a deeper analysis and understanding how 'almost the entire fabric of life' was re-defined (Young and Light, 2001, p. 2) and how spatial frameworks of everyday practices were reorganised. It was widely discussed that the nation state had a substantial and a multi-faceted role in this process, not only as a provider of 'material' conditions (institutions) for the changing systems of social reproduction, but also as a spatialised framework of belonging (identity) in a highly uncertain and rapidly changing world (Anderson, 1991; Paasi, 2001; Young and Light, 2001; Jackson, 2004). Nevertheless, dissolving the state control over everyday life was a significant issue in post-socialist political discourses, thus, the role and the values and norms that the nation state rested upon had to be re-defined thoroughly in post-socialist countries. This process was tied intimately to the issue of being part of Europe (Moisio, 2002; Kostovicova, 2004): in post-socialist political rhetoric, it represented the 'return' to democratic traditions, historical continuity (rejecting the socialist past, stressing the 'modern' and 'western' roots of the sovereign, territorialised nation state) and also adopting a model for 'working capitalism' to remedy the crisis of post-socialist restructuring (Young and Light, 2001; Paasi, 2001; Moisio, 2002; Ziegler, 2002). Nevertheless, free trade and well-functioning market economy raised also the issue of changing meanings of national borders due to globalisation, rise of network economies and intensified cross-border relations (Paasi, 2001) – questioning the significance of a pillar (the territorialised nation state) that 'newly born' post-socialist identities rested on (Young and Light, 2001).

The repositioning of post-socialist countries in the political space was embedded into the discourses over the idea(s) of Europe, in (and through) which, its meanings (as a 'place', based on shared history and values, and also as an 'institution', i.e. the EU) were re-interpreted, and the changing sense of nation/nationhood was widely discussed throughout Europe (Paasi, 2001; Simonsen, 2004). The spread of terms of the 'new Europe' and 'East and Central Europe' in geopolitical discourses – that largely shaped ongoing debates in post-socialist countries – rested on the idea of including post-socialist countries in Europe as a place and also as an institute (the EU) (Moisio, 2002; Clark, 2002). Nevertheless, it referred also to the process of 'othering': the exclusion of '... backward, violent, extremely nationalist countries...' (Simonsen, 2004, p. 358), and (re-)defining Europe as a bounded space, primarily, in relation to Russia (Moisio, 2002; Simonsen, 2004). Such discourses manifested in including post-socialist countries in Europe as an institute (Paasi, 2001), that resulted in highly complex and overlapping structures of spaces and boundaries, that (particularly,

being included in/excluded from the 'common market', the euro-zone, and the Schengen system) largely shaped the everyday practices of people living border regions (Walters 2002).

Moreover, the EU-accession of post-socialist states raised fear and political debates inside the 'old' EU-member states, that resulted in the re-definition (reinforcement) of the role of nation states (as territorialised power) in controlling international flows, particularly, migration (Simonsen, 2004; Houtum and Pijpers, 2007; Cunningham, 2004). Thus, Neoliberal globalisation and the end of the Cold War resulted in the development of highly complex networks and flows crossing the national borders as well as the boundaries between the former 'East' and 'West', but produced complex, overlapping (bounded) spatial structures, and new meanings of traditional (e.g. national) boundaries.

While the nation-state was re-defined through geopolitical discourses engineered by the political elites, as a source of identity and stability in post-socialist countries with well-functioning institutions for exercising power and control social practices, it raised conflicts that have been inherent in multi-ethnic post-socialist countries under 'Socialism' and before (Mitchell, 2000; Young and Light, 2001). Political conflicts that escalated to wars on the Balkan were widely discussed and interpreted in this context (e.g. by Ó' Tuathail, 1999; Young and Light, 2001; Jackson, 2004; Kostovicova, 2004). Yugoslavia was interpreted as a permanently contested political framework that rested on the dual ideology of (national) independence and (ethnic) togetherness that provided a framework for subsequent attempts for modernisation. Due to the failures of the centrally planned system, inner conflicts were managed by shifting the economic and political power to the national (party) elites from the 1970s on, providing an institutional (and economic) basis for the centrifugal forces, that emerged (firstly) as series of 'inner' political struggles (federalism vs. centralisation), and escalated to ethnic/national and military conflicts (Sajti, 1995; Jackson, 2004). For 'secessionist' republics of Yugoslavia, modernisation (tackling the structural crisis) was close-knit to the issue of national sovereignty – being released from an 'outworn' centrally planned system and political oppression of the Communist Party (increasingly dominated by anti-reformist Serb and Montenegrin politicians from 1989) – and to the issue of European integration. Nevertheless, as post-Yugoslav republics were highly diverse in ethnic and cultural terms, the rise of nationalisms and the construction of culturally homogenous nation states by national political elites challenged and made sources of (war) conflicts all 'other' (ethno-cultural) identities tied to particular places and landscapes (Brubaker, 1998; Robinson *et al.*, 2001; Jackson, 2004).

