Post-War Governance and the Making of Supermodern Ruralities: some Social and Political Consequences

Name: Andrew Dawson

Affiliation: University of Melbourne

Contact details: School of Philosophy, Anthropology & Social Enquiry, University of Melbourne, Parkville 3010

Email: dawsona@unimelb.edu.au
Tel.: (03)83444201
Post-War Governance and the Making of Supermodern Ruralities: some Social and Political Consequences

Abstract
Domicide and the contradiction between the means of achieving peace and facilitating the return of displaced persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina have, this paper argues, produced a form of ‘supermodern’ rurality characterised by the proliferation of ‘non-places’. These are characterised by particular social conditions, including an intensity and multiplicity of human mobilities, social estrangement and suspension of mechanisms of communitarian surveillance. The paper explores some of the social and political outcomes of these conditions, namely the emergence of people smuggling, trafficking and prostitution as increasingly gainful pursuits, the emergence of new forms of inter-ethnic dependency, and the greater incorporation of Bosnian diasporic communities, particularly in Australia, into inter-ethnic conflict.
Post-War Governance and the Making of Supermodern Ruralities: some Social and Political Consequences

Introduction

Domicide and the contradiction between the means of achieving peace and facilitating the return of displaced persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina have, this paper argues, produced a form of ‘supermodern’ rurality characterised by the proliferation of ‘non-places’. These are characterised by particular social conditions, including an intensity and multiplicity of human mobilities, social estrangement and suspension of mechanisms of communitarian surveillance. The paper explores some of the social and political outcomes of these conditions, namely the emergence of people smuggling, trafficking and prostitution as increasingly gainful pursuits, the emergence of new forms of inter-ethnic dependency, and the greater incorporation of Bosnian diasporic communities, particularly in Australia, into inter-ethnic conflict.

Dayton and the making of non-places

It is now more than twelve years since the DPA (Dayton Peace Agreement) ended the war of Yugoslav succession in BiH (Bosnia and Herzegovina). However, DPA’s legacy has been contradictory (Dahlman and O Tuathail, 2005). On one hand, it sought to bring lasting peace, and did so by recognising the division of the country into ethnonationalist homelands. The country is now divided by the IEBL (Inter-Entity Boundary Line) between the now Serbian dominated RS (Republika Srpska) and the Bosniac dominated, though more ethnically mixed, BF (Bosnian
Federation). Contrastively, DPA also sought to reverse ethnic cleansing, through guaranteeing the right to return for displaced persons.

The war displaced more than 2.2 million people (Phuong, 2000: 165), roughly half the pre-war population. Initially, approximately one half of these were either ‘internally displaced’ within BiH itself or moved to other former-Yugoslav republics. Approximately one half were granted either permanent or temporary asylum mostly in European countries. Subsequently, many of the latter were pressured to move on, either through repatriation to BiH, where most such people now remain internally displaced, or through resettlement in a ‘third country’ such as the United States, Canada and Australia. The return of all these groups was to be facilitated by reconstruction of the economy and the system of governance destroyed both by war and post-socialist transition, and by the injection of huge amounts of foreign aid. Centrally however, property restitution was at the heart of the returns process. DPA established the right to the restoration of property ownership. Moreover, reconstruction of the housing stock, 60 percent of which had been severely damaged or destroyed during the war (UNHCR, 1997), represents the largest single category of international expenditure in BiH.

The contradiction of DPA, between its means for achieving peace and the reversal of ethnic cleansing, is most keenly felt in eastern Bosnia, which borders Serbia and its strategic ally Montenegro, and, in particular in the Tuzla-Zvornik area. Prior to war the Tuzla-Zvornik area was, like most of eastern Bosnia, a patchwork of
ethnically mixed and, more commonly, Bosniac (Muslim) and Serbian dominated villages. This reflects the rural practice of endogamy. Following war and the area’s own division by the IEBL, three distinctive types of village formation have emerged. Some have retained their original mono-ethnic character. The mono-ethnic character of others has been reversed through ethnic cleansing and resettlement of displaced co-ethnics from elsewhere. Finally, many villages have taken on characteristics of what Auge describes as ‘non-place’ (1995).

