

**RESISTING DIVISION ALONG ETHNIC LINES:
A CASE STUDY OF TWO COMMUNITIES WHO CHALLENGED
DISCOURSES OF WAR DURING THE YUGOSLAV CONFLICT 1991-1995**

Valentina OTMACIC

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**Department of Peace Studies
University of Bradford**

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ABSTRACT

Valentina Otmacic

Resisting division along ethnic lines: a case study of two communities who challenged discourses of war during the Yugoslav conflict 1991-1995

Keywords: 1. Conflict in the former Yugoslavia. 2. Croatia. 3. Bosnia and Herzegovina. 4. Group identity. 5. Dominant discourses of violence. 6. Counter-discourse. 7. Ethnic co-existence. 8. Gorski kotar; 9. Tuzla; 10. Non-violence

There is a generalized perception on the 1991-1995 war in the former Yugoslavia as an ethnic conflict caused by longstanding antagonisms among homogenous ethnic groups inhabiting its territory. In such a worldview, which became part of the dominant discourse, inter-ethnic violence in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina was inevitable and the division of the population along ethnic lines was needed to stop the violence.

In this thesis I problematize the dominant discourse on the ethnic nature and inevitability of violence, as well as on the ethnic fracturing as a solution, by exposing the experiences of two largest communities that remained ethnically mixed and preserved communal peace throughout wartime – the community of the region of Gorski kotar in Croatia and the community of the city of Tuzla in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

By documenting and analysing their discourses and practices, and by contrasting them with the dominant discourses of war in these two countries, I provide evidence that these two communities were *oases of peace* which developed a counter-discourse and resisted violence by preserving their multi-ethnic character, promoting multiple identities, cherishing inter-ethnic

cooperation and ensuring equality and good governance for all their citizens. Their narratives challenge the well-established «truths» about the war in the former Yugoslavia and add to the complexity of collective memories of its peoples.

«Today the highest level of courage consists in stating that you don't hate anyone and that you don't want to kill anyone»

(Srdjan Dvornik, peace activist from Croatia, in Modric, 1993)

This work is dedicated

to the citizens of Tuzla and Gorski kotar,
for having the courage not to hate,

and to my mother and my father,
my personal heroes.

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Seven years of research passed rapidly. During all this time I enjoyed selfless care and support of my mum, to whom this work is dedicated. It is because she believed in me that I made it – in this study, and in so many other aspects of my life. She has been waiting patiently for the moment of my doctoral graduation, and I can't wait to see her joy on that special day. Many other members of my family and friends around the world cheered me, took care of me, understood and believed in me throughout all these seven years. This work belong to them as much as it belongs to me. Special thanks go to Daphne Winland and Jose Angel Ruiz Jimenez, for their encouragement and support.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFCNLY	Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (<i>Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije</i>)
B-H	Bosnia-Herzegovina, or Bosnia and Herzegovina
CDC	Croatian Defence Council (<i>Hrvatsko vijeće obrane</i>)
CDU	Croatian Democratic Union (<i>Hrvatska demokratska zajednica</i>)
DoB	Dragon of Bosnia (<i>Zmaj od Bosne</i>)
FF	Front of Freedom (<i>Front Slobode</i>)
FTC	Forum of Tuzla Citizens (<i>Forum Gradjana Tuzle</i>)
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ISC	Independent State of Croatia (<i>Nezavisna Država Hrvatska</i>)
LCC-PDR	League of Communists of Croatia – Party of Democratic Reform (<i>Savez komunista Hrvatske – Stranka demokratske promjene</i>)
LCY	League of Communists of Yugoslavia (<i>Savez komunista Jugoslavije</i>)
LRF	League of Reformist Forces (<i>Savez reformskih snaga</i>)
NOP	National Liberation Movement (<i>Narodno-oslobodilački pokret</i>)
PDA	Party of Democratic Action (<i>Stranka demokratske akcije</i>)
SASA	Serbian Academy of Science and Arts (<i>Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti</i>)
SCC	Serb Civic Council (<i>Srpsko građansko vijeće</i>)
SDP	Serbian Democratic Party (<i>Srpska demokratska stranka</i>)
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (<i>Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija</i>)

SR	Srpska Republic (<i>Republika Srpska</i>)
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Forces
URF	Union of Reform Forces (<i>Savez Reformskih Snaga</i>)
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two
YNA	Yugoslav National Army (<i>Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija</i>)

PREFACE

The awakening of my interest, which gradually evolved into a passion for the areas of peace and human rights dates back to the time of violent dissolution of the country where I was born, the former Yugoslavia. The year 1991, the initial year of my university studies of Spanish and French languages and literature in Zagreb, was characterized by the beginning of war in Croatia, my home Yugoslav republic. My family and friends, my colleagues and teachers, all of us suddenly found ourselves caught in the whirlwind of an abrupt armed conflict. Dramatic events started succeeding each other at a vertiginous speed. It was difficult to understand what was happening, but it wasn't difficult to figure out what was the right thing to do in the given circumstances. I soon realized that my priorities needed a drastic change. Leaving my readings of Voltaire, Rousseau, Cervantes and other authors temporarily aside, in early 1993 I joined a Spanish NGO assisting refugees and displaced persons in Croatia. This was the beginning of a journey and a life-long vocation in which I would combine praxis and academic study in the areas of human rights and conflict transformation, a journey which would take me to four different continents in the coming twenty-five years.

Although this study is about the former Yugoslavia, the initial idea of this enquiry was born in – Lebanon. I had been living and working in Lebanon for several years, and returning regularly to this country which I consider my second home. During one of the endless conversations with my close friend Mona, in the living room of her apartment in Ein-el-Mreisse in central Beirut, I found out that in that same four-storey building there were tenants, and good acquaintances of Mona, of Shiite, Sunnite, Christian and Druze faith. Intrigued by such diversity, I asked Mona about the tenancy situation during the Lebanese war, a twenty-five years long violent conflict characterised by widespread inter-ethnic (there called sectarian) divisions and cruelties. I was surprised when Mona replied that the tenancy situation back then was – exactly the same. She further explained that in most of the Ein-el-Mreisse area of Beirut citizens did not divide along ethnic lines; moreover, they were

supporting and protecting each other against violence throughout that long and difficult period.

This sparked my curiosity and opened a new and exciting page in my life. While, like most other researches and practitioners, in the past I was focusing on the effects of war and violence and on the support to their victims, this insight – that there was an entire area in Beirut city that resisted divisions along sectarian lines despite widespread identity-based violence in the rest of the country – appeared as a discovery well worth exploring. Mona gladly organized informal conversations with the tenants of the apartments in that building and other inhabitants of Ein el Mreisse, which opened a whole new world to me – the extraordinary world of preserved humanity, civic courage, defiance to divisions, inter-sectarian support, alternatives to ethnic or sectarian group identity; a universe of narratives, experiences and learnings that could perhaps help nurture non-violent conflict transformation in so many other places in the world. The idea of this research was born.

I began to search for similar communities in my own country, Croatia, as well as in neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina. These two former Yugoslav republics, now independent states, were strongly affected by widespread violence during the break-down of Yugoslavia, which, just like the violence in Lebanon, was tagged as «ethnic» or «sectarian», meaning group identity-based. The quest led me to several larger or smaller communities which offered resistance to ethnic divisions during wartime. Unfortunately, most of them succumbed under the pressure of violence and dominant discourses promoting inter-ethnic fears and resentments. Nevertheless, despite all odds and against all currents, two communities of significant size challenged the discourses of war and succeeded in preserving inter-ethnic communal peace throughout and till the end of the wartime. This is their story.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The 1991-1995 violent conflict in the former Yugoslavia, which resulted in the dissolution of this country, is often characterized as an «ethnic conflict». There is a generalized perception that the territory of Yugoslavia was inhabited by rather homogeneous ethnic groups and that the war was caused by ancient interethnic antagonisms or even hatreds. In such a worldview, divisions along ethnic lines, entailing the voluntary or forceful grouping of the population according to people's ethnic identity, are widely seen as the only effective way to stop the bloodshed and solve the problem.

Looking at the cases of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as two of the former Yugoslav republics which were most affected by the 1991-1995 war, in this study I consider this generalized view on the inevitability of divisions along ethnic lines as only one of the possible narratives about group identification processes and inter-group relations in the former Yugoslavia. I also argue that this narrative became part of the dominant discourse which, as I try to demonstrate in the main body of the research, contributed to violence rather than to peace.

Yugoslav society was highly diverse, with numerous, evolving and often overlapping social identification processes and complex inter-group relationships which had episodes of conflict but also of cooperation. This study tries to make a modest contribution to the understanding of those complexities, by problematizing the discourse of ethnic conflict and by indicating that the attempts to create ethnically homogeneous states or territories despite heterogeneous social realities did not reduce violence, but actually instigated it.

Ethnic or national identity was only one of numerous group identities of the people in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was often made salient and abused for the political and economic interests of the elites. This assumption is supported by contrasting the experiences of two communities that remained ethnically mixed during the 1991-1995 war with the realities in the rest of

Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although ethnic fracturing took place in most of these two countries, the inter-ethnic coexistence and cooperation were preserved in some of their communities. Two of the largest among them, the community of Gorski kotar in Croatia and the community of Tuzla in Bosnia-Herzegovina, are explored in this study.

The study seeks to make a contribution to knowledge by addressing the question: in what ways did these two ethnically mixed communities in the former Yugoslavia present a challenge to dominant discourses of war during the 1991-1995 violent conflict? To answer this question, after reviewing the pertinent literature (Chapter 2) and describing the conceptual framework and the methodology of this research (Chapter 3), I first look back into the past experiences and narratives of the population which is in the focus of this study (Chapter 4), broadly grouping those narratives around three key themes which emerged from my analysis, namely: i) group identification processes; ii) inter-group relations and iii) governance. I then attempt to identify the dominant discourses that contributed to the preparation, eruption and mobilization for violence, including ethnic fracturing, in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Chapter 5). I look into some of the key counter-discourses to dominant discourses of war at a supra-local level (Chapter 6), to then immerse deeply into the local experiences of the communities of Gorski kotar and Tuzla (Chapters 7 and 8), answering the question how the resistance to ethnic divisions and violence evolved, prevailed and persisted during the entire war period in these two areas of ethnic coexistence, which I name *oases of peace*. Finally, I offer a comparative analysis of the two case studies and draw conclusions in Chapter 9.

