

## RESEARCH ARTICLES

### **Cultural Identity as a Specific Dimension of the Socio-Cultural Dynamics: Refugees in Temerin**

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**Abstract.** The paper is based upon research that consisted of a series of interviews conducted with refugees in the municipality of Temerin in Serbia, during the fall of 2011. The objective of this research was to analyze the identity of refugees and the degree of their social integration. The assumption was that dimensions of their identity may show and point to the problems and difficulties of their social integration. The identity of the refugees is analyzed within the socio-cultural context, because migration always occurs in a specific spatial and socio-cultural configuration. Refugees as migrants are exposed to the influences of economic, political and cultural structures of the society. The data shows that the circumstances of war and exile contributed significantly to strengthening the ethnic identity of refugees and that it is still a very important dimension of their cultural identity. Refugees have, in most cases, a positive experience and feelings of acceptance by their neighbors, friends and other inhabitants of Temerin, which indicates a high degree of their social integration.

**Keywords:** *socio-cultural dynamics, cultural identity, ethnic identity, refugees, Temerin, Serbia*

#### **Introduction – general data and the methodological framework of the research**

Temerin is a town and a municipality center in the south Bačka region of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. In the east Temerin borders with the municipality of Žabalj, in the north with the municipality of Srbobran, in the west with the municipality of Vrbas, and in the south with the municipality and town of Novi Sad. According to the census of 2002, the Temerin municipality had the population of 28,275 (together with the villages of Bački Jarak and Sirig) and the

town of Temerin itself had the population of 19,216.<sup>1</sup> The majority population in the ethnic sense are Serbs (9660) and Hungarians (8187). The data from the census of the population in Serbia held in 2002 indicated significant changes in the ethnic structure of Vojvodina, which is also reflected in Temerin, where Serbs became the majority population for the first time. The ratio of Serbian and Hungarian population in Temerin was changed because of massive migrations, i.e. the arrival of refugees (primarily of Serbian ethnicity) after the wars in the 1990's in the areas of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main goal of the research conducted in Temerin was to investigate the identity of refugees and the degree of their integration into the community.

The research was conducted in 2011 in a series of interviews with Serbian refugees who migrated to Temerin in the 1990's. The sample was random and all the interviewees agreed to be interviewed if they remained anonymous. The interviews were done with the interviewees who live in the part of Temerin primarily inhabited by refugees (the part of the settlement where the largest number of houses were built because of the help of the municipality). The interviewees were asked questions concerning their identity (ethnicity) and problems and difficulties they encountered during the period of adaptation. The total number of interviews is twenty (the equal number of male and female interviewees), of which seventeen were conducted with refugees and three with local inhabitants from Temerin. The interviews were structured, with a few basic questions posed to all interviewees. The questions were related to the place of origin, ethnic identity, reasons for coming to Temerin, way of life (job, financial situation, etc.) that they had led prior to the arrival to Temerin, their relationships with neighbors and other inhabitants of Temerin.

The first part of the paper presents the theoretical framework of the research which discusses the issue of identity formation and social-cultural dynamics, as well as the meaning of the subjective and objective dimensions in the construction of identity, so that the later interpretation of empirical data could be put in a wider theoretical context.

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<sup>1</sup> Data given after: *Stanovništvo – nacionalna ili etnička pripadnost*, vol. 1. Republika Srbija, Republički zavod za statistiku, Beograd, 2003, p. 42. The last census was done during 2011 and preliminary results show that there are 28,308 inhabitants in the Temerin municipality. For more details see: <http://webrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/Public/PageView.aspx?pKey=82> (Statistics Yearbook of Republic Serbia 2011).