To explain, property reclamation rates in eastern Bosnia have been impressive (Dahlman and O Tuathail, 2005: 450). This has especially been the case in the Tuzla-Zvornik area which, as evidenced by initiatives such as “1998 – the Year of Return”, became the most important focus of the international community’s effort to reverse ethnic cleansing through ‘minority return’ – the return of displaced persons to areas in which they now form part of an ethnic minority. Willingness to reclaim property reflects a blend of factors including local traditions of property ownership (Colic-Peisker, 2002: 9), concerns for morality and justice (Steffanson, 2006) and exploitation of the huge reconstruction investment. However, in most cases this has not translated into ‘sustainable return’ – reclamation followed by permanent residency. Return has been stymied by economic conditions, conditions that are particularly severe in minority return areas. The economy remains in crisis, and BiH’s inordinately ‘volatile’ structures of governance (Black, 2002, 180) are ill-equipped to resolve it. Additionally, of course, the DPA legacy of ensuring peace through the consolidation of ethnonationalist homelands stymies return, as hostility
towards minority returnees by local people is also institutionally embedded by local nationalist politicians who, in a process of carrying out ‘ethnic cleansing by other means’ (Dawson and Roberts, 2006), seek to maintain their power bases and ideological missions. Finally, subjected not only to ethnic cleansing, eastern Bosnia, and particularly the RS, also faced hitherto unprecedented levels of ‘domicide’ (Porteous and Smith, 2001), where destruction of the built and natural landscape was so severe as to render it meaningless to former residents.

However, through reconstruction what has eventuated is a plethora of ‘new villages’ that in most respects echo, albeit with less human traffic, the supermarkets and airports that, according to Auge are the quintessence of late-modern or, as he terms it, ‘supermodern’ existence (1995). Newly implanted ‘historic’ local cultural references compete alongside a bewildering array, or in Auge’s terms, an ‘excess’ (1995: 14) of flags and symbols of international aid donors and, in Bosniac villages, the monolithic alien religious architectures of Middle Eastern states. Erstwhile unique and intimate villages have been replaced by a gleaming white uniformity in which the villages’ few residents live alienated relationships mostly with comparative strangers or estranged neighbours. Most importantly, they are characterised by a deteritorialization of the relationship between place and culture and identity. Resembling the airport lounge, they are, to quote Clifford (1992), more akin to ‘sites of travelling’ than ‘sites of dwelling’, as most residents wait in limbo either for death or the potentiality of further displacement. And, most importantly, the emerging material and social form of village life is largely extra-
locally defined, initially by international aid agencies and increasingly by its now
displaced former residents.

Again, to explain, the reclamation without sustainable return that is commonplace
in these villages produces a range of peculiar forms of residence. A few, largely
everly returnees, live in them permanently. A few resettled Bosniacs in BF villages
and Serbs in RS villages live there in abandoned properties. Due to precarious
conditions of tenure wrought by DPA’s policy of property restitution by which the
houses they occupy could at any time be reclaimed, they wait anxiously for their
own possible removal. Thus, they invest negligibly in infrastructure and other
aspects of village life. A considerable number of resettled Bosniacs in BF villages
and Serbs in RS villages live there in sub-let properties formerly reclaimed by
displaced Serbs and Bosniacs respectively. This group are constantly reminded of
their residential insecurity, for the so called ‘returnees’ from whom they lease are a
particularly large group, and they develop various forms of engagement with the
villages. Some merely sleep there, conducting most other aspects of their lives, such
as work and the education of children, across the IEBL amongst other co-ethnics.
Some engage in forms of astronaut migration, with family living elsewhere, usually
in Bosnia or other parts of former Yugoslavia, and with one or two members of the
household returning to the village to make use of land for livelihood. This can entail
an arrangement in which Bosniacs and Serbs, temporarily cohabit, even frequently
with people who they know to have been or suspect of being complicit in the ethnic
cleansing of their own families. And finally, many so-called ‘returned’ villagers
live more or less permanently elsewhere, in other parts of Bosnia, other parts of former Yugoslavia, Western Europe and ‘third’ countries, visiting only sporadically.