The final goal of this study is to contribute to knowledge by identifying and examining the narratives of two communities whose experiences add to the complexity of understanding of wartime events and challenge some «generalized truths» about the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. By adding to the complexity of collective memories through bringing to light these very concrete experiences of inter-ethnic cooperation, I ultimately hope to

contribute to reducing the risk of future identity-based violence in this territory and elsewhere.

This introductory chapter sets the context for this study by introducing the former Yugoslavia before its breakdown, and then narrowing the focus to two of its republics – Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The notions of ethnic fracturing as a form of violence and ethnic co-existence as an element of resistance to violence are introduced to present the phenomenon under investigation: the experiences of two communities which resisted ethnic divisions throughout the 1991-1995 war.

1.1. *Yugoslavia and its discourses: understanding the context*

Administrative map of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (ICTY, 2017)



1.1.1. Yugoslavia 1929-1991: integration and disintegration of the state of the South Slavs

The beginning of Yugoslavia - literally meaning the land of the South Slavs – dates back to 1929, when the former Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes established in 1918 was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. That Yugoslav Monarchy collapsed under the assault of Nazi Germany and its allies in 1941. However, during World War Two (WWII) the (re)making of Yugoslavia, first named the People's Federal Republic and later on renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), took place under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito and his Communist Party.

The SFRY was composed of six Socialist Republics, namely Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia (including the autonomous regions of Vojvodina and Kosovo), Montenegro and Macedonia. In the year before its breakdown, the country had approximately 23.5 million inhabitants. The country's population has always been characterized by high diversity and heterogeneity, in terms of national or ethnic belonging and religious affiliations, but also economic and social characteristics. In this study I argue that dominant discourses which were imposing homogeneous political spaces over heterogeneous social spaces contributed to violence and war.

According to its 1974 Constitution, Yugoslavia was the union of equal nations and nationalities. In addition to six identity-based groups recognized as nations (Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Muslims, the last group being recognized as a nation only in 1974), it had a number of *narodnosti* (nationalities, minorities or ethnic groups), the biggest one being Albanians, Hungarians and Italians. With regard to religious affiliation, most of the population was at least formally or also substantially affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church or Islam.

The new Yugoslavia was (re)born during WWII under the leadership of Tito and with support of a broad grassroots movement. The slogan inviting all citizens of Yugoslavia to celebrate «brotherhood and unity» of its constitutive nations and ethnic groups soon turned into key Yugoslav official discourse.

There was hope that past inter-group challenges would be overcome by a positive joint future celebrating diversity. In the international arena, Yugoslavia stood at the very front of the Movement of Non-aligned Countries, promoting the idea of non-alignment as «broad neutrality between the capitalist and Soviet powers» (Tepavac, 2000, p. 70). Internally, the economic system of socialist self-management was introduced, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) assumed political and social leadership and Tito was declared president-for-life of both the state and the LCY. Despite several internal tumults, until 1980 the country enjoyed a certain level of stability, including relatively high levels of economic and social wellbeing of its population.

However, although another one of the popular slogans was claiming «Even after Tito – Tito», soon after the death of the country's leader in 1980 the state started collapsing. As argued by Ramet (1999), the collective leadership which was to guide the country after Tito's death proved unable to reach a consensus on fundamental economic and political issues and incapable of enforcing its decisions. The malfunctioning of the institutions was coupled with the polarization and rise of nationalist voices.

When, on January 22, 1990, the Slovene and Croatian delegations abandoned the Fourteenth Extraordinary Congress of the LCY, the chairman of that Congress, Momir Bulatovic, had no choice but to call for a fifteen-minute break which, as he later stated, «lasted throughout history» (Silber and Little, 1995, p. 86). As a culmination of several years of mounting tensions in Yugoslavia, this was certainly one of the crucial moments in the dismantling of Yugoslavia and the prelude to violent conflict that would ravage its republics, causing the death of thousands of people, massive displacements of population and many other calamities, which will be outlined in the following section.

1. 1. 2. Break-up of Yugoslavia: the violence

The declaration of independence of Slovenia and Croatia in 1991 was soon followed by the military attacks of the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA) on those

two states-to-be. The conflict spread to Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992, very soon after this republic declared its own independence. Macedonia and Montenegro knew a relatively peaceful transition to independent states. The last episode of the fracturing of the former Yugoslav territory was related to the independence of Kosovo. As an autonomous province of Serbia, Kosovo experienced serious escalations of violence since the 1980s, followed by an armed conflict in 1998-1999 and finally the declaration of its independence in 2006.

There is still a number of on-going debates and controversies about the causes and dynamics of the conflicts that affected several of the former Yugoslav republics during the 1990s. The role of ethnic identity, unresolved inter-ethnic disputes or «ancient ethnic hatreds» (Ramet, 1999, Babic, 2004, Gagnon, 2004, Sekulic et al., 2006), the nature and effectiveness of action and inaction of the international community during the war (Campbell, 1998, Woodward, 2000) and the role of the media (Balas, 2000, Wilmer, 2002, Kurspahic, 2003) are among some of the contested issues related to this topic.

This study will build on those debates and attempt to contribute to knowledge related to the pre-war and war time realities in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, adopting the social constructionist approach to reality and knowledge, it will not attempt to uncover the «true» or «real» causes of the violent conflicts in question, but will rather examine the interplay between discourses and violence or non-violence in those conflicts. The term discourse will be used in its broader meaning of «form of social practice» (Fairclough, 1989).

Several authors (Silber and Little, 1995, Campbell, 1998, Gagnon, 2004) point at the links existing between the processes of preparation, eruption, spreading and exacerbating of the violence in the former Yugoslavia and the dominant discourses which were at the time emanating from those who had the narrative authority (Campbell, 1993) or the power to control the public discourse and the public mind (Dijk, 2008) in the country and in the international community.

Such links between discourses and violence are possible because, as argued by Foucault, there is an intimate relationship between knowledge, discourse and power, and «each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes be as true» (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). What we usually call knowledge simply refers to the discourse which has received a «stamp of truth in our society» (Burr, 2003, p. 68), while there are «other alternative versions of the same event representing it in a different way to the world» (Burr, 2003, p. 48), which tend to be marginalized.

Building on those conceptual frameworks, my study examines the dominant discourses in pre-war and war settings in the former Yugoslavia, focusing on the functions of those discourses in stimulating violence. Discourses of political leaders and the media, as the ones with the highest influence on the conduct of the masses, will be at the centre of my research, combined with institutional texts and history textbooks. In addition, my study will look into several of the alternative discourses and enquire about their role in challenging the discourses of violence. The identified alternative discourses or counter-discourses vary from critical media texts and public appeals to the persistence of ethnic coexistence as a counter-discourse to the violence of ethnic divisions. Geographically, the study will be limited to two of the former Yugoslav republics, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. This selection is based on two reasons: firstly, these are the two former Yugoslav republics which were the most heavily affected by violence, and secondly, I have direct experience of living and working in both of them. This is why I have personally witnessed the highly problematic ethnicization of their political and social realities outlined in the subsequent section.

1.1.3. Violent conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991-1995: problematizing the dominant discourses of ethnic conflict

As pointed out by social psychology and several other disciplines, perceptions play a key role in our ways of dealing with conflict and violence.

The conflict itself can be defined as a phenomenon in which one person or a group *perceives* the other person or a group as a threat, regardless of how objective or «real» that threat is.

In his «problematization of the ethnicization of the political field in Bosnia», Campbell (1998, p. xi) warns that the perception of the nature of the problem of Bosnia, or the way the problem was posed, determined the solutions that were proposed for it. A similar conclusion can be applied to Croatia. Bar-Tal (2011) further develops on the importance of perceptions in conflict situations by claiming that in many cases the use of violence is perceived as necessary, almost inevitable, by the groups in conflict. He points at the role of the societal-political systems in providing rationales and justification for the violence, and more particularly at what he names a socio-psychological infrastructure, defined as «the configuration of shared central societal beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society at present and for the future» (Bar-Tal, 2011, p. 11).

Prior to and during most armed conflict situations, the political leadership and other entrepreneurs of violence strongly influenced societal beliefs and attempted to turn them into ideological and violence-supporting beliefs. By handling the information in a selective, biasing and distorting way, they promoted a so called tunnel vision of reality, with a tendency to «close minds and stimulate tunnel vision which excludes incongruent information and alternative approaches to conflict» (Bar-Tal, 2011, p. 13).

The primary assumption of my study is that the discourses of several key actors in the societal-political systems in the former Yugoslavia, including Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, provided a «rationale» for the outbreak and the intensification of the violence that ravaged those two countries during the 1991-1995 conflict. As will be shown in the study, the ways in which different power holders were defining the problem, as well as the ways in which they were dealing with it, actively promoted violence. Among other consequences, dominant discourses from nationalist political and other elites triggered and supported polarization and inter-ethnic diffidence and hostility between citizens of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina of different ethnic origins, manipulating

with fear, spreading the belief that the members of the opposite groups were «the enemies» and that violence was the only option for survival of one's own ethnic group or nation.

Those who were in a position to influence the information provided and the worldviews developed by different groups of people prior to and during the conflict, and consequently stimulate their attitudes and behaviours, were mainly the persons from the elites and the mass media. Therefore, it was important to critically review their discourses influencing the behaviours of the populations in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in relation to the 1991-1995 conflict, starting from the historical evolution of discourses on specific key themes. The key themes that emerged from the study of those discourses include group identification processes, inter-group relations and governance. As will be shown in the next sub-heading, depending on the aims that their authors wanted to achieve, the discourses related to those three themes had the potential to lead towards ethnic fracturing and violence, or to support ethnic coexistence and cooperation.

1.1.4. Ethnic fracturing and ethnic coexistence during the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina

Ethnic fracturing as a multiple form of violence

What struck me just as many other people on the eve of and during the violent conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, is what Kain Hart (2004, p. xvii) names «a sudden and violent reconfiguration of social life» and «a radical reinterpretation of the world that was played out by power politics on peoples' identities, bodies and homes». One of the most salient aspects of this violent reconfiguration of social life was the *abrupt fracturing of the territory and population along ethnic lines*.