Discourses over national identities and boundaries in the former Yugoslavia were embedded into and shaped by the geopolitical debate over the Balkan and its place inside the 'new Europe'. Since the geopolitical significance of Yugoslavia was shrinking at the end of the Cold War, conflicts in the West Balkan

were not considered of strategic importance in the early 1990s. Thus, the escalating war was considered as something happening ‘outside’ Europe, placing the ‘Balkan’ as a geopolitical category outside the democratic world. The ‘othering’ of the war-hit countries split former Yugoslavia politically and spatially (i.e. into the militant Yugoslav/Serb state vs. republics seeking for sovereignty/adopting ‘European values’) (Ó Tuathail, 1999; Sajti, 1995). As a consequence, after the Balkan wars, Yugoslavia’s/Serbia’s role had to be re-defined as European, and as a democratic country, and also as a territorialised nation state on the Balkan,² that made Serbia’s European integration a highly contested process (Kostovicova, 2004).

The wars and the ambiguity of the national borders changed the socio-spatial framework of everyday life of people living in multi-ethnic border regions of the Balkan thoroughly. In Tito’s Yugoslavia, the ethnically and culturally diverse space of Vojvodina was defined as part of (North) Serbia. Nevertheless, it gained a limited autonomy, and until the late 1980s, despite the rise of Serb nationalism and ‘cutting back’ the autonomy of the region, local people had learnt how to deal with economic problems and how live in a multicultural milieu. The region was increasingly embedded in international flows before 1990: the residents of Vojvodina were over-represented amongst Yugoslav guest workers, and many local people benefited from semi-legal activities (e.g. form blooming open markets that were mediators of also smuggled and faked goods, and frequented by Hungarian shoppers), that eased social problems stemming from the crisis of centrally planned economies³ (Gulyás, 2007). In this period, social conflicts that were scarcely considered as ‘ethnic’, were managed and resolved through local personal networks.

Nevertheless, from the early 1990s on, the region was a scene to major ethno-cultural changes. Although, it was hit directly by the fifth Balkan war (by the NATO bombing in 1999), major demographic and ethno-cultural changes occurred from the early 1990s on: 300,000 residents left Vojvodina, of whom, 50,000 were Hungarians, while Serb families from war-hit regions were arriving up till the end of the Kosovo conflict (Sajti, 1995; Szlávit, 2007). Outward migration of Hungarian minority (that targeted primarily Hungary) was stimulated by the fear of the war (of being enlisted in the Yugoslav army), and also by the economic crisis. Highly qualified, young and mobile groups of the population (e.g. former guest workers) were highly over-represented amongst migrants, who exploited the opportunities of cultural (language) community and of the emerging market economy, saving their small capitals from hyperinflation of the

² Territorial fluidity remained even after the last Balkan war (basically, until now), due to the split of Montenegro, and to the hotly debated status of Kosovo.

³ Such transactions were tolerated and even (indirectly) supported by the relatively liberal regulation of cross-border flows (on both sides) between Hungary and Yugoslavia.

war economy (Nagy *et al.*, 2003; Szilávy, 2007). These changes challenged the identities that were tied intimately to particular places and largely destroyed networks of (localised) social relations developed and worked as framework of everyday social practices until 1990s, it was suggested by the interviews.

