
Carolyn Leutloff-Grandits CLAIMING OWNERSHIP IN POSTWAR CROATIA: THE DYNAMICS OF PROPERTY RELATIONS AND ETHNIC CONFLICT IN THE KNIN REGION

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Carolyn Leutloff-Grandits's book "Claiming Ownership in Postwar Croatia: The Dynamics of Property Relations and Ethnic Conflict in the Knin Region" is an evocative study of inter-group relations in an after-war region of post-socialist Croatia. The focus is on access to houses and land, i.e. the dynamics of discourses, structures, and agencies of property relations. Exploring the role of ethnicity and locality in everyday life, changing values and strategies over property "rights", interrelated ongoing political discourses and disputes, Leutloff-Grandits's book contributes to meager anthropological studies of ethnic conflict in the Balkan region, as well as to theories of conflict, ethnicity, anthropology of post-socialism, and legal anthropology.

The book originates from Leutloff-Grandits's enrolment in the Department II at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (MPISA) in Halle/Saale, Germany as a PhD. candidate in the period 1999-2002 within the Project Group Legal Pluralism. Headed by Chris Hann, the Department's thematic frame was Property Relations, with the aim to understand recent and contemporary transformation processes, social and economic changes, and con-

sequences of decollectivization in the post-socialist countries of Asia and Europe. In the Book's Preface Hann highlights the essential and particular feature of Leutloff-Grandits's field research among other ones in the frame of the Project: "she dealt primarily with houses, while others were focused on land". "Another particularity", as Hann has explained, "lies in Leutloff-Grandits's professional engagement in a war-torn region, with the complex and problematic social dynamics of (intensified and contested) narrations and attitudes linked to war-related property rights and conflicts" in the Introductory word of C. Hann's in the Book's Preface.

Consulting exceptionally numerous foreign and national literature and archive resources, and using and improving Croatian (Croato-Serbian) language during a one-year field research project in the Knin region and paying several short visits to Zagreb, Belgrade and towns in Bosnia, the author has acquired a comprehensive insight of the economical and political situation in the region and a detailed basis chronicling the events of the war in this area, watching carefully and judiciously the past and recent events that make the fact-oriented background of politically loaded questions of property relations. The research work brings us detailed analysis of the relationship among different ethnic groups at the local level, who are correlated with the legal and unwritten logic of ownership and "rights" to the houses and the land. The research work outlines the mesh of national, social and citizen rights and strong rhetoric of influential nationalist parties, which the author describes thoroughly and interprets as equally important factors that make the question of ownership and ethnic confrontation in that area a complex one. The research was placed within the ethnically mixed region of Knin, which had been the arena of dramatic ethnic conflict between Croats and Serbs from 1991 to 1995. Expatriating purposely the Croatian settlers, destroying and / or occupying their houses, the Serbian army occu-

pied the area and declared it to be Serbian national territory after the independence of Croatia had been declared (1991). Four years later, the Croatian army returned the Knin region to the country jurisdiction after an organized combined military and police action. That turmoil was followed by war casualties, relocation and deportation of the inhabitants. In 1995 the almost complete Serb population fled the area (became refugees), and Croatian law legalized taking possession of Serb houses by the newly immigrated Croats from Bosnian areas suffering from the war.

In the introductory part, in the section *Access to the field and the establishment of social networks*, the author picturesquely describes situations in which she defines herself as the researcher who in the process of research consciously articulates and reconsiders its methodological and epistemological aspects:

a comparatively limited knowledge of the language of the research group and (not) being able to communicate through nonverbal, cultural signs, which results from (not) knowing the context and gestures, and which emphasizes or diminishes potential ethnically unpleasant situations during the interview. In that manner, already in the introductory part, the author reconsiders her position as cultural "outsider". Elaborating her access into the field, her approach and gradual creation of social networks, referring to C. Geertz (1983) the author emphasizes on how different social categories, like age, nation, gender and so on, altogether influence the scope and limitation of the research itself, and also the content of the information obtained, as Leutloff-Grandits clearly points out: "It took months before I could be sure that people would tell me something that real-

ly touched them during my interviews". Self-reflexive sketches as such, which the Leutloff-Grandits's book abounds in, constructively enrich the description and interpretation of knowledge, since they bring along the experience of social reality, that in which the author is taking part, mainly through observation. Thus, already in the introductory chapter the author states the main problem of the research work, theoretical and methodological referent framework and introduces to the reader her field research, outlining her personal position as a researcher.