The consequences of non-place

Thus far, I have described how domicile and the contradictions of DPA, BiH’s post-war settlement, have rendered many villages as non-places. In the second half of the paper I point to some of the emerging consequences of this condition. I consider briefly the emergence of (a) people trafficking, smuggling and prostitution and (b) the emergence of new forms of inter-ethnic dependency. However, particular attention is given to the issue of (c) the incorporation of diaspora in the transformation of village life. This is explored in relation to Australia’s former-Yugoslav communities.

(a) People trafficking, smuggling and prostitution

At one level, village life is characterised increasingly by an intensity and multiplicity of human mobility in which its illegal forms, are easily submerged. Likewise, village life is also characterised by a profound estrangement in social relations such that the normal mechanisms of communitarian surveillance are suspended. Trades in people smuggling, trafficking and prostitution burgeoned post-war because of the demand for paid sex wrought by the presence of a huge international intergovernmental and military sector (Human Rights Watch: 2002). Subsequently, following the development of effective state strategies of
surveillance (Human Rights Watch: 2002, 11), these were removed from their erstwhile urban contexts to rural villages, which have seen a growth of a ‘cottage industry’ in people smuggling, trafficking and prostitution (Dawson, forthcoming). The intensity and multiplicity of human mobility and the estrangement in social relations are central to its continued possibility, rendering ineffective attempts by the state to incorporate ordinary people into processes of detection (Dawson, forthcoming).

(b) *New forms of inter-ethnic dependency*

At another level, the practice of reclamation without return that produces various forms of monetary and non-monetary sub-letting arrangements produces new forms of inter-ethnic dependency. Some of these, such as the free exchange of residency for food between rural and urban residing ethnic ‘others’ respectively might be described as integrative. Other practices are not. For example, the extraction of rent, often bears the hallmarks of violent forms of peasant brokerage (such as Mafia), more typical of other parts of southeastern Europe (see, for example, Blok, 1974). Techniques used for extracting rent are varied, including violence and the incorporation of renters within criminal ventures, such as people smuggling, trafficking and prostitution (see Dawson, forthcoming). However, principally, they rely on the ever present potential for eviction. Importantly, property reclamation is disproportionately more commonplace amongst Muslims. This is, by and large, an outcome of the greater willingness, in contrast to their Serbian counterparts, of Bosniac political authorities to participate in the reclamation process. This, in itself,
is a demographic inevitability. Constituting the largest single ethnic group, it makes sense for Bosniacs to extend their demographic geographical-reach and, thereby, their sphere of political influence. Contrastingly, constituting a minority group, it makes sense for Serbs to concentrate their own demographic geographical-reach, and, thereby, their own sphere of influence. Thus, the overwhelming scenario is of rural-based displaced Serbs renting from urban-based displaced Bosniacs, and a situation of Serb dependency on and, often control by Bosniacs. Interestingly, this bears striking resemblances to Ottoman Bosnia, where Islamization was encouraged through the granting of privileges, including rights to urban residency, to engage in elite trades and land ownership (Glenny: 1999, 19). Under such conditions similar forms of inter-ethnic brokerage and dependency emerged that became the basis of ethno-class based conflicts (Donia and Fine: 1994).

(c) Incorporation of diaspora in the transformation of village life – the case of Australia

The situation of reclamation without return is often depicted cynically by members of the international community as involving “second homeowners, who have had their vacation properties repaired at international expense” (cited in Black, 2002: 194-95). Such cynicism reflects what Eastmond argues is a tendency within post-war reconstruction policy and literature to mis-conceptualize return as a definitive move to place of origin. Rather, in the transnational space occupied by displaced persons return is a dynamic and open-ended process that may extend over long periods of time and may involve mobility between places (2006). Importantly, the
engagements with village life that form part of this process can be significantly transformative. Economically, for example, Prism Research demonstrate that migrant remittances constitute 23% of household income in BiH. Politically, for example, voter registration amongst diasporas is high. Finally, the range of ‘cultural’ interventions is many and varied. It represents, by and large, a reversing of domicile. For example, members of diasporic communities have been active in the rebuilding of mosques and churches, the erecting of plaques that name the dead and displaced and other acts that symbolically repopulate and articulate continuity. And such actions form part of a longer tradition. As we have argued elsewhere, amongst many peoples of the European periphery the experience of mobility is often centrally constitutive of the places that people call home (Dawson and Johnson 2004). Indeed, in the case of Bosnians, most of whose memories incorporate episodic conflict-induced, colonial-induced, development-induced and labour migrations, the normalcy of mobility is such that it is cosmologically inscribed (see, for example, Sudetic, 1998, 340).