## Identity and the socio-cultural dynamics

The concept of identity, whether individual or collective, usually means different things. Cultural identity as a form of social identity, i.e. collective identity, is often deduced to ethnic identity. In other words, it is often explained from the perspective of other social phenomena which are less characteristic of culture and more characteristic of certain interests imposed upon culture (Koković, 2005. 289). In the widest sense, cultural identity represents (reflects) a special dimension of the socio-cultural dynamics of a society. The processes that produce, reproduce and organize the borders of identification and differentiation among social groups and collectivity can be observed in the light of different “ideologies of identification” (Dženkins, 2001). In that sense, one can speak about at least two parallel processes of the socio-cultural dynamics, i.e. two kinds of “attribution”: one is the process of *group identification* and the other is the process of *social categorization*. In the first case identification occurs “from the inside” (in relation to borders or boundaries of a group), whereas categorization comes “from the outside” (i.e. it is directed from the society towards a group). These two processes represent the bases of both collective and individual identity and represent the essential dimensions in the processes of subjectivization and objectivization, i.e. subjective and objective (social) dimensions in the formation of individual and group identities.

Ideas or concepts about the consistency of identity rely on the claims that identity is essentially finite, or that this is the identity in itself (Castells, 2002). Yet, it seems that changeable boundaries saturate the discourse of constructions which we believe answer the questions about *who we are*, the question of our identities. The probability of a successful construction of a political community should be greater if the identity is wider, because it decreases the diversity and increases the capacity of our action, says Paić (1999). In this kind of a “game” identity cannot be considered a stable thing. A tendency is noticeable in research not to observe identity as an essential, unchangeable attribute of an individual or group (Ruano-Borbalan, 2009: 6).

In order to analyze the concept of cultural identity, it is important to make a distinction between the so-called “strong” and “weak” concepts of identity that include many different questions: identity as the basis of self (psychological and socio-psychological dimension of identity), hybridity of

identity, continuity, changes and fluidity of identity, structural determinism and action (experience) as the basis for the construction of identity, etc. (Grad, Rojo, 2008: 4). Many different dimensions of identity are studied in a particular way in discourse analysis. Social-constructionist positions accentuate the active process of production and transformation of social realities in discourse. The diversity of identities is still limited whereas the processes such as formation, context and resistance are included in their analysis. Critical perspectives in the discourse analysis of identity pay special attention to the relations of discourse, power and knowledge (Grad, Rojo, 2008: 5). The next part of the article will present some important theoretical aspects of cultural identity that will be operationalized later in the paper through the interpretation of research data.

In order to define more precisely the meaning of the term 'cultural identity', one must take into consideration various elements that are its components, such as: the simultaneous attachment of identity to an individual and to a group, understanding identity as a relationship with the other and other people, its historical nature and changeability, as well as the relativity of identity in relation to the social context and other identities. Cultural identity, therefore, is "self-awareness of members of a group which is historically created and develops depending on the criteria that group establishes in the relations with other social groups" (Stojković, 2008: 26).

Despite the fact that culture, i.e. cultural identity, represents a kind of differentiation among individuals and collectivities, it should be stressed that social processes are the ones that produce and reproduce, i.e. arrange and organize the borderlines of identification and differentiation among various collectivities. Cultural identity is always manifest in social interaction and it should be understood as a *relational concept*, or a form of practice that develops through social action. Besides that, cultural identity can be interpreted as a variable of political behavior. Anthropologist Frederik Barth contributed greatly to theories on ethnicity claiming that culture and cultural differences should not be treated as important in their own right, i.e. beyond the field of social relationships in which they are organized. When writing on boundaries and ethnic groups, i.e. when developing his own theory of ethnicity, he claims that a specific *cultural content* is not a decisive factor, but the *process of codification* of cultural differences which leads to the treatment of ethnical identities or ethnical categories as socially relevant (Bart, 1997).

The features that are the foundation of identity can be socio-cultural as well as territorial (spatial) and can be mutually actuated or cancelled (Stojković, 2008: 25). Important processes that influence defining identity, i.e. processes that influence its creation and disappearance, are termed *deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization* of identity. They are particularly important in the context of analyzing cultural identity of migrants (refugees).