In the first chapter under the title *Property, Social Organisation and Ethnicity: The Knin Region before Socialism*, the historical background of the area under research up to the end of the Second World War has been outlined in detail and in chronological order. It has been pointed out especially that there was a period before the period of socialism when the country represented an economically sustainable foundation for feeding the rural, traditionally organized families and by that it acquired a key position as a marker of social identity and status. The moment the country loses its self-sustainability and fails to be an economically sufficient foundation for the life of a family / household in the 19th century, the same assumes characteristics of a national territory. In the process of building the nation, at the beginning of the 20th century, the Orthodox peasants identified themselves as Serbs and the Catholic peasants as Croats, by which the national level of identity was intensified over the religious one. The Orthodox and the Catholic population weren't anymore a homogeneous social group, instead they followed differently (contradictorily) proclaimed nationalistic politics, and ethnicity becomes a strong, symbolic and national determinant, and the religious affiliation emphasizes this distinction.

The following chapter, *Property, Social Organisation and Nationality under Socialism and during the 1990s War*, gives us a chronological view of historical events in the period between 1945 and 1995, in the

socialist and post-socialist period, and during war in the first half of the 1990s. In this chapter the author notices a shift in the meaning of property (houses and land) in the sense of exchanging private ownership for public ownership, as well as change that brought about a boom of industrialization and a decrease in the importance of agriculture. Furthermore, it shows that the proclaimed politics of 'brotherhood and equality', didn't function equally in practice, which is apparent only in the local level mutual influences of political power as researched by her. At the end of this part, the author notices an arousal of politically encouraged national and religious identity at the end of the 1980s, which became the basic criteria for legitimating the usurpation of properties, or disposal of the properties, and for violating citizen rights in view of the right over their property.

In the fourth chapter under the title *Changing Housing Relations after Ethnic War*, she analyses the influence of war conflicts on ownership conditions. Ownership "rights" and property "rights" were interpreted in different manners and were applied differently as well, both according to the presently valid regulations and according to the ethnic and age group qualification, emotional attachment towards house and land (as symbolically constructed 'national territory') and according to criteria that prevailed throughout history. An important difference in the strategy towards ownership refers to different views on Serb private ownership, regarding which the author notes an interesting gap based on local homogenization in the first place, not on the ethnic differentiation. In the local interpretations and in determining property "rights", an unbelievably great importance of local practice and affiliation

has been noted: the local Croats respect the existence of Serb private ownership, while the Croatian immigrants from Bosnia think that the war, their sufferings and national affiliation give them the right to ownership over Serb houses. The local inhabitants, both Croats and Serbs, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of the experience of living together and that of autochthonous status, irrespective of ethnic affiliation.

In the fifth chapter titled *The Dynamics of Housing Conflicts*, the author describes and problematizes the conflict regarding disposal of houses in the Knin region after the reintegration of the Croatian national territory in the mid 1990s, and notices that in practice legal regulations have been implemented very inadequately, which has harmed mostly the Serb population, but at the same time, a lot of immigrant Croats. The new regulations and programmes for the return of the Serbs (which include the return of their properties as well) to Croatia were then adopted under the pressure of the international community. However, due to unsettled circumstances in post-war socioeconomic reality, the local power-wielders discovered numerous ways to evade the legal acts.

The sixth chapter, *Land Use and Land Access*, has been dedicated to the aspects of ownership over land (agricultural land, cultivable and non-cultivable) in the 1990s. Unlike the cases of houses, the author notices that nationality was not the most important factor in solving the questions regarding disposal of lands. The key element was the distinction between autochthons and immigrants. In this relation to land the local Croats strongly differed from newly immigrated Croats who didn't feel strong emotional attachment to the land. Therefore, on the basis of the criteria of differentiating the newcomers and the autochthons, their rights to land were explicitly disputed by the autochthonous Croats (notably in cases of oral conflicts over land ownership).

In the following chapter, *Religious Celebrations and the (Re)creation of Home and*

Community, attention has been dedicated to religious celebrations as the places for re-establishing the community. Through the description of public celebrations, attention has been dedicated to the everyday life of the inhabitants of the Knin region as communities where through those manifestations people express their strained ethnic relations, while the right over land and houses remains a burning and very strained question. The author especially analyses the current public, particularly local, discourse by which the ethnic conflicts and the war sufferings experienced in Croatian territory are emphasized as the criteria to the legitimacy of usurping Serb properties. Just through the celebrations the author interestingly notices the cohesion between the Croats and the Serbs at the local level. The ethnic differences have been losing their importance. Participating in the celebrations of ethnically different neighbours has been noted as a spot of surpassing national and ethnical differences, which is keenly defined by face-to-face, local and shared experiences. The author, therefore, concludes that the cohesion between the local Croats and Serbs and the experience of the pre-war coexistence, which are expressed through shared celebrations, have also influenced the conception of the rights over properties in the post-war period. The local Serbs and Croats unitedly plead for the mutual rights over properties, often contrary to the interests of the immigrant Croats.

The eighth chapter, titled *Political Campaigning*, brings along a detailed analysis of the Catholic Church as a political element and the political campaigns during the communal elections in May 2001. The results of the elections at the local level, however, show a general commitment

to nationalistically proclaimed politics, contradictory to indicators at the local level, which overlaps with the aspirations of leading public and political discourse practices.