3. A GATE ON THE FORTRESS? GEOPOLITICAL DISCOURSES OVER THE 'NEW EUROPE' AND THE BALKAN CONFLICTS IN HUNGARY

The rise and escalation of the political (politicised ethnic) conflicts on the Balkan raised political debate, controversial reactions and frustration in Hungary, that was embedded into the geopolitical discourses over repositioning the country inside Europe and the global political and economic map. While 'Euro-Atlantic' integration was a key issue supported by all political forces, the re-reading of the pre-socialist national history that underpinned this process ideologically resulted in diverse interpretations of the nation. By the proponents of neoliberal modernisation (including successors of the pre-1989 Socialist Party), it was defined as the product of post-socialist modernisation process, associated with sovereignty, controlled by the territorialised nation state that rests on the loyalty of its citizens, and (as member of European institutions) a potential supporter of Hungarian minorities living outside the national borders. In the other 'mainstream' ('rightist', conservative) interpretation, the nation was defined as an ethno-cultural community that rests on shared history and values stretching over the boundaries of territorialised nation states of the region. This discourse raised subsequent waves of fear of 'Hungarian revisionism' of borders in the neighbouring states, and political tensions in Hungarian borderland communities (outside Hungary), of whom many felt 'being used' by Hungarian national parties in geopolitical discourses.

Nevertheless, despite the ongoing debate over the interpretations of the nation, actual political decisions were driven by the interests of the political elite to legitimise the transition process through Euro-Atlantic integration. Due to this, as the Balkan crisis deepened and was perceived as a challenge for the 'New World Order' by the USA (Ó Tuathail, 1999), and Hungary was considered as a potential partner of the NATO in the intervention, just after joining the Treaty in 1999, a Hungarian aircraft basis was used for bombing Serbia, including Vojvodina. The ethno-cultural concept of the nation was challenged again in 2004, when a referendum was organised by the conservative political parties to get support (legitimacy) for offering dual citizenship for Hungarians living outside the national borders. This attempt failed due to the low level of participa-

tion and to the rejection of the proposition by the majority of voters.⁴ Thus, the concept for the nation that saw the resolution for the problems of ethno-cultural relations and of national borders in being integrated into Europe as a framework for intensified (cultural, economic etc.) flows prevailed, and underpinned the ‘mission’ taken by Hungarian foreign policy to take a leading role in integrating the Balkan into European institutions.

In the southern border region of Hungary, that was considered as a ‘periphery’ by the national and local media and discussed in the context of war, crime, threat and migration in the 1990s, local geopolitical discourses were embedded into a dense network of relations and daily practices connected to the Yugoslav(Serb)-Hungarian border, as it was suggested by the interviews conducted in Szeged. Although, there was an increasing fear of the ‘side products’ of the war, such as the rise of criminal offences, the growth of the illegal economy, and the entry of new agents (immigrant entrepreneurs) on the highly contested and shrinking market of retail and services (all together, labelled as the ‘Balkanisation’ of the local economy and society in Szeged), the benefits of the changing geopolitical situation was also perceived. The local economy was stimulated by the influx of small capitals from Yugoslavia that were fuelled into small scale joint ventures and the local property market. This process was underpinned by the liberalisation of the conditions of enterprising and of property transactions⁵ in the early years of the transition in Hungary.

The local political elite aimed at repositioning Szeged in the ongoing national and international geopolitical discourses, to exploit its geographical (dis)advantages and the existing dense economic, cultural and personal cross-border networks. Local politicians were increasingly considered with being an engine of ‘making peace’ and of the re-negotiation of the Balkan’s role in Europe. This ‘mission’ was inspired largely by the changing (peripheral) position of Szeged in the emerging uneven landscape of capitalism. Thus, the future of the city was discussed in its geopolitical (borderland) context, as it was articulated by a senior official of the City Hall (2001):

The development of Szeged might have stimulating impact in a wider [i.e. North Balkan] region [...]. Catching up with the rest of the country and marching into Europe.

The ‘gate to the Balkan’ was an inverse interpretation of the city’s earlier position (being a ‘dead end’) up until 1999. This new interpretation rested on the

⁴ The (probably, convincing) arguments against this concept were very similar to those used in the old EU-member states to protect their welfare systems and labour markets in the enlarged EU.