Historically, Australia has been a key nodal point in Bosnian and former-Yugoslav itineraries of mobility. Displaced persons from BiH, most of whom obtained permanent visas, constituted the largest part of the Australian humanitarian immigration program in the 1990s. Census 2001 states that there are 23,910 people born in Bosnia-Herzegovina in Australia. This is, however, almost certainly a gross under-representation, and Bosniac community organizations argue that the real figure is closer to 60,000 (Victorian Office of Multicultural Affair: 2001, 6).
Policy rhetoric in Australia on immigration transformed through the twentieth century from an emphasis on assimilation to integration and, latterly, multiculturalism. This brought an embracing of the notion of ‘ethnic self-help’ and ethnic clustering, the foundations of which were in place for many newly arrived Bosnians. Significant ethnic Macedonian, Croatian and Serbian communities were established through post-WWII political immigration and 1960s economic immigration. This explains a great part of the statistical disparity. Through a combination of the benefits offered and pressures exerted by Australia’s highly organised Croatian and Serbian diasporic communities, many newly arrived Bosnians, often regardless of their ethnicity, eschew the identification of BiH as their place of birth.

Having said this, in contrast to previous Yugoslav migrations, most of the newly arrived Bosnians were Muslims. Often regarded as the most committed pan-Yugoslavists, many such people are, nonetheless, establishing a distinctively Bosniac national community and identity in Australia (Colic-Peisker: 2002, 3). Manifestations of this range from establishment of Bosniac welfare centres, to adoption of cultural markers such as use of Turkish and Arabic words, to adoption of ethno-nationalist political dispositions such as the stereotypification of Serbs as enemies, and to Islam assuming a greater role in everyday life.
The history of Australia’s Croatian and Serbian diasporas’ homeland engagements is, by and large, a radically ethno-nationalist one. For example, the communities have provided ultra-nationalist political leaders and paramilitaries (see West: 1994, 300-2). Likewise, it is clear that Australian-based Bosniac ethnic and religious nationalism is increasingly being harnessed to transform BiH itself. For example, the high levels of voter registration are an outcome of efforts by homeland political parties within Australia. Like important religious figures such as the leader of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Grand Mufti of BiH, who has been criticized in Bosnian media for devoting too much time to ministering abroad, such organizations seem to regard diaspora as a cradle of ethnic and religious nationalist renewal.

Conclusions:

In this paper I have argued that domicide and the contradictions of DPA have created non-places in rural Bosnia. I have also considered some of the consequences of this, namely, the emergence of people trafficking, smuggling and prostitution, new forms of inter-ethnic dependency and the increased incorporation of diaspora in the transformation of Bosnian village life. By way of predictive conclusion, I point to a possible outcome of DPA’s production of rural non-places for diaspora, and for Australian-based Bosnians in particular. The history of Australia and the former-Yugoslavia’s entanglements, wrought by migration and the maintenance of transnational connections, is of a long duration. Now, more than in most periods, it will have important consequences for both contexts. It is
commonly agreed that following the recent independence of Kosova Serbian nationalist politicians may call for RS to follow the example it set by declaring independence, with a view to becoming part of a Greater Serbia. And this may be precipitated by a state engineered ‘humanitarian’ resettlement of displaced Serbians into the reclaimed, but not resettled properties of RS’s former Bosniac population. Importantly, it should be clear, many such properties are owned by Bosnian Australian residents. This will bring exiled Bosniacs and Serbians, collectivities that in Australia are reproduced by multiculturalist policies of immigrant management, into a transnational struggle. The violent effects of this may be felt in Australia itself.

References


Dawson, A. (forthcoming), ‘Post-war reconstruction policy and the conditions of possibility for people smuggling, trafficking and prostitution in Bosnia and Herzegovina’, *Anthropology in Action*.


**Word count:** 3,115