Migrations and, generally, all important demographic movements drastically change the social and cultural composition of population (societies) and thus force us to re-examine the meaning and value of cultural identity and cultural diversity (Robins, 2008: 358). It should be stressed that the analysis of the relations of (cultural) identity and space in social sciences is quite problematic but territory, as a defined geographic space, surely represents one of the “identifiers”, i.e. ways to operationalize cultural identity by translating it into empirically ascertainable facts. This refers to connecting a certain territory (as a carrier of meaning) with cultural identity. The said processes of *deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization* of identity are essentially contradictory processes. On the one hand, the meaning of territory is weakening and cultural identities are somewhat threatened. This is seen in the lack of awareness of belonging to a particular territorial identity due to the processes of globalization and fast development of information and communication systems. We, therefore, speak of transnational or deterritorialized identity as well as a general endangerment of identity which occurs not only at the level of individual places, regions, minorities, etc. but also in dominant (the most influential, the biggest) national states (Mlinar, 1990: 20).

The identities of migrants in that sense (as well as the identities of non-migrants) become more elastic and fluid because they are under the multiple influence of both the society to which they belong and the said global processes. As opposed to that trend, it can be said that migrations always occur in particular spatial/social configurations and that migrants (i.e. their identities) are influenced by economic, political and cultural structures of the given (new) spatial and social context. In that sense, territory (space) does not lose its importance. Hence, the reverse version of deterritorialization is reterritorialization, i.e. the new rooting of migrants in particular locations. These processes testify of the survival of the importance of territory and its influence on the formation of identities, especially cultural identity, through particular dynamics of physical (geographic) spatiality and socio-cultural dynamics of a specific society.

## Representations of (cultural) identity

The process of identity formation has its subjective (individual) and objective (social) dimension. Identity construction, as a representation of the self, is one of the crucial ways of practice and individual presentation (Ruano-Borbalan, 2009: 16). Determined by psychological means, individual identity is constructed on the basis of individual experiences. This implies that an individual is part of the institutions that channel his/her activities and offer a symbolic foundation of his identification and action. In that sense institutions channel the processes of acculturation, cultural identity construction in the new social setting and, in a certain way, represent resources and the setting which the individual must count on. Identity is based on the relationship with “other”.

Generally speaking, today considerations of individual identity are established on the study of the term “self” (image of self, representation of self, construction of self, control of self, etc.). “I”, according to L’Ecuyer, can be defined as a “set of characteristics (tastes, interests, qualities, flaws, etc.), personal traits (including bodily characteristics), roles and values, etc. that the person ascribes to him/herself, sometimes values them positively and recognizes them as part of him/herself, on the basis of an intimate experience that he/she exists and identifies him/herself despite changes” (Ruano-Borbalan, 2009: 7). In the 1970’s many studies were written that discuss the influence of social relationships on the mental life of an individual. Part of those studies that developed under the influence of Erving Goffman (especially those that deal with conversation analysis) starts with interpersonal communication in the explanation of identity construction. Representations of self, or self-image, can be positive or negative. The key concept is the “self representation”, i.e. a set of activities, behaviors or artifacts that an individual uses so others could evaluate him/her positively (ibid, 8). In that sense, individuals often distort their memories and adjust their opinions to the new circumstances and situations. The cognitive component of that process is constructed on the basis of memories, information and representations of self. “I” (self-image) is the inner, important side of individual identity which is constructed through the relationship with the environment and with others inside the groups we belong to. The concept of “subjectivity” is part of the process and a condition for the development of an individual. It implies the way in which we develop and become *subjects* (personalities, actors) in the social processes to which we are exposed. Research dealing with this problem offers explanations that, in the symbolic order which allows interpersonal communication and

interpersonal action among all subjects that *socialize under its power*, acts an internal shaping power of *identity and subjectivity* construction and the ways certain this are *represented...* (Paić, 1999: 126).

On the other hand, identities can be understood as discursive and performative in the sense that they are formed (construed) during discursive practice and exposition to different norms and conventions (Barker, Galasinski, 2001: 28), i.e. through adoption and entrenchment in certain cultural, religious, political and other practices that are imposed by social institutions.

For the purposes of our analysis we point out two dimensions of identity: on the one hand, it is the seemingly paradoxical relationship between personal and collective identity, and on the other, it is the fact that identities are, essentially, of sociogenic character. The paradox is seen in the fact that the self develops from the outside within, because it is constructed by the power of its share in interactional and communicational patterns of the group to which someone belongs; collective identity has advantage of personal identity of an individual. Yet, collective identity (“us-identity”) does not exist beyond individuals that constitute and bear the “us”, because it is the matter of individual knowledge and awareness (Assmann, 2008: 153). Since personal identity refers to social recognition, the aspects of “self-identity” (individual and personal) are sociogenic and culturally determined (ibid, 155).