People of different ethnic groups who were living together for centuries got “grouped” territorially along ethnic lines, either by the direct use of force (forced displacement) or by use of some other, less visible form of violence (threats, loss of jobs for being from the “wrong” side, feeling of exclusion,

marginalization by the majority group and similar reasons). Witnessing the developments and events, one could observe that those ruptures along ethnic lines were strongly encouraged and justified by the dominant discourses, supported by a strong and omnipresent feeling of confusion of the populations facing the collapse of state structures and exposure to uncertainty at different levels.

As a result of those factors, while the violent conflict supported by hostile dominant discourses was raging in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Croatia, the great majority of citizens sooner or later got divided along ethnic lines. While attempts of some level of resistance to ethnic divisions were noted in a number of communities, such attempts were soon crushed by the dominant discourses coupled by the use of violence. Taking into account that ethnic identity was used by the political leadership of all sides as one of the main agents of mobilization of the population for the war, it was clear that any sort of inter-ethnic coexistence at community level would represent a threat to that mobilization effort, as well as a challenge to the “logic” of war. Nevertheless, in two communities, the inter-ethnic coexistence and cooperation was preserved throughout the war. As elaborated below, after the war I got strongly intrigued by the existence, persistence and experience of such *oases of peace*.

Ethnic co-existence as a form of counter-discourse and resistance to violence: practical examples of oases of peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia

Despite all the surrounding violence and the discouraging context, the inter-ethnic coexistence and cooperation were preserved in the region of Gorski kotar in Croatia, as well as in the city of Tuzla in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The region of Gorski kotar in western Croatia is a mountainous area with some 25.000 to 30.000 inhabitants living in several towns or in scattered villages. The population is mixed of ethnic Croats and ethnic Serbs. The city of Tuzla in north-eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina has some 130.000 inhabitants from three ethnic groups: Bosniaks (Muslims), Serbs and Croats.



Position of the two *oases of peace*

In the above *oases of peace* different ethnic groups not only remained living together during the entire war, but also protected and supported each other, sometimes in very difficult circumstances. My attempts to find out more about the preserved peace in those communities from the existing literature were unsuccessful. Seemingly, these plausible exceptions did not attract the attention of scholars or other members of the public. I then realized that there was an important gap in the knowledge that needed to be addressed.

While studying identity-influenced politically-driven conflicts, researchers from different disciplines tend to focus on the study of inter-ethnic violence, while disregarding the study of cases of resistance to such violence and examples of inter-ethnic coexistence and cooperation, such as the ones observed in the areas in the focus of this research. This means that our knowledge and understanding of past events remains limited to only a certain number of discourses and practices, mainly the most powerful, dominant and violent ones, while alternative discourses and practices (or counter-discourses and counter-practices) remain marginalized and disregarded. This study is an attempt to address this gap in the knowledge by exploring the phenomenon described below.

1.2. *The phenomenon under investigation*

In order to address the mentioned gap in the knowledge, I decided to explore the experiences of the two communities which I identified as living in the *oases of peace* during the 1991-1995 war: the community from Gorski kotar in Croatia and the community from Tuzla in Bosnia-Herzegovina. I consider them being *oases of peace* because the communal peace at all three levels - direct, structural and cultural level – was preserved in them, as will be shown in Chapters 7 and 8. I believe that the analysis of discourses from these *oases of peace* related to the themes of group identity, inter-group relationships and governance, as well as their contrasting against the dominant discourses on the same key themes in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina of the 1990's, is particularly relevant for understanding the resistance to ethnic divisions and to violence taking place within these geographic areas. By collecting and analysing data related to the key themes in the two *oases of peace*, I try to identify in what ways they presented a counter-discourse and a challenge to the power of dominant discourses during the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

As emphasised by Campbell (1993), the purpose of such work is not to offer the *true* account that would pierce the veil of official propaganda or other dominant narratives. The aim is, rather, to foster a critical review of the existing knowledge and understanding of the war events, which are summarized in the next heading, as well as to contribute new insights and offer alternative narratives filling the gap in the knowledge. The ultimate hope is that these alternative narratives or counter-discourses will positively influence future actions at a local, but also at a broader level.

Chapter 2: Literature review and research framework

The aim of this chapter is to identify the key aspects of the existing literatures pertinent for this work, as well as the gaps in the literature that will be addressed in the study. In the second part of this chapter I outline the structure of the study, define primary and secondary research questions and elaborate on the importance and implications of this investigation.

2.1. *Literature review*

The *pertinent existing literatures* in the investigated field can be grouped thematically as follows:

2.1.1. *Theoretical work on social constructionism and discourse analysis*

Adopting a social constructionist approach to my study, I examine, analyse and compare different discourses that emerged in the pre-war period but also during the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, with the focus being on the dominant discourses of war on the one hand, and on the counter-discourses (or the discourses challenging the dominant discourses of war) on the other hand, considering the *oases of peace* as physical examples of a counter-discourse.

From the initial contacts with the inhabitants of the two *oases of peace*, as well as from the very limited secondary data available on them, I could immediately observe that the worldviews of those communities, which undoubtedly influenced their behaviour, were significantly different from the dominant worldviews and prevailing models of knowledge in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war. Providing an insight into the ways in which those communities perceived the realities and acted in them is one of the main aims of my work. A social constructionist approach, which considers that knowledge is not derived from the nature of the world but versions of

knowledge are fabricated through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life (Burr, 2003), was chosen as the most relevant theoretical orientation for my study.

In my enquiry I am drawing on the work of Burr (2003), Danziger (1997) and other scholars advocating a social constructionist approach to research. The focus of my study being on the discourse and social construction of meaning, I am further building on the work of Foucault (1972, 1980), particularly on his analysis and understanding of the relationships between discourse, knowledge and power.

2.1.2. Theoretical work of social psychology on conflict-related issues

Social psychological perspectives are particularly relevant for my study as they «do not try to describe what the “real course” of the conflict was, but rather to analyse what people think and feel in this situation, as this is extremely important for the understanding of why they act in a particular way» (Bar-Tal, 2011, p. 4). In that endeavour, Social Psychology often adopts the social constructionist approach and discourse analysis as a tool, looking at how language influences our perceptions and our social interactions (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Making use of a larger body of the existing literature of Social Psychology dealing with conflict-related topics, my study particularly benefits from the work of Daniel Bar-Tal (2001, 2004, 2011), notably from his conceptual framework dealing with shared societal beliefs and collective emotional orientations in intractable conflicts, as well as from his in-depth work on the collective memories and their relation to conflict and violence.

Concerned with the characteristics and implications of *collective memories* of war-torn societies, Bar-Tal (2011) warns of the possible consequences of simplified and emotionally loaded collective memories of past violent conflicts. Bar-Tal further highlights that complex experiences of violence are often transmuted into simple narratives of collective ethnic victimization, which become a permanent source of fear and mistrust between ethnic groups. In

cases of violent conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, there is an increasing body of literature looking into the influence and use of collective memories for instigating violence among ethnic groups. My study will contribute to the literature by investigating dominant discourses, but also counter-discourses related to collective memories, and their influence on the behaviours during conflict.

The body of knowledge from within the field of Social Psychology will be used in approaching the key themes of my study, namely: *group identification processes*, *inter-group relations* and *governance*. In addition to the work of Bar-Tal, in the framework of the above themes my study will also draw on the writings of several other scholars in Social Psychology, such as Kelman, (1997), Brewer (2003, 2011) and others.

2.1.3. *Theoretical work on conflict and violence*

Even if the conceptual debates on violence are still on-going, nowadays there is a general consensus that violence includes not only acts of physical destruction against others' bodies or property, but also unjust structural conditions and their justification through culture or ideology (Berghof Foundation Operations GmbH, 2012). This approach to violence is further elaborated by Johan Galtung, one of the most prominent scholars in the field of Peace Studies. Galtung (1990) distinguishes *three types of violence: direct, structural and cultural violence*. While direct violence, usually having the form of physical or verbal aggression, is easily perceived and recognized as such, the other two types of violence are often overlooked although they create conditions for direct violence to happen. Structural violence is related to the structure of the relationships that allows direct violence to happen. It includes non-egalitarian and discriminatory practices which are usually built into the very structure of the society, not permitting certain persons or groups within the society to meet their needs or to make decisions that affect their lives. Cultural violence is based on principles and beliefs - including prejudice and stereotypes - that are used to justify or legitimize direct and structural violence.

My analysis of the interplay between discourses and violence in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina will take into account all three types of violence described above. Ethnic segregation, which is at the centre of my research, can be viewed and will be analysed as an example of the combination of the three types of violence, and ethnic co-existence and cooperation as the absence of any of the three types of violence, or peace. This approach will allow me to observe the dominant discourses on ethnic divisions during war in the former Yugoslavia from a new perspective.

The work of Vivienne Jabri (1996), uncovering the discursive and institutional processes which generate and reproduce war and violent conflict, will further inform my study, providing it with very significant insights into the interplay between discourses and violence. She also draws our attention to the importance of counter-discourses during violent conflict, by highlighting that:

«The discourse of war aims at the construction of a mythology based on *inclusion and exclusion*. [...] Any representation which blurs the inclusion/exclusion boundary breaks down certainties constructed in the name of war and forms a *counter-discourse which deconstructs and delegitimizes war* and thereby fragments myths of unity, duty and conformity» (Jabri, 1996, p.7).

It is in that sense that the *oases of peace* are observed in my study as a *de facto* counter-discourse to the discourses of war in the former Yugoslavia, because their existence and experiences are deconstructing the myth of ethnic unity and denying the division of in-groups and out-groups exclusively along the ethnic lines, as will be seen from the case studies in Chapters 7 and 8.

Taking into account that the ethnic aspect of identity and its relations to conflict and violence in the former Yugoslavia are at the very centre of my research, the conceptualization of *ethnic conflict and ethnic violence* will receive particular attention. The main debates related to this field of study (Horowitz, 1985; Huntington, 1996; Lake and Rothchild, 1998; Petersen, 2002; Sen, 2006; Cordell and Wolff, 2009; Elcheroth and Spini, 2011) will be taken into account in light of their role in the dominant discourses (or resistance to such discourses) linked to the violence in the former Yugoslavia.