⁵ The lower limit for the registered capital of a company without legal entity took one-tenth of the average monthly salary in 1992. International investors, primarily, Yugoslav ‘small capitals’ were involved in one-sixth of local businesses in the region at the peak of such flows (1994). Joint ventures were allowed to own a property in Hungary, thus, having a home for immigrants.

changing geopolitical position of the Balkan (cease-fire, and latter, the involvement of Yugoslavia/Serbia in European institutions), as well as on the knowledge and social capital accumulated in cross-border networks before and even during the 'five wars' of the Balkan. Nevertheless, the vision rested upon asymmetrical relations: Szeged (Hungary) was to take the leading role in integrating 'the Balkan' (considered as the 'other' of European working capitalism and democracy) economically and politically into Europe. This role rested on the position of the city in the 'New Europe' (and of Hungary as a NATO-member, as a candidate for EU-membership etc.), and also on the cultural and economic functions fulfilled in Southeast Hungary and the North Balkan before the First World War. However, in general terms, local strategies that were embedded into international geopolitical discourses, rested also on the dense and multi-layered networks of social relations that crossed the border under socialism (in the 1980s) and post-socialism.

4. GEOPOLITICAL DISCOURSES AND THE CHANGING FRAMEWORKS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Under the conditions of post-socialist transition that resulted in profound changes and uncertainty in everyday life, being part of a localised network of social relations, moreover, belonging to a nation was source of stability. Such frameworks of identity and social practise were challenged deeply and thoroughly by the war conflict in Yugoslavia, particularly, for those who had to leave the place used to be attached to. For the interviewees, the 'trauma' of the war (or just the fear from being involved in it) that forced them to cross the border (flee from home) was a turning point in their lives. Nevertheless, this change was interpreted also as a 'new beginning' that rested largely on relationships 'back home' (a source of stability emotionally and economically), and also on the opportunities of the liberalised market economy in Hungary.

Starting a 'new life' under the conditions of the transition crisis of the early 1990s was largely a question of means of living. Thus, enterprising (successes/failures related to it) was key issue for immigrants, as a material basis for being part of the society, and also a source for new social relations.⁶ They had to run their businesses in a rapidly changing environment, and their failures (as businessmen) exhibit all the characteristics of post-socialist transition, such as semi-lawful business operation as a business strategy, vulnerability, and lacking business ethic and strategic partners. In seeking for stability in their emerging

⁶ Very often, the story of the interviewees was structured (e.g. chronologically) by the milestones of constructing their businesses.

business relations, the interviewees interpreted the Yugoslav/Hungarian border (considered as a manifestation of national identity and territorial power by national political elites, and a 'wall' separating two worlds in the 'new Europe' discourse) in a very practical way. It was seen permeable, limitations of crossing it were considered as problematic, but temporary and manageable. Thus, social relations 'back home' and those crossing the border were maintained, and supported the momentums of leaving Yugoslavia, settling down, and running businesses.

I left that company [a family business in Szeged], and came to live here [his current place of residence] to establish this company. I had a huge number of international contacts. I built up a system of which I became the exclusive representative in Serbia.⁷ At the time, things didn't go well at the company. But I felt responsible for the people that I'd recruited (Peter, entrepreneur, moved to Hungary in 1995).

When we came over, friends and acquaintances, who lived here [in Szeged], helped a lot. These were friendships of long-standing. Some 15–20 years old...⁸ (Joseph, entrepreneur, left the country in 1991).

The national border worked also a source of capital accumulation during the years of the Balkan wars. The process rested on actual knowledge provided by the network including 'home relations' (in Yugoslavia) and other migrants in Hungary, moreover, on social capital accumulated in the 1980s, when intra-Yugoslav trade was blossoming.

We already had a dormant company here [i.e. in Szeged, at the time of settling in Hungary]. We rented an apartment and an office, and found a job [...]. Then came the war, which severed commercial relations in Yugoslavia. The status of the Vojvodina, which had supplied Slovenian and Croatian manufactures, also changed. The company was quick to join intermediary commerce; as a Hungarian company we made re-exports to the West Balkans, and were important business partners of large international companies [...]. Szeged was a bridge head for multinationals. They, too, relied on us⁹ as an intermediary in their exports to the Balkans. Then came the embargo of the UN Security Council against Yugoslavia. We quickly contacted NGKM,¹⁰ got an export licence for certain foods and other processed products. We also supplied manufacturers in Serbia. Demand was huge.' (Gabriel, entrepreneur, moved to Hungary in 1991)

Personal relations that crossed newly defined national borders as well as ethno-cultural boundaries in the Balkan, provided a framework for involving the

⁷ It was a multi-level marketing scheme, a commercial enterprise based on sole trader distributors.

⁸ He met and made friends with quite a number of Hungarians through his business operations on the Yugoslavian side of the border in as early as the 1980s.