In order to fully understand the concept of cultural identity and transfer it from the cultural-political level to a more exact level of analysis, it is important to establish *identifiers* and their function in identity construction. With the use of indicators, i.e. identifiers, cultural identity is operationalized and transferred to empirically ascertainable facts – carriers of meaning (Stojković, 2008: 26). Identifiers are, therefore, some sort of markings or resources which social groups use to construe their own identities or ascribe them to other social groups. By introducing the concepts of discourse analysis into the analysis, cultural identity identifiers could be understood through representations of certain discourses. Discourses produce reality and contain a dominant reality (or representation), as well as a set of alternative representations, which testifies of the politics of a given discourse (Nojman, 2009: 74). Representations in discourse are constitutive in the sense that they determine what is noticed and communicated but they do not necessarily contain everything that needs to be understood in order to fully grasp certain actions (or practices).

It is crucial, however, that we can treat the concept of cultural identity as part of social reality which can be represented and analyzed through certain indicators.

Participants “testify” of these indicators through the representation of self and the group (community) to which they belong.

### **Data interpretation**

The previous theoretical framework implies that the way people see themselves and their identity is to a great extent the product of the socio-cultural dynamics and one of its presuppositions. The analysis of interviewee responses is an attempt to present ways in which the refugees from Temerin see and describe their identity. In order to better understand the social context of their present life, a decade or more since their migration to the present place, it is important to bear in mind that the process (or continuity) of the formation of their cultural identity has had a significant cut. This surely refers to the violent change of their entire way of life. On the other hand, although the refugees of Serbian ethnicity came to a setting where the majority population is also of Serbian ethnicity, which can be interpreted to a certain extent as a facilitating factor when it comes to the process of acculturation, still they found a different social and cultural setting from the one which they came from.

We will present interviewee responses with respect to three aspects of their self-representation: the first concerns their own cultural identity and the interviewees’ need to declare or not declare their ethnicity; the second concerns the external (social) identifiers that the interviewees rely on in the construction of their ethnic identity (the question of the citizenship of Serbia); the third the problem of fitting into the wider social community, the way they see that they are accepted in the setting as “refugees” and the way they see their present place of living.

#### ***The problem of identity***

Although the interviewees declared themselves as Serbs when asked about their cultural and ethnic origin and identity, the analysis indicates that the war and exile contributed greatly to the strengthening of ethnic identity which had not been as prominent before. This can be seen in an answer of an interviewee (age 61), who is a refugee from Croatia and who arrived to Temerin in 1997: *“I had high respect for the state in which I lived, in my military card I was noted as Yugoslav.”* When asked if he felt Yugoslav today, he answered: *“No!*



*(energetically) I was betrayed by the YNA (Yugoslav National Army) and Yugoslavia... I am a Serb from Slavonia... Serb from Slavonia and I am not ashamed of it."*

Another interviewee, also a refugee from Croatia (aged 69), described the situation before the war in Croatia and said: *"My wife is Croatian in origin and we knew from the start that there would be problems, because I am a Serb. We led a normal life, it was a peaceful environment. But somehow, that nationalism was latent, it was all latent, do you understand? You could not exactly feel the tension but there were some stings. Even back in 1971 they made first attempts to show us, Serbs, who they were and they managed to cover it all up... It all initiated some things, do you understand? I cannot say there was no tension, but you could feel it in the air that it wasn't quite right."* When asked how he declared his ethnicity today, he answered: *"I am a Serb! (energetically) I am an ethnical Serb and I am married to a Croat... I am proud of that."*

Similar experiences were mentioned by another interviewee, a female refugee from Croatia, who came to Temerin in 1993: *"Until Tuđman was elected president we had a very nice life in Croatia... both economically and in the sense of human relationships. After that provocations started... They simply first started a psychological war through intimidation."* When asked *What are your memories of your life in Croatia*, she answers: *"Wonderful! It was really beautiful... for years we were building the family house... we made another room for our son. When the war came, we lost everything. Our house was burnt down in 1992."* When asked about her ethnicity, she answered: *"I am a Serb from Croatia, I was born there and I am not ashamed of it. I judge someone by their soul and their behavior, not by their ethnicity."*