A debate on the concept of ethnicity and the question of causal relationships between ethnicity and violence are among the most significant current discussions in the field, highly relevant for the key themes of my study. Several authors highlight the extreme flexibility of the concept of ethnicity. Slack and Doyon (2001, p. 139) even claim that «*the identifier of ethnicity can be anything*», indicating that it is a «membership of the group based on the presumption of a shared trait or traits, that can be anything from genealogy to dressing habits».

Campbell (1998, p.88) explains the difference between two main positions on ethnicity: the primordialist position and the instrumentalist or constructivist position. The primordialist position holds that «ethnicity is “a brute social fact” expressing the essential or innate character of the group», while the instrumentalist / constructivist position holds that the *ethnicity is a «response to particular circumstances*», a «resource created by members of a community to bring people together and to mobilize them». This indicates that the salience of ethnicity depends on the circumstances and increases in the times of crisis, which is a phenomenon that I will explore in the context of crisis in the former Yugoslavia. Cordell and Wolff (2009, p. 14) argue that «it is generally agreed that constructivism has developed into the more prominent discourse on ethnicity [than primordialism] and that there is no longer much debate questioning which of the two schools offers the more credible approach to the study of ethnicity». However, even if there is evidence of a significant shift in the academic approach to the question of ethnicity, my research will attempt to demonstrate that the primordialist approach remains dominant in the discourses and practices not only of the national elites, but also of the key international actors in their ways of problematizing the war and post-war realities in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Elcheroth and Spini (2011, p. 176) further discuss the malleability of ethnicity as an analytic category, which can be used to differentiate groups by a variety of dimensions. Moreover, they warn that «ethnicity has the potential to form a mythical narrative for a community», and that it «actually functions as a practical *meta-category*, grouping together a rather diverse set of social

dimensions used to make sense out of collective antagonisms and violence». In my study I show how several aspects of ethnicity as analytic category evolved and were abused for instigating violence.

Brubaker and Laitin (1998, p. 426) highlight a growing trend of labelling different types of conflicts as ethnic conflicts. They claim that «a pronounced “ethnic turn” has occurred in the study of political violence», as those instances of collective violence that cannot be framed as the war between nation-states or revolutionary acts or counter-colonial violence, are now commonly labelled as ethnic groups fighting ethnic wars. They also observe the flexibility of the concept of ethnicity, considering that it is that flexibility which makes the concept so handy and attractive to conflict analysts. Concurring with the views of these authors, in this research I problematize the labelling of the conflict in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as ethnic conflict.

An interesting debate which is very relevant for my research developed recently around the interplay between ethnicity and violence. While in the past there was a tendency to consider ethnic identity and ethnic animosities as causes of violence, a new and growing body of literature is developing around the idea that *ethnic identity and the related inter-ethnic relationships are actually shaped by the violence*, during and after the violent conflict. Gagnon (2004, pp. 11-12) claims that «violence may be constitutive, that is, its goal may be to construct actors or meanings or relationships that did not previously exist». He further argues that «the ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia were an attempt to force a reconceptualization of ethnicity itself for political ends». In the specific case of violent conflict in Croatia, Sekulic et al. (2006, p. 797) provide evidence that dismisses the common views of ethnic hostility as a cause of violence in Croatia and find strong support for concluding that «the events of the war itself and especially elite manipulation of public images of these events are strongly implicated in rising intolerance during the war». In this study I build on the work of these scholars and examine the cause-effect interplay between ethnic identity and violence in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

2.1.4. *Country-specific literature on the history, society and violent conflict in the former Yugoslavia*

My review of the country-specific literature has two main aims. On the one hand, the literature produced by scholars, journalists and others on the pre-war and war times in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina is a rich source of information and data related to the dominant discourses and counter-discourses of that period, which I use jointly with other relevant social texts. On the other hand, this literature in itself is a constitutive part of different discourses on the pre-war and war-time events, and as such it had and it still has a force for producing consequences.

The social constructionist approach to my enquiry allowed me to critically review the existing literature and the key debates dealing with the history, society and violent conflict in the former Yugoslavia, with a particular focus on the literature which became part of the dominant discourses or of major counter-discourses in different academic fields, such as Political Science, International Relations, History, etc. Internationally recognized authors such as Ramet (1992, 1999), Bringa (1995), Campbell (1998), Udovicki and Ridgeway (2000), Wilmer (2002), Gallagher (2003), Gagnon (2004), and others were studied in parallel with the most prominent scholars from the former Yugoslavia, such as Banac (1995, 2001, 2006), Babic (2004), (2000), Kurspahic (2003), Sekulic et al. (2006), Hromadzic (2013) and many others. The literature produced by renowned journalists, such as Kaplan (1993), Silber and Little (1995) or Glenny (1996), as well as influential diplomats, such as Owen (1996), was given particular importance due to the nature of this study.

As elaborated in detail in Chapter 5, many works of the country-specific literature contributed to generalized views on the group identification processes and inter-group relations on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, which was often referred to as the Balkans. Due to their positions and roles in the society, their authors had what Campbell (1993) names the *narrative authority*, therefore their discourse was trusted and influential.

The analysis of the literature revealed that one of the generalized views, or stereotypes, promoted in most of the literature is that the people living on the

territory of Yugoslavia were divided into *ethnically homogeneous groups*. Most literature on the violence conflict in Yugoslavia contains maps indicating which ethnic group was in majority on which territory, which disregards the malleability and the diversity of group identities of the population.

Furthermore, many influential diplomats, renowned journalists, policy makers and respected academics contributed to and promoted the stereotypes on the Balkans and its people as barbaric and prone to inter-group conflict. Lord David Owen, a British diplomat who served as EU peace negotiator in the former Yugoslavia in 1992-95, serving alongside the UN peace negotiator Cyrus Vance, wrote a personal account on his experience in the book titled *Balkan Odyssey*. The very title of this book is noteworthy, transmitting a sense of adventure and peril in which he, as a hero, had to show some extraordinary bravery to survive. Robert Kaplan, the American journalist whose book *Balkan Ghosts* became a best-seller and allegedly had significant influence on the position of President Clinton with regard to the war in the former Yugoslavia, equally transmitted a number of simplified, stereotypical and often dangerous ideas about this part of the world, culminating in his accusation of the Balkans for «inventing» Nazism and inspiring Hitler:

«Twentieth-century history came from the Balkans. Here men have been isolated by poverty and ethnic rivalry, dooming them to hate. Here politics has been reduced to a level of near anarchy that from time to time in history has flowed up the Danube into Central Europe. Nazism, for instance can claim Balkan origins. Among the flophouses of Vienna, a breeding ground of ethnic resentments close to the southern Slavic world, Hitler learned how to hate so infectiously» (Kaplan, 2005, p. xxiii)

Furthermore, selected writings produced by several members of the elites of the former Yugoslavia, which had often provided a foundation for their public discourses and strongly influenced the public in the country, were reviewed in detail for the purposes of this research. Instances of such works include the writings of Franjo Tudjman, the first president of Croatia, whose work *Bespuca povijesne zbiljnosti* (*Wilderness of historical reality*) attracted a lot of attention in the former Yugoslavia, mainly due to his attempt to revise the official death

count for the WWII Croatian death camp, Jasenovac, whose principal victims had been Serbs (Stitkovac, 2000). Another work that was revised is the *Memorandum on current social issues* drafted in 1985 by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Art, portraying Serbs as the great victims of Tito and communist rule and accusing Croats and Albanians of alleged “genocidal” policies and actions against ethnic Serbs (Ramet, 1999). On the other hand, I also identified several writings of the political leadership in the two *oases of peace*, such as the work of the Tuzlan mayor Selim Belsagic *The city and its man* and the book written by Josip Horvat, the head of the Crisis committee in Delnice, in Gorski kotar, named *Oasis of peace*. These works are analysed in detail in the body of the research, as they significantly contribute to addressing the gaps in the literature described below.

2.1.5. *Gaps in the literature*

Despite the existence of a significant body of literature analysing causes, dynamics and consequences of violent conflict in the former Yugoslavia, the scholarly work in this area appears to be focusing almost exclusively on different aspects and manifestations of violence during war times, while marginalizing or disregarding those discourses and practices which were opposing or resisting violent practices. Although there was a number of initiatives at different levels opposing direct, structural and/or cultural violence in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, including discourses and acts of resistance to ethnic divisions and segregation, at present there is no substantial body of research that focuses on counter-discourses to the dominant discourse of war and ethnic divisions, and this is the main gap in the literature that my research will attempt to address.

More generally, there appears to be no systematic documentation of the experiences of communities which inhabited the areas of ethnic coexistence during war times. Filling this gap is of utmost importance for a number of reasons: in addition to increasing and complementing the body of knowledge on the history of the region of concern, it can also contribute to better understanding human behaviour in conflict situations, challenging the

prejudice and myths on «innate interethnic hatred» and the «inevitability of violence», as well as contribute to the prevention of future violence. Looking at the experiences of two *oases of peace* in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as a counter-discourse to dominant discourses of war, my study tackles only a limited number of aspects of that broad area of research, but it certainly opens the gate to new perspectives and further enquiry in this field.

In its attempt to address the described gaps in the knowledge, the study is organized in nine chapters, responding to one primary and three secondary questions presented in the continuation of this chapter.

2.2. Research framework

2.2.1. Research questions

Primary research question:

- In what ways did two ethnically mixed communities in the former Yugoslavia present a challenge to dominant discourses of war during the 1991-1995 violent conflict?

Secondary research questions:

- Which were the dominant discourses that contributed to the preparation, eruption and mobilization for violence, including ethnic fracturing, in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina?
- How did the resistance to ethnic divisions and violence in the two areas of ethnic coexistence evolve, prevail and persist during the entire war period?
- To what extent were the dominant discourses of violence challenged by the persistence of those two areas of ethnic coexistence, and how?