⁹ Hungarians with Hungary-based enterprise, having an extensive personal network throughout the former Yugoslavia.

¹⁰ Hungarian Ministry of International Business Relations, a ministry in charge of international business relations during the Antall Government (1990–1993).

war-hit regions in the international division of labour, through flows people (labour), knowledge, information and (from 2000 on) of capital. Such networks of relations that rested on trust stemming from local networks supported strategic responses of immigrant businessmen to the rapid changes of the liberalised Hungarian market (i.e. the entry of international competitors).

A turning point in the business operations was when a friend of the family, a representative of a company in Zagreb, who had excellent connections in Italy, offered to sell machinery for the XXX company at a reasonable price. We had 24 hours to make up our mind. We agreed because the security of the business was a main concern. We didn't want to put all our eggs in one basket. We needed a manufacturing unit in case retail opportunities ran out of steam... (John, entrepreneur, moved to Hungary in 1991).

In the beginning we had five employees. Skilled labour was hard to come by. Back home [i.e. in Vojvodina] it was different. Operation was round-the-clock there. Then in 1993 the war in Bosnia broke out and young men came. They wanted a job, so we were able to operate 24 hours per day to fulfil the YYY transnational retailer's order. Then a friend of one of our employees came over from Szabadka (Subotica), he took over professional oversight. It was he who had introduced all the innovations. He was the engine of growth. We owe him a lot (Quotation from John again).

Geopolitical discourses over the 'New Europe' in which Milosevic's Yugoslavia was considered as Europe's 'other', did effect the everyday life of the interviewees, even though, they left the country before/during the wars and were hit by that heavily. They perceived this 'othering' in business relations as a symbolic border between Western Europe and the countries of the former 'Soviet bloc' (e.g. in choosing partners by 'western' firms). To overcome it, they employed a spatial strategy that rests on Hungary's relatively good image in constructing international business relations through Hungary-based firms. However, it was also stressed, that the view of 'Yugoslavia' was differentiated along ethno-cultural characteristics: entrepreneurs' from Vojvodina (particularly, Hungarians) were considered as 'more reliable partners' in the 'West'.

Considering Yugoslavia as a militant state in geopolitical discourses and the fear of the war did shape the social relations of the interviewees locally: they felt being 'outsiders', even 'suspected' of having criminal (immigrant) relations, that made developing local networks of relations slow. However, in general, cultural differences between the migrants and the receiving society (community) were considered essential in this process:

Hungarians take quite a while to acknowledge foreigners. We have first hand experience in this. The language also reflects this. It [i.e. the Hungarian language] has not changed in centuries [...]. We have Vojvodian mentality; we wine and dine guests, because, who knows, some day I might be their guest, needing their hospitality. You won't find that mentality among the Hungarians (Jon, entrepreneur, settled in Hungary in 1995).

The interviewees related such differences to the multi-ethnic environment they came from, where being open to otherness' was a key issue for living together. Such experiences made them develop a highly complex system relationships as a source of stability under the uncertain conditions of post-socialist transition, war, and being an immigrant.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The emerging social networks and daily practices of people who left behind the war-hit place and community they used to belong to, were shaped largely by ongoing geopolitical discourses. Nevertheless, building up a 'new life' that was tied closely to running a business to live on, rested on relationships that crossed the boundaries defined through geopolitical discourses designated by national political elites and European technocrats. Perceiving the globalisation of the Hungarian market, they developed a complex web of international relations, that rests on values and norms of the 'West', but underpinned also by Neoliberal market opportunities produced by the post-socialist transition (as an integration into European/global flows) and by the largely personalised relations 'back home', as capital assets to be exploited (cheap/skilled labour, investment opportunities etc.). This process rooted deeply in the multi-ethnic milieu that they are still strongly attached to (emotionally and through personal ties) and that made them open-minded, moreover, in the development path of the border region (particularly, the Vojvodinian side) characterised by relatively intensified flows of people, goods and information before the transition. Social networks stretching over the national boundaries remained sources of stability after the war (from 2000 on), nevertheless, the distinction between the business and personal relations became more pronounced, and criticism concerning national borders as products of geopolitical discourses were replaced by scepticism toward Europe as an institute, and a framework for maintaining (reinforcing) uneven development through defining a complex set of boundaries.

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