Younger female interviewees gave somewhat different answers. Their memories of the pre-war period of their lives were mostly positive. One interviewee (aged 24), a refugee from Croatia who came to Temerin in 1995, said: *"My parents worked there, they earned a good living... I can say we lived a very good life. Everything was great."* When asked about the ethnicity of herself and her family, she responded: *"Both of them (parents) are of Serbian ethnicity. They had a traditional Serbian wedding and we were raised according to our customs... I am a Croatian Serb... more precisely, a Serb born in Croatia. I am proud of my origin... I am not ashamed of the fact that I am from Croatia... I would always like to go back to the place where I spent my early childhood."*

Another female interviewee (aged 23), also a refugee from Croatia who fled in 1991 and came to Temerin in 1996, said: *"I was only two at the time but on the basis of stories I later heard from my parents I can tell you what was going on..."* When asked if she had any relatives, friends or neighbors in Croatia with whom she or her family maintain contact, she responded: *"Yes, we do... My mum has a friend. Here's an example. Although the war broke out, she kept contact with her two cousins who are of Croatian ethnicity... they worked together... They are very good people, she even has one friend of Muslim ethnicity so I do not see any obstacles to continue those friendships in the future."* When asked about her ethnicity, she said: *"We are a Serbian family ethnically... What happened, happened, people are generally not to blame, but politicians who caused conflict among all three sides. Ordinary people suffered there. Of course, there are other opinions, for example, because of some things from the past I wouldn't like to have a Muslim or a Croat for a husband... that is a different matter, but for a friendship there are no problems."*

The answers above testify of the fact that the ethnic identity of the interviewees, despite significant variations in their answers (especially when it comes to the relationship with other nations and ethnic groups), is a very important factor in cultural identity. This is quite understandable in the context of war devastations, exile and tribulations. These experiences of endangerment have contributed to the maintenance and development of the national awareness and identity of refugees. On the other hand, the socio-cultural dynamics of the new, ethnically non-homogeneous setting, Temerin, also affects their feeling of ethnic belonging in a special way. This will be elaborated in the part of the paper that deals with the problem of social integration of refugees and their relationship with the inhabitants of Temerin.

### ***The problem of citizenship***

During the interviews the interviewees were asked a question about whether they managed to become Serbian citizens after the arrival to Serbia, and how. In our context this is seen as an identifier of cultural and national identity since the possession of citizenship, besides providing conditions for a better economic status (the issue of employment), symbolically signifies the belonging to the state and the national community. When it comes to refugees, it can have a special dimension of political and economic integration into the

society. The answers of the interviewees testify of the significance of Serbian citizenship for them.

One interviewee, a refugee from Bosnia and Herzegovina, answered the citizenship question: *"I have a dual citizenship, both the Bosnian and... we had to have it, we could not get this one. After that we got this one, we will keep that one for a while, I believe, and that will disappear..."* When asked if other members of his family have Serbian citizenship, he answered: *"Yes, my wife has a Croatian, Bosnian and this (Serbian) citizenship. She has this and that, but this one (Serbian) is a priority."*

A female interviewee, a refugee from Croatia (aged 39), when asked about citizenship, answered: *"... Of Croatian documents I had a birth certificate and a Croatian citizenship certificate that I needed to get the citizenship. I do not have a dual citizenship, just Serbian, I don't need anything that is theirs."* A similar answer was given by another interviewee, a refugee from Croatia (aged 69), who said: *"Now both my wife and I have Serbian citizenship..."*. When asked if he had a dual citizenship, he answered: *"No! (upset) I don't need anything that is theirs... I have seen how they handle things..."*

Besides the symbolic identification, i.e. the need to belong to a state and a community (reterritorialization of identity), we emphasized that getting a citizenship is a practical issue that affects the realization of certain rights (and obligations) on the territory of Serbia. The interviewees have also stressed that dimension in their answers.