2.2.2. *Structure of the research*

My research has the following structure:

- Chapter one
Introduction
- Chapter two
Literature review and research framework
- Chapter three
Conceptual framework and methodology of research
- Chapter four
Grounded in the past: tracing the emergence of key discourses and practices influencing group identification processes, inter-group relations and governance on the territory of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Chapter five
On the road to violence: identification and analysis of dominant discourses which supported violence in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1991-1995
- Chapter six
Alternative voices: an overview of the evolution, key characteristics and influence of selected counter-discourses opposing war
- Chapter seven
Ethnically mixed communities as a counter-discourse (I) Case study from the region of Gorski kotar in Croatia
- Chapter eight
Ethnically mixed communities as a counter-discourse (II) Case study from the city of Tuzla in Bosnia-Herzegovina

- Chapter nine

Comparative analysis, conclusions and research implications

2.3. The importance and the implications of the investigation

This study contributes to research on the violent conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. I aim to enhance the body of knowledge on the interplay between discourses and violence that occurred during those conflicts, and specifically on the continued ethnic co-existence as a form of counter-discourse and resistance to violence.

By identifying and analysing the evolution of dominant discourses which supported violence through Chapter 5, the study attempts to contribute to answering what Elcheroth and Spini (2011, p. 190) consider «the relevant question» for the analysts of political violence. They argue that this question «is not why the majority is driven by destructive motives, but how a minority managed to convince the majority that there was no viable alternative to their particular way of defining the group, its struggle, its enemies and its means». In the cases of violent conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina this question remains largely unanswered and my study can add to the body of literature dealing with this problem.

Building on their research, my study directly responds to the invitation of Brubaker and Laitin (1998, p. 426), who insisted on the crucial distinction between conflict and violence and urged scholars «to take violence as such more seriously in the studies of ethnic and nationalist conflict» and to «seek specific explanations for occurrence – and nonoccurrence – of violence in conflictual situations». This thesis attempts to contribute to this aim by seeking to establish the links between different discourses and the occurrence – as well as nonoccurrence - of violence in the specific settings in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In particular, I explore and analyse the cases of two ethnically mixed communities where the inter-ethnic violence did not occur during the

supposedly “inter-ethnic” conflict in the two countries of concern. By this means I also challenge the links established in the studies of several scholars (Vanhanen, 1999, Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2005) between ethnic diversity and ethnic violence. According to Elcheroth and Spini (2011), the general conclusion of those studies is that more ethnic heterogeneity leads to higher risk of violence. The *oases of peace* studied in this research are an obvious counter-discourse to such a conclusion.

Similarly, the study of the two *oases of peace* defies the discourses on the “ancient hatreds” and “innate antagonisms” among different ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia. Such claims got deeply rooted both in the popular discourse and in the political discourses at national and international level, as well as in some significant scholarly discourses. Challenging those discourses can be of central importance for the present and future relations of the communities of the concerned region.

Such relations are also strongly influenced by collective memories of past events. Building on Bar-Tal’s conceptual framework related to collective memories of conflict and violence, Elcheroth and Spini (2011) highlight the nature of the narratives of ethnic victimization. They claim that in those narratives interethnic violence is remembered while intraethnic violence and «in-group» resistance or desertion is forgotten. They also suggest that such systematic «gaps» in the memory, which they name «directed forgetting», facilitate simplifications in the representation of out-group conduct and intentions. My study seeks to add complexity to the collective memory of the 1991-1995 events in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina by exploring and exposing narratives which are usually a matter of «directed forgetting». Those narratives include testimonies of intra-ethnic cooperation during war times, as well as accounts of other types of identification and resistance to dominant discourses of war.

Finally, the power of selected counter-discourses in the cases of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina is analysed, in terms of their contribution to violence reduction and conflict transformation in the two countries. Additional research

on this specific aspect could further contribute to the understanding and use of counter-discourses for violence reduction purposes.

As presented above, I hope that the theoretical and practical implications of my study will be multiple. The overall desired significance of my work could be summarized in the following argument put forward by Gagnon (2004, pp. xx-xxi):

«How we think about the causes of ethnic conflict is not just a matter of observation or analysis from a distance, but has direct feedback into the lives of people in the region. In this calculus, scholars are far from being merely neutral analysts, but are integral parts of how these kinds of wars, and this set of wars, in particular, have been and are being constructed in the minds not only of their students and academic colleagues, but also policy makers and the general public».

Chapter 3: Conceptual framework and methodology of research

This chapter examines the key concepts, as well as theoretical and methodological approaches used in this study. It presents the social constructionist approach of this research and elaborates on the knowledge understood as socially constructed meaning and a key motivator of action. Clarifying the difference between conflict and violence, this chapter further explains why war is never the only option available to address conflict. Drawing from the field of social psychology, it looks into the influence of shared beliefs and shared emotions, particularly fear and hope, in mobilizing people for violence or for peace. Finally, it examines the concept of group identity in general, and ethnic identity as one of its types in particular, and the links between group identities and inter-group relations in the context of conflict.

The methodology of this research is presented in the second part of this chapter and discourse analysis introduced as a method of choice. Processes of data generation, collection and analysis are described in detail, and complemented by the examination of challenges, ethical issues and other concerns that were addressed throughout the research period.

3.1. Conceptual framework of the research

3.1.1. Conceptualizing knowledge as a socially constructed meaning and a motivator of social action

In my research, as well as in my overall understanding of the world, I adopt the approach in which knowledge is considered as something that «people do together» (Burr, 2003, p.9), something created through the social practice and interactions, rather than a reflection of the reality or an objective truth. The observation of Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), who note that our knowledge shapes our worldviews within which some forms of action become natural and others unthinkable, is particularly important for this study. The worldviews

shaped by dominant discourses (Chapter 5) and by their counter- discourses (Chapters 6-8), and their link to violent or non-violent behaviours, are at the very centre of this study.

Furthermore, my approach is largely based on the social constructionist view on knowledge, considering that the ways of understanding the world do not come from objective reality but from other people (Burr, 2003, p. 7). Consequently, what we know today about the war in the former Yugoslavia includes the knowledge constructed and transmitted by a range of people, from witnesses and actors in the war-time events, to the media, scholarship and other sources.

Knowledge about that war is also created and transmitted by scholars, who conduct research about it and present their views to the public. As stressed by Gagnon (2004), scholars largely contribute to the ways in which different groups of people understand specific conflicts. Moreover, scholars are among the people with the utmost «narrative authority», a term used by David Campbell (1993) to describe those who have influence over others. This reminds us that, as scholars, we carry an enormous responsibility. Throughout my thesis I will also critically review some of the scholarly work produced prior, during and after the war in the former Yugoslavia and reflect on its possible influence on different actions that have been shaping the lives of the population living on its territory.

One of the main sources of my motivation for conducting this research is the observed partiality of the knowledge and understanding of the wartime events. I felt the need to add to the complexity of the overall understanding of that war, and to put under scrutiny some broadly accepted «truths», such as the ethnic nature of this war. I was particularly motivated to do so when getting acquainted with the inhabitants and the experiences of the areas with preserved interethnic coexistence, which by their very existence seemed to challenge some widely accepted ideas on this war, such as its supposed interethnic nature. In the terminology of David Campbell (1998), I felt the need to «problematize the problem», or to question the very basics of the broadly

accepted understanding of what the problem was, through the examples of experiences which oppose and challenge this overall understanding.

My work took place with the awareness that «versions of knowledge become fabricated through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life» (Burr, 2003, p.4), and that different understandings of the world lead towards different social actions. The link between knowledge and action is central to my work in two aspects, the first one being related to the past and the second one looking at the future.

Firstly, my research findings confirmed my initial assumption that the kind of actions undertaken by the communities living in the two *oases of peace*, differing from the actions that were taking place in the rest of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, were influenced by a different interpretation in those communities of the conflict itself, including the existing threats and the possible solutions. The socio-psychological perspective adopted in my work supported this assumption, explaining that «various past experiences and acquired knowledge [also] have determinative influence on the manner in which a collective acts in a conflict situation[...] Thus, also a possibility of peace building must be initiated in human minds first» (Bar-Tal, 2011, p. 4).

This leads me to the second aspect of my work which is linking knowledge and action, this one referring to the *collective memory* and the future of the areas affected by the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. As defined by Schuman and Scott (1989), collective memory is a widely shared knowledge of past social events that may not have been personally experienced but are collectively constructed through communicative social functions. Collective memory can be transmitted directly, through oral transmission of events, or through cultural memory, encompassed in education and commemoration. Liu and Hilton (2005) warn that collective memories are a symbolic resource that can be mobilized politically to legitimize political agenda for the present and future. They further specify that collective memory of past conflicts has a motivational function for collective behaviour, and it is often used as justification of violent actions. Indeed, my research findings support that collective memories, as selective knowledge on specific episodes of the past,

were widely used prior to and during the war in the former Yugoslavia to instigate violence based on ethnic belonging, as elaborated in Chapter 5. However, as can be perceived from Chapters 7 and 8, positive collective memories provided a strong foundation for preserving inter-ethnic peace in the two *oases of peace* subject of this study.

Starting from Chapter 4, throughout my work I identify and critically review collective memories on specific aspects of the history in former Yugoslavia. Additionally, with my scholarly work on this topic and by exposing the narratives gathered in the *oases of peace*, I hope to contribute to the complexity of understanding of the events that took place during the 1991-1995 war. By adding to the complexity of memory, I hope to contribute to the reduction of future political and other manipulation with the past.

3.1.2. Distinguishing between conflict and violence. Conceptualizing war as one of the options available as conflicts emerge

The well-established and widely used distinction between *conflict* as an interaction of persons or groups who perceive each other as a threat to satisfying one's own needs or reaching one's own goals, and *violence* as acts that aim to inflict harm (Burton, 1990, Galtung, 1998), is crucial for this study. Despite the prevalent popular view that violence is sometimes inevitable, when conflicts emerge parties that are involved in them always have a choice. They choose from a variety of approaches and options that can be applied in trying to resolve their conflict, and resorting to violence is only one of their options.