The concluding chapter represents the recapitulation summary of the stated results. In the final review the author concludes that the research shows a difference between the influence of ethnic conflict and nationalistic politics on an everyday local level, on the one hand, and on a wider regional or national level, on the other hand. Putting forward the review of the post-war situation up to the end of 2004 in epilogue, the author concludes that the experiences lived through locally go beyond national boundaries. Surprisingly for the war and post-war context, in other words, for the area where bloody ethnic conflicts went on recently, other distinctions have been observed as well – first of all, at the level of autochthons vs. recent immigrants. All those are reflected and taken note of in explaining, interpreting and assessing the rights over ownership (houses and land), which the author notices often to be contrary to the proclaimed nationalistic politics and international programmes and regulations about returning the properties and rights over the same.

This detailed and thorough study of war-time and post-war ethnic conflict in Croatia provides valuable knowledge of ethnic conflicts in the early 1990s in the area of ex-Yugoslavia in general. Through a full-fledged analysis of property relations and rights over property, especially houses, the author once again updates the importance of the question of contextual particularities of ethnicity, ownership relations and conflicts, and questions the universality of the rights over property as lightly comprehended beforehand. It shows that property (houses and land) as a symbolic, identifying and existence capital, in practice full of politically proclaimed politics and war conflicts, often shows different manifestations and interpretations related to the questions of ownership over pro-

perty. Those aren't legally regulated questions only, but also questions of mediation and sustaining the community, local affiliation, shared experience and conditional relationships of power in the locality. On account of those aspects, legitimacy, superiority and "right" to usurpation are mediated for "the other", while the questions as a whole represent an inexhaustible field of anthropologically directed research of ethnicity, property rights, identity and confrontation, which still lack in and for the area of ex-Yugoslavia. In that direction this study will be an inevitable point and a referent framework worth taking into consideration.

Tihana Rubić

**Katarina Ott (ur.)
KAKO DA JAVNE
FINANCIJE ZAISTA BUDU
JAVNE? SUDJELOVANJE
GRAĐANA U NADZORU
LOKALNIH PRORAČUNA
U HRVATSKOJ,
MAKEDONIJI I UKRAJINI**

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Fiskalna decentralizacija – ponajviše prenošenjem odluka o raspodjeli javnih sredstava – dopušta i omogućuje regionalnim i lokalnim vlastima određivanja vrste i obilježja javnih usluga koje najbolje odgovaraju lokalnim potrebama. Više istraživanja širom svijeta pokazalo je da je fiskalna decentralizacija prilično uspješna brana pro-

tiv korupcije i da potiče gospodarski rast, omogućuje veću pravednost i dostupnost u pružanju usluga te pozornije (štedljivije) trošenje javnih prihoda. Fiskalna bi decentralizacija trebala poticati veću aktivnost građana u političkom životu i njihovo veće sudjelovanje u političkom procesu, što bi povratno utjecalo na unapređene transparentnosti donošenja odluka i na poboljšanje odgovornosti državnih tijela i nositelja vlasti.

Koliko je to stvarno ostvareno u tri tranzicijske zemlje, izloženo je u nedavno objavljenoj publikaciji *Kako da javne financije zaista budu javne? Sudjelovanje građana u nadzoru lokalnih proračuna u Hrvatskoj, Makedoniji i Ukrajini* urednice Katarine Ott. Knjiga je sastavni dio Biblioteke Fiscus, a izdavač Institut za javne financije iz Zagreba. Ova je publikacija učinak mentorskoga rada urednice skupini polaznika programa *Nadzor lokalnih proračuna (Subnational Budget Watch)*, koji je u akademskoj godini 2004. – 2005. organizirao i financirao institut Otvoreno društvo – Inicijativa za reformu lokalne uprave i javnih usluga na Srednjoeuropskom sveučilištu u Budimpešti. Osim predgovora i uvodnoga poglavlja urednice Katarine Ott, u knjizi su tri priloga. Ivana Maletić piše o nadzoru lokalnih proračuna u Hrvatskoj. Židas Daskalovski na primjeru Štipa i Gostivara tumači sudjelovanje građana u nadzoru lokalnih proračuna u Makedoniji. Razmatrajući stanje u osnovnom obrazovanju, autor trećega priloga Sergii Slukhai izlaže stanje nadziranja proračuna i odgovornosti vlasti u Ukrajini.

Katarina Ott podsjeća kako su proračuni vrlo važni za građane, pa ih oni ne bi smjeli prepuštati isključivo nositeljima državne vlasti na raznim razinama i interesnim skupinama koje bi mogle stajati iza te vlasti. Porezni obveznici moraju imati mogućnost i želju za izjašnjavanjem i odlučivanjem na koji će se način raspoređivati javni prihodi. Autori istražuju sudjeluju li građani u proračunskom procesu, jesu li i koliko proračunski podaci dostupni, pouzdani i pravodobni te jesu li jasno