Thus an interviewee, a refugee from Croatia who came to Temerin in 1995, said: *"We got it (the citizenship) because our older son wanted to go to the army, to do his service, and he got it before us... then the three of us got it, too..."* An interviewee, a refugee from Bosnia who came to Serbia in 1992, said: *"... and then the children got it (the citizenship), I still haven't... I need it for work, I was registered... now according to the new law we have to... I need it for work."*

The interviewees' answer indicate their needs to confirm their cultural (national) identity in a "formal" sense, by receiving the status of a citizen of Serbia. Yet, we cannot entirely rely on the claim that the issue of citizenship is the most important identifier of cultural identity, i.e. the indicator of the feeling of national belonging.

### ***The problem of identity and social integration***

The development and stability of cultural identity is to a great extent determined by the total social status of an individual. When refugees are concerned, the issue of social integration and incorporation into a new setting plays an important role in whether they feel accepted by the community to which they came. The degree of social integration significantly affects the stability of their identity and the feeling of belonging.

The issue of social integration can be observed through several dimensions. The first important fact is that most of the interviewees had fled to Temerin precisely because they had either friends or family living here. The second dimension of this issue concerns the acceptance of refugees by the wider social community (neighbors, acquaintances, work colleagues, etc.), whereas the third dimension refers to their subjective feeling whether they consider Temerin to be their home, i.e. if they feel like foreigners or “at home” in Temerin.

Most of the interviewees say they did not have any problems with integrating into the community in Temerin and that negative reactions of the local population were mainly occasional. These answers, which testify more of their subjective feelings and less of objective circumstances, are most likely motivated by the fact that, upon the arrival to Temerin, they had either relatives or friends here who took them in and helped them.

An interviewee, a refugee from Croatia, commented on this: *“A family relation influenced our move here”* and later continued: *“Temerin is our home now... I think we are well accepted, I know a lot of people, we have relatives here, we managed to get by and that works well.”*

An interviewee from Croatia, who fled to Temerin in 1992, said: *“... here in Temerin I had a relative and since she had a house in our old neighborhood, she asked us if she could help us somehow...”*

Another interviewee, a refugee from Bosnia who came to Temerin in 1995, when asked about the reason for moving to Temerin, answered: *“Well, yes, my family is in Srpska Crnja and his (husband’s) relatives are here and so we decided to move here because of the location and because of work... and we like it here...”* and she added: *“Yes, I feel at home here...”* The fact that a large number of refugees had some kinds of social ties and that was one of the main reasons for their move to Temerin was mentioned by one interviewee, a local inhabitant (aged 60): *“Many had relatives in Bosnia, Croatian and that first wave came in 1995. Here people*

*rushed to help, brought them water and food to collective housing... They really were helping them. My uncle, once removed, fled from Bosnia in 1995. We took him in here and gave him a roof over his head."*

An interviewee, a refugee from Croatia who came to Temerin in 2001, when asked for her reasons to move to Temerin, besides having relatives here, named reasons of economic nature: *"Cheaper real estate, close to Novi Sad, in future for my child's education, for work, and that's it. My dad's cousin is here in Temerin, so, simply, a feeling that I have someone here..."*.

An interviewee, a refugee from Bosnia who came to Temerin in 1991, said his reason for coming to Temerin was an acquaintance: *"I had a few acquaintances, not many important ones, but I simply came here by chance. I have more possibilities close to Novi Sad, more chances to find a job, it's all closer to a center..."* When asked if he had any bigger problems and any reactions by people from the surroundings, the same interviewee answered: *"Well, I did not have any greater problems, it was a bit awkward, you know, new faces and all that, but time goes by. You know, through work you get to know people, there weren't any problems."*

An interviewee, a refugee from Croatia who came to Temerin in 1994, said: *"We managed to find quite cheap real estate here in Temerin through some friends. Actually, my father's relatives from Novi Sad recommended Temerin."*

An interviewee, a refugee from Croatia who has lived in Temerin since 1995, said her reason to move here was a job: *"... I went to Sombor with a colleague and my husband and two children. And in Sombor neither my husband nor I could find a job. He found a job in Temerin and we came here."* When asked how they fit in Temerin, she responded: *"For me this setting is quite ok, quite good, wherever we lived, and we lived privately, we did not go to collective housing..."*