As conflicts are universal, there is no doubt that they were present in all areas of the former Yugoslavia during 1991-1995, including in those that were not affected by armed violence. It is important to note that in both *oases of peace* there were clear immediate threats to the lives of the population, as will be elaborated in Chapters 7 and 8. However, while in most of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina the conflict turned into violence with strong ethnic overtones (not always in the form of armed violence, but also in other forms of direct, structural and cultural violence, such as dismissing individuals of

specific ethnic group from their jobs, evicting them from their homes or exposing them to humiliation and harassment), in the two *oases of peace* the prevailing type of violence, i.e. violence among groups of different ethnic origin, did not take place. As elaborated in Chapters 7 and 8, structured efforts were made in those areas to prevent the three forms of violence.

When identifying and analysing discourses of war, parallel to several of their counter-discourses, it is the concept of violence that draws the distinguishing line between those two types of discourse. While both types of discourse were taking place in the broader context of violent conflict occurring on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, it is important to note that the discourses of war were inviting to, fomenting or justifying violence, while their counter-discourses were directly or indirectly questioning the use of violence and promoting alternatives to violent «solutions», as will be seen from the subsequent chapters.

Furthermore, the notion of *perceived threat* which characterized the individuals or groups in conflict is another concept which is key to this study. The definition and description of the nature and the source of the threat by key influencers is crucial for the perception of the threat in the population. It can vary among different actors and observers, and challenging the perceptions defining entire ethnic groups as a threat is the basis of the counter-discourses presented in this study. In the same context and logic, the concept of *parties in conflict* should be observed with special attention, because it can vary, and it did vary in the discourses of war and their counter-discourses in the former Yugoslavia. As clarified by Jabri (1996, p. 16) «how we define parties to a conflict may also be a reflection of dominant discourses around a particular conflict situation which legitimise or render visible the claims of one while delegitimising those of the other».

The terms *war* and *violent conflict* are used in this study interchangeably, as war can be observed as organized violence (Jeong, 2000). However, it is important to stress that war and discourses of war in this research are not observed only in their relation to direct physical violence, such as destruction and killings which were taking place on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, and which makes the more visible and the most studied form of violence.

Following the conceptual framework of Galtung (1990, 1998), the study equally looks at the discourses that were fomenting or justifying structural and cultural violence, and the counter-discourses that were opposing them.

The deliberate nature of violence and war is considered in my study. Although war is often commonly understood and thought of as an «accident» that occurs in human relations, this is rarely the case. Most often resorting to war is a deliberate choice, it is «the outcome of sequences of actions and decisions carried out by defined decision-makers» (Jabri, 1996, p. 21) Moreover, war is a choice that requires acceptance and support from a significant number of people. As pointed out by the organization War Resisters International (2017), wars will cease when men [and women] refuse to fight.

The processes of generating acceptance and support for the option of war in the former Yugoslavia are in the focus of Chapter 5. Discourses and discursive practices are at the core of such processes. Jabri (1996, p. vii) explains that «human conduct and discursive and institutional continuities within social systems are mutually constitutive processes implicated in the reproduction of violence as an aspect of social and political life». She conceptualizes *conflict as constructed discourse*, stressing that the linguistic constructs used to provide versions of conflict by parties and observers are not peculiar to that conflict alone, but derive from pre-existing discursive models which are implicated in the construction of the conflict and have wide consequences. Recalling and critically reviewing some of the key discourses and practices from the past around the broader themes of group identity, inter-group relationships and governance (Chapter 4), I then proceed to analyse the influence of the discourses and the relationships between discursive practices and human conduct both in the reproduction of violence (Chapter 5), but also in the reproduction of non-violence and co-existence, as witnessed in the *oases of peace* (Chapters 7 and 8).

Thus, I conceptualize war as «an option that is available to states and communities as conflicts emerge» (Jabri, 1996, p. 1), keeping in mind that it is never the only option, as we can observe from the example of the communities living in the *oases of peace*.

3.1.3. Understanding the relationship between discourse and power. Conceptualizing dominant discourse and counter-discourse in the context of violent conflict

Not all discourses in a given society are equally powerful. The relationship between knowledge and power was analysed by Foucault (1980), who understood *power* not necessarily as repressive, but as a productive force which constitutes discourse and knowledge. Power is responsible for creating the social world, but also for the ways in which this social world can be talked about. Foucault (1980) further noted that every social discourse which involves a politically generated truth-claim encounters a counter-discourse that challenges the original discourse's legitimacy. Truth, he claimed, is relative to power struggles and discourses created within those struggles. Such power struggles, perceived in the tensions between dominant discourses of violence and counter-discourses of peace during wartime in the former Yugoslavia, are analysed in this study.

Van Dijk (2008) defines social power in terms of control – the one over the discourse of the others, but also control over peoples' minds. He specifies that «control does not only apply to discourse as social practice, but also to the minds of those who are being controlled, that is, their knowledge, opinions, attitudes, ideologies, as well as other personal or social representations [...] Those who control discourse may indirectly control the minds of people. And since people's actions are controlled by their minds, mind control also means indirect action control» (Van Dijk, 2008, p.9). This is highly relevant for my study which looks into the role that dominant discourses had in controlling the minds and consequently the actions of wider population in the former Yugoslavia.

The control of the dominant discourses over people's minds and actions is often closely linked to their control over what Campbell (1998) calls the «emplotment» in the narratives. Building on the work of the historian Hayden White, Campbell (1998, p. 35) points at the fact that «[...] narratives are a performance. Through the operation of «emplotment» facts are structured in

such a way that they become components in a particular story [...] any given set of real events can be emplotted in a number of different ways, can bear the weight of being told as any number of different kind of stories». How things are told, what constitutes part of the narrative and what is omitted, gains particular importance prior to and during the conflict. Changing narratives over the same events are observed throughout the recent past in the former Yugoslavia, producing different and sometimes opposing «versions» of the truth, sometimes contributing to peace and on other occasions instigating violence among ethnic groups.

To help understand the relations of power between different discourses and their consequences, Fairclough (1992) elaborated on the concept of *ideology*. Fairclough understands *ideologies* as constructions of meaning that contribute to the production, reproduction and transformation of relations of *domination* (Fairclough, 1992, p. 87). This means that in every society there are ongoing processes of negotiation of meaning and power relations are reflected in the discursive practices: while *dominant discourses* mostly intend to maintain the existing social order, they are confronted by specific *counter-discourses* that «challenge the dominant meanings and equip people with resources for resistance» (Jorgensen and Phillips, p. 76). In the context of my study, I observe discourses of war as an order of dominant discourses which introduced or legitimized the “logic” of violence among people in the former Yugoslavia. The main aspects and the evolution of those discourses are analysed in Chapter 5. Several discourses which opposed to the «logic» of violence during the war in the former Yugoslavia are analysed as *counter-discourses* or *discourses countering the “logic” of war* in Chapters 6-8. Even though they did not turn into dominant discourses on the overall territory of the former Yugoslavia, at certain localities those counter-discourses challenged the discourses of war. The extent and the nature of that challenge is examined in this study.

This capacity of dominant discourses is explored by Fairclough (1992), who claims that power in discourse (or dominance) is the ability to *control* or constrain the contributions of non-powerful participants. This claim is

reinforced by van Dijk (2008), who defines social power in terms of control of one group over the discourse of the other group. Van Dijk further explains that «control does not only apply to discourse as social practice, but also to the minds of those who are being controlled, that is, their knowledge, opinions, attitudes, ideologies as well as other personal or social representations» (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 9).

Furthermore, adopting the notion of power in terms of preferential access to or control over public discourse (Van Dijk, 2008), and taking into consideration that mass media is one of the most potent tools for influencing the broad public, my study is looking into the role of mass media both in promoting discourses of violence (Chapter 5) and in promoting counter-discourses (Chapters 6-8).

While analysing the relations between discourses, power and social practices in war-time Yugoslavia, I build on the fact that decisions to initiate the war are taken by a few persons who have the power, while the consequences are felt by a great number of people, mostly having less power. As explained by Jabri (1996), discourse is what renders the destructive element of human violence legitimate and acceptable to those who perceive war in strategic terms. Such perceptions of the war in the former Yugoslavia, and their spreading among the overall population, are discussed in this study. Jabri's recommendation to look into linguistic resources and repertoires associated with the legitimation of war, as well as to look into a possibility of constructing new forms of discourse as a means towards establishing non-violence as a norm in the resolution of conflict, are both addressed in the study, the first one in relation to the dominant discourses of war, and the second one in relation to the counter-discourse opposing to see the war as a solution.

Discourses on the role of ethnic identities and the *dominant discourse on the "ethnic nature" of the conflict* played an extremely important role in war-time Yugoslavia. They influenced the distribution of political power, which was given to ethnic leaders as the only representatives of the people. This disempowered other, alternative voices, such as the voices of the women or citizens' initiatives, as their contributions were not taken as «representative».

This is why the dominant discourses on the «ethnic nature» of the conflict in former Yugoslavia are given particular attention in this study.

3.1.4. Understanding shared beliefs and shared emotions in the context of intergroup conflict. Fear as the key motivator of violence.

While discourse analysis is used as the analytical framework of this study, a complementary theoretical framework is applied from the field of *social psychology*. This is mainly because the study attempts to establish links between discourses and social practices and analyse how discourses contributed to specific attitudes and behaviours at individual or group level, either violent or non-violent. To be able to understand this contribution, it is important to understand the role of beliefs and emotions in that process. The social-psychological perspective of intergroup conflicts brings important insights in the area of what Bar-Tal names *shared beliefs* or *societal beliefs*. They often serve as a basis for *group formation*, influence the behaviour of groups and serve to distinguish one group from another (Bar-Tal, 2011). The processes of group formation and group identification, and the role of discourses in those processes, are one of the key themes explored in this study.

The close link between societal beliefs and *ideology* is particularly relevant for this research. Building on the work of van Dijk, Bar-Tal and Halperin (2011), I consider ideology as a closed system of systematically formulated beliefs which guide reality *perception* and *behaviour*, and, as such, reduce openness to information and its processing. Societal beliefs are mostly rooted in the histories and myths. Therefore, discourse plays a very important role in their formation. Those beliefs make part of the cognitive world of the parties in conflict, and as such are crucial for understanding the dynamics of a specific conflict. Shared beliefs could be considered as a *shared knowledge and understanding* of specific groups on specific issues. As different discourses influence the creation of knowledge and understanding, starting from Chapter 4 onwards, my study attempts to make visible the link between discourses and

their possible influence on the perceptions and behaviours of different groups of people prior to and during the war in the former Yugoslavia.

Linking the discourse and the societal beliefs, and building on Bar-Tal (2011) who claims that societal beliefs can often become rigid and turn into a kind of ideological conflict supporting beliefs, I consider that *dominant discourses in the former Yugoslavia also produced dominant societal beliefs*, which tended to accept and justify violence, as elaborated in Chapter 5. Bar-Tal (2011, p. 15) further noticed that «observation of the serious, harsh and violent conflicts indicates that it is much easier to mobilize society members to participate in them than to persuade them to embark on the road of peace making.» This proved to be accurate also in the former Yugoslavia, and my study looks into two opposed types of discourses: those which mobilized people for violence, and those which mobilized them for non-violence, analysing the persuasion methods in both cases.

The mobilization of members of society during conflict is closely linked and highly influenced by personal and *shared emotions*. One of the most salient emotions with a strong mobilization effect is *fear*. There is an extensive body of research on the *interplay between fear and conflict*. On the individual basis, fear can be defined as a natural alarm following the *perception* that one or several of persons' needs or interests is threatened. Fear can take a variety of forms. If it reaches high levels, it launches the aggressive capacities of the human being in order to enable him or her to quickly respond to a specific problem, either by attacking or by escaping. Violence is one option that can be used to deal with the conflict, by inflicting harm on the enemy.

There is an on-going debate on the link between emotions and rationality. Some, such as Svendsen (2008), disagree that emotions such as fear represent a threat to rationality, claiming that an absence of emotions would also lead to irrationality. Many others (Farre Salva, 2004) claim that higher the levels of emotions such as fear, the rational capacities of the persons and groups decrease, which is an excellent opportunity for manipulation with the fear for political purposes and instigation of violence. Examples of such manipulation will be presented in Chapter 5. In the context of conflict, reducing

fear is considered as a first step towards violence reduction and constructive conflict transformation, as will be confirmed in the case studies from Gorski kotar and Tuzla. Therefore, the cases of instigating fear by dominant discourses, and fear reduction through counter-discourses, will be analysed in the main body of this study. In both cases it is *the perception of a threat* that is crucial for understanding the way in which the conflict is dealt with.

Marina (2006) claims that one of the most common tactics of political control through fear is “closing the ways out” – convincing people that there are no other solutions to the problem than giving control over their lives to the political “saviour” who will rescue them. This is what Bar-Tal (2011) names *tunnel vision*, which is often promoted by political leaders, as illustrated by numerous examples in Chapter 5.

Bar-Tal (2001, 2011) confirms that, when met with conflict or threatening conditions, a society that experiences fear as a collective emotion is likely to act violently. However, he also introduced the idea of *collective hope* as a potential mobilizing force leading towards peace. As a secondary emotion requiring «higher mental processes of vision, imagination, setting goals and consideration of alternatives – all of which require openness, creativity and flexibility» (Bar-Tal, 2001, p. 620), hope can become a counter-balance to fear. This idea is explored in my study particularly in reference to the two *oases of peace*. There is no doubt that these *oases* also experienced communal conflicts during 1991-1995. However, their communities approached those conflicts in a constructive and non-violent way, with strong hope and a clear vision of better future.

3.1.5. *Understanding identity in the context of conflict and violence.*

Conceptualizing ethnic identity as a type of group-based social identity

There is a growing interest of scholarship and a wide range of research on the role of group identities in violent conflicts. Social psychology offers a framework for the study of group identification processes, based on social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979). Jenkins (2008, p. 5) introduces the

notion of identity by claiming that, «[a]s a very basic starting point, identity is the human capacity – rooted in language - to know 'who is who' (and hence 'what is what'). This involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on: a multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the human world and our places in it, as individuals and as members of collectivities». As indicated by Jenkins (2008), language plays a crucial role in identity formation, therefore discourse analysis can contribute very important insights in this area of research.

Discussing the motivational theories of social identification, Brewer (2011, p. 125) states that social identity «involves the attachment of one's sense of self and self-interest to the collective as a whole. When a *group identity is both important and salient*, the individual is motivated to enhance group welfare and protect group interests, including defending the group boundaries from encroachment, protecting group values from dilution and preserving group integrity». Brewer (2011) further points to the idea that group identities meet fundamental needs for *reducing uncertainty and achieving meaning and clarity in social context*. She stresses that there is compelling evidence that identification and in-group bias increase under conditions of high cognitive uncertainty, when the function of group membership and identities is to provide self-definition and guidance for behaviour in otherwise ambiguous social situations. However, the author also recognizes that group identity is only one of many possible modes of reducing social uncertainty, while roles, values and laws can serve the same purpose. The war in the former Yugoslavia was certainly the time of highest uncertainty for its inhabitants: social, political and economic systems were falling apart in the midst of generalized violence, and there was no clarity on the future of the people and the territory. This is why the processes of group identification and related inter-group relations played a key role in influencing the behaviour of the population, and as such they are included as two core themes of this study.

An additional characteristic of identity important for this study is that identity is a process taking place through social interactions, not a predetermined feature that people have. This distinguishes the primordialist view on identities,

still very common in general discourse but also in part of the academia, from the constructivist view adopted in my study. In fact, the case of Yugoslavia, where millions of people have been “changing” their ethnic, religious, political and other identities over relatively short periods of time, as shown later in this study, is in itself an evidence of flexibility and malleability of ethnic and other group identities, thus challenging the primordialist view on group identity as fixed and “eternal”. The influences of primordialist views on the processes of identification and consequently on the ways the violent conflict in the former Yugoslavia was understood and managed, are also explored, particularly in Chapter 5.

Abdelal et al. (2009) defined social identity as a social category that varies along two dimension: content, as a meaning to collective identity, and contestation, as a degree of agreement within a group over the content. The content of social identity may take form of four non mutually exclusive types: i) *constitutive norms* or informal and formal rules that define group membership; ii) *social purposes* or the goals shared by the members of a group; iii) *relational comparison* referring to defining an identity group by what it is not and establishing the way it views other identity groups; and iv) *cognitive models or worldviews* in terms of a framework that allows members of a group to make sense of social, political and economic conditions. This analytical framework for the study of identity is used in my study, and the four types of group identity are explored in terms of their relevance for the behaviour of social groups prior to and during conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Furthermore, as each person has multiple and overlapping identities, the variable of *salience* or the intensity of identification with specific group is being considered. This is particularly important because, as further pointed by Abdelal et al. (2009), specific contexts are said to increase the salience of one identity over another.

As could be perceived from the above conceptual frameworks, identities are central to how people make sense of the world and how they behave in it. Moreover, as argued by the theory of self-categorization and expressed by Turner et al. cited in Coutant et al. (2011, p. 42), identities are also crucial in the process of group formation, because, «individuals can and do cognitively

divide their social world into groups and categories around in-groups and out-groups. The categories are formed by paying attention to specific characteristics that separate individuals». This differentiation of in-groups and out-groups is particularly important in times of conflict, and it forms the basis of inter-group discrimination. Among different group identities existing in the former Yugoslavia, it was the ethnic group identity that gained specific salience and underwent significant content changes. In that context, the concept of *othering*, establishing one's identity through opposition to the "other", often accompanied by the process of stereotyping and dehumanization of that "other" and the propensity for violent inter-group interaction between "us" and the "others", is central to this research. Jabri (1996) warns that once the concept of "otherness" takes root, the unimaginable becomes possible: the relationship becomes defined by the destruction of the enemy, which is perceived as necessary. These processes of dehumanization of the out-groups which contributed to the legitimation of violence in the former Yugoslavia are identified and analysed in Chapter 5.

The framework exploring the interplay between group identities and conflict is further developed by Jabri (1996), who considers that the problem becomes salient when inter-group differences get highly institutionalized and ideologically legitimated, and discriminatory practices become habitual. This type of governance got widespread in former Yugoslavia, when discriminatory practices became habitual and not perceived as violence. However, these practices did not take root in the *oases of peace*, due to alternative types of governance and adherence to the rule of law, which are analysed in Chapters 7 and 8.

The hypothesis being explored in this study is that, although there is no doubt that most inhabitants of the *oases of peace* belonged to one of the ethnic groups, other forms of group identification were *not sacrificed* and coexisted together with ethnic identification. The hypothesis is taking into account the important fact - often overlooked in the texts on so called ethnic conflicts - that *ethnic identity is only one of many types of group identities*, although it can get very salient during conflict. As explained by Citrin and Sears (2009) and other

authors, in modern society individuals belong to several, usually overlapping groups, including national, regional, ethnic and professional groups – hence, the familiar assertion that *individuals have multiple identities*. The number, nature and relative significance of these varied social identities change with life circumstances and political events.

While some authors consider that the salience of the ethnic identity is one of the main causes of violent conflict, others perceive its increased salience as a consequence of the violent conflict. High levels of salience of ethnic identities help plant the seeds of *ethnocentrism*, which is a worldview in which one's own ethnic group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it (Brewer, 2003). Referring to the level of salience that makes the ethnic identity appear as the singular group identity that overshadows all other types of identity, Sen (2006, p.2) writes: «violence is fomented by the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people, championed by proficient artisans of terror».

Ethnicity and ethnic identity are contested concepts that can include or exclude almost an unlimited number of factors. This is why there is a number of different definitions of ethnic groups. For the purpose of this study I am adopting Bar-Tal's definition (2011, p. 2) indicating that «ethnic societies or groups refer to collective whose membership is determined on the bases of perceived common past, common culture, common language and common destiny». Although they were being considered and referred to as ethnic groups by outsiders, it is important to note that members of those groups in the former Yugoslavia very rarely used the terms «ethnic groups» when referring to themselves. They were rather using the term “nation” (“narod” or “nacija” in the local language(s)).

The concept of the *nation* has a number of definitions and is benefiting from an increasingly rich academic interest. In his seminal work, Anderson (1991) defines nations as imagined, limited and sovereign communities. Jabri (1996) emphasises that the nation is the location of discursive and institutional practices which at one and the same time generate legitimation and exclusion. She observes national identity as a self-perception based on history,

mythology, tradition, language and culture. Importantly, this self-perception relies on the sense of collective identity which binds individuals across class, gender, income levels and other forms of division or types of group identity.