An interviewee, a refugee from Bosnia (aged 70) who came to Temerin in 2001 (previously he had lived in other places) said: *"The local population accepted me perfectly well. We live normally. I have a lot of acquaintances here, both Serbs and Hungarians, there are no problems. I feel at home here, we even received help from the Secretariat for Refugees, and to tell you the truth, any help means a lot... To tell you the truth, my home today is Temerin..."* The help provided for refugees was also mentioned by another interviewee, a local inhabitant of Temerin (aged 53): *"Since I used to work in the Secretariat of Defense, I was one of the first to become active in welcoming refugees and I was quite involved in the whole story."*

*Since 1991, when the first wave of refugees came from Croatia, we became very active to help these unfortunate people.” And he continued: “... The local community helped as much as they could... we did all we could.”*

Yet, some interviewees testified that they did not have only positive experiences of acceptance by the local population. One interviewee, a refugee from Croatia who came to Temerin in 2004 (until then she had lived in Surčin, since 1995), when asked how the local population accepted her, said: *“It depends. Many said ‘Here, another refugee came, another problem. It was hard for me to find a place to live, I was alone with two children.’”*

## **Conclusions**

One of the most important goals of the research presented in this paper was to use a thorough interview to investigate the identity of refugees in Temerin, as well as the degree of their integration in the new social setting. The paper started from the assumption that identity research through representation can detect problems and difficulties that refugees encounter during adaptation, i.e. acculturation and social integration. Identity is analyzed as a consequence and a presupposition of that dynamics. Important identity dimensions are its historical character, processability, changeability, as well as relativity. Yet, it still represents the awareness of a member of a group as well as the process of codification of cultural differences by the social community. We have thus emphasized the fact that migrations always happen in certain spatial/social configurations and that migrants (i.e. their identities) are influenced by economic, political and cultural structures of the given (new) spatial and social context. The interviewee responses in this research reflect to the greatest extent the subjective dimension of identity construction. Collective identity of a group (ethnic, i.e. national community) has advantage over personal identity so the focus of attention was put on that identity. Personal identity also refers to social recognition so in that sense it is sociogenic and culturally determined.

In order to transfer the concept of cultural identity from an abstract to a more concrete level of analysis, we established identity identifiers, i.e. indicators which the interviewees testify of by representing themselves and the group (national community) to which they belong. Three aspects stand out: the

first one relates to the need and the way in which the interviewees declare their ethnicity; the second aspect refers to one of the external (social) identifiers which the interviewees rely on when construction their ethnic identity (the issue of Serbian citizenship); the third one refers to their perception of how much they fit in the wider social community, the way they perceive their acceptance as “refugees” in Temerin and the way they perceive their present place of living.

The analysis of interviewee responses indicates that war circumstances and exile have to a great extent affected the strengthening of ethnic identity which had not been too prominent in a previous period of life. Interviewee responses have also indicated that, despite certain variations (especially in the relationship towards other nations and ethnic groups), ethnic identity represents a very important dimension of their cultural identity. War experience and exile have contributed to the development of national awareness and identity. The fact that (with more or less problems) they managed to become Serbian citizens contributed to that awareness and feeling of symbolic identification, belonging to a state and a nation, i.e. a kind of reterritorialization of their identity.

On the other hand, the socio-cultural dynamics of the new setting also affects the stability of identity and a sense of belonging in a special way. The relationships in the new social setting have been operationalized and represented through the interviewees’ answers to the questions concerning the reasons for coming to Temerin and how the local population accepted them. The answers indicate that these experiences are mainly positive. As refugees, their position was facilitated by the fact that many of them had relatives, friends or acquaintances here. Yet, there were also those who listed economic reasons, i.e. employment, as the main reason for coming to Temerin.

The results of the research presented in this paper represent to the greatest extent a subjective dimension of identity construction and a sense of belonging to the environment, which is a consequence of a personal experience. Overall, it can be concluded, based on the data, that there is a developed sense of social integration among the refugees in Temerin and that it is a reflection of the changes in the socio-political, economic and cultural life of Temerin.

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