The concepts of *national identity*, *nation* and *nation-states* played a significant role in the construction of dominant discourses. In fact, when referring to their reference groups, Croatian and Serbian leaders were very eloquent on national issues and national priorities. In that context, the constructivist approach to nations as imaginary communities and constructions of human categorizations, is adopted. However, the study also focuses on the consequences of the essentialist and conventional approaches to nations, which are considering nations as a historical continuity and the «natural order of things». As will be presented in Chapter 5, this approach was promoted by a number of dominant discourses and was often used to justify violence as the only means to realize the «historical dreams of particular nations to have their own state». In this context, Hobsbawm (1993) points at the social manipulation element in the creation of the nations. He confirms Gellner's view that nationalism - as a principle according to which the political and the national units should be congruent – precedes the nations, and not vice versa.

Wehler (2005) defines nationalism as a system of ideas, a doctrine, a worldview that serves for the creation, mobilization and integration of a larger solidarity group (called nation), but first and foremost for the legitimation of the modern political power. National identity can be perceived as another type of group identity, which in many aspects overlaps with the ethnic identity. Both ethnic identity and national identity being elusive concepts, among the scholars there is a variety of ideas on their main differences and overlaps. As one of the main differences Wehler (2005) stresses the fact that nations consider their territory to have a sublime character, to be “sacred”. This type of discourse, whereby not only the territory but also the war was sacred, was often used by leadership of Croatia and Serbia. Hobsbawm (1993) considers that ethnic groups can be perceived as proto-nations, but also notes that ethnic groups are not necessarily pursuing what is a “must have” of every nation – the state. However, this was not the case in the former Yugoslavia, where

leadership of most ethnic (and national) groups pursued the creation of their nation-states, which were considered as the only solution to the problem of dissolution of Yugoslavia, at least in the dominant discourse of Serbs and Croats.

Smith (2004, p. 302) observed that identities are among the most normatively significant and behaviourally consequential aspects of politics. Indeed, what makes the collective action possible are the shared group memberships. To lead a set of people to define themselves as belonging to a common social category is to «create social power through mobilizing people to act together» (Reicher et al., 2010, p. 626). Such mobilization is often used by those who seek to shape social reality, so called entrepreneurs of identity, «whose skill involves constituting as a single category the audience which the entrepreneur wishes to mobilize, constituting the project which the entrepreneur wants to achieve as an instantiation of the norms, values and priorities associated with this category and constituting the entrepreneur himself/herself as prototypical of the category» (Reicher et al., 2010, p. 627). This type of leadership and governance will be explored in Chapter 5 and contrasted to the governance in the *oases in peace*, described in Chapters 7 and 8.

In cases of violent conflict, the skills of entrepreneurs of identity gain great significance. How will people be grouped (who will become “us” and who will become “them”), which of the social identities will become most salient for most people and how much they will be willing to sacrifice for their groups’ aims and purposes, will often become a determinant factor in the course of the conflict. In such contexts, identities often become weapons in the hands of entrepreneurs of violence. When used for pernicious purposes, identities are frequently turned into agents of polarization, serving to fracture the social fabric and mobilize for violence. My study explores how such abuse of ethnic identity for violent purposes has been systematically made by the elites in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, resulting in the fracturing of almost all of their territory along ethnic lines. At the same time, it looks closely into the two areas where

such fracturing did not happen, exploring the means of their resistance which allowed them to remain ethnically diverse.

3.2. Methodology of research

3.2.1. Conceptualizing discourse as a form of social practice and introducing discourse analysis as a method of choice. Reasons for using discourse analysis as a theoretical and methodological approach of this study

In this study I am looking into different versions of knowledge and meaning created in the context of Yugoslav war. Knowledge and meaning are transmitted through the language, which is part of the society. Therefore, linguistic phenomena are social phenomena, as «whenever people speak or listen or write or read, they do so in ways which are determined socially and have social effects» (Fairclough, 1989, p.23).

Addressing the research questions of my study required paying particular attention to the linkage between knowledge, meaning (“truth”) and social action, which was identified by Michel Foucault (1972, 1980), the author who established the basis for the modern studies of discourse. His main views and concepts related to discourse are used as a framework orienting my study. Foucault claims that discourses generate knowledge and «truth» and therefore shape the world. In other words, discourses systematically form the object of which they speak. The processes of systematically forming specific “objects” through dominant discourses prior and during war in the former Yugoslavia – such as the processes of shaping the very nature of the “problem” in ethnic terms (through discourse on ethnic conflict) and consequently determining the nature and characteristics of the “enemy” (the ethnic other) and “possible solutions” (ethnic fracturing) – are analysed in Chapter 5. The two case studies in Chapters 7 and 8 expose the counter-discourses with alternative views on nature of the problem – parties in conflict – possible solutions, which were key in preserving peace in the two studied communities.

Furthermore, Foucault established that discourses speak about the persons who are using them and that, for specific modes of discourse, some people

had more “right” to speak than others. This is how he established the link between discourse, authority and power. Because certain types of discourse allow specific types of individuals to «speak the truth», or to be largely believed when speaking on specific issues, discourses also give these individuals degrees of social, cultural, and political power. This power is often used to silence or marginalize opposing discourses or counter-discourses in order to maintain the existing social order. This is particularly relevant for my study, as I explored a number of discourses in the former Yugoslavia that were proposing different and sometimes opposing approaches to the “problem” in the country. As elaborated in Chapter 6, most of those discourses were silenced or marginalized.

Jorgensen and Phillips (2012) further elaborate on the concept of discourse as social practice by specifying that discourse contributes to the construction of social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and meaning. Discussing the links between discourse and social action, they note that «different discourses each point to different courses of action as possible and appropriate» and «changes in discourse are a means by which the social world is changed» (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2012, p. 18). This link between discourses and different social actions is explored in my study, contrasting the experiences of the two *oases of peace* with the experiences on the rest of the territory of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. To be able to understand different discourses and their influence on the social realities during the wartimes on the territory of former Yugoslavia, I used *discourse analysis*, a multidisciplinary method of analysis in social sciences which has a variety of approaches.

While considering the role of discourses in the social practices during wartimes in the former Yugoslavia, I remained aware that social practices related to the armed conflict could not be fully understood exclusively on the basis of the analysis of discursive practices, because social practices include both discursive and non-discursive elements. However, the scope of my study is limited to the contribution of discursive practices to the broader social practices, particularly to the practices of violence or non-violence explored in Chapters 5-8.

Overall my research was informed by the field of social psychology, looking into specific concepts such as attitudes, behaviours, identity and social conflict, which are all very relevant for my study. Focusing on social interactions, social psychology points out that «people use language like a tool to get things done» (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, pp. 17-18). This means that people use discourse in order to accomplish forms of social action in particular contexts of interaction.

Analysing discourse as a social practice and as a tool to influence and persuade people is highly relevant for this study for a number of reasons. While discourses play an important role in considering possible and appropriate courses of action in any situation, in the conflict situation their role is even more crucial. Consequently, discourses played an important role in the legitimization of war on the territory of former Yugoslavia, as well as in the mobilization of support for that war. As indicated by Jabri (1996, p. 21), social practices through time and across space render war an institutional form that is largely seen as inevitable and at times acceptable form of human conduct. This phenomenon was also observed in the former Yugoslavia and one of the main aims of my research is to try to understand the social processes which generated that acceptance and support for violent human interaction.

With that aim, in Chapter 5 I attempted to uncover some of the key discourses which contributed to the institutionalization and spirit of inevitability, acceptability and desirability of violence. At the same time, in Chapters 6-8 I closely looked into specific counter-discourses which opposed that spirit, considering the practice of *oases of peace* as unique *social counter-practices*, or as *counter-discourse per se*, as by their very existence the *oases of peace* challenged the dominant discourse of inter-ethnic intolerance and violence.

3.2.2. *Data generation, collection and analysis*

In this study I apply the qualitative approach to research, characterized by flexible research design and the use of documentary analysis and interviews as main data collection and data generation techniques.

Following the observation of Dijk (2008), who maintains that *institutional texts, political discourse, media discourse and textbooks* are among the most powerful types of discourse due to their scope and reach, I put these types of text in the focus of the main body of my research. I selected the texts from the relevant literature, documents and records such as recordings of the speeches of key political actors, TV and radio materials. In terms of the *time* when they were produced, the texts and talks selected for the purposes of the analysis of discourses of violence and the two case studies were chosen in accordance with the following criteria: either they were related to the period around the beginning of the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, or they were related to the key events occurred during wartime. Texts from the initial moments of the armed conflict (1991 in case of Croatia and 1992 in case of Bosnia-Herzegovina) were selected because they played a major role in how the relationships were shaped in the new context. As indicated by Reykowski and Cislak (2011, pp. 247-248), «initial reactions may shape the conflict resolution dynamics and affect final settlement[...] Automatic negative emotional responses generated by conflict that once started tend to continue via negative reciprocity». The beginning of the armed conflict influenced the development of new norms, relations and worldviews, therefore it was crucial to analyse the contribution of discourses to the developments at the very beginning of the war, as well as those related to major events occurred throughout the wartime.

Two *key themes* crucial for understanding the evolution, nature and impact of discourses of violence on the one hand, and their counter-discourses on the other, emerged from the initial readings, pointing at the complexity and importance of the processes of *group identification* and *intergroup relations*. The third key theme, focusing on *governance*, emerged at the later stage of the research process when from the gathered materials I could clearly identify the elements of the governance practices that contributed to the peace in the two oases, and which were challenging the governance practices in the rest of the two countries.

Through my enquiry I found out that the historical evolution of the three key themes and related narratives had the potential to contribute to inter-group

conflict and violence, but also the potential to support peace and cooperation of different groups on the territory in the focus of this study, depending on the selection of narratives and the orientation of the person or group with narrative authority. In Chapter 4 the three key themes are explored historically, focusing on the key moments in the past and collective memories and narratives relevant for each theme. In the subsequent chapters, broadly following the same three themes, the discursive practices will «depart» in two opposite directions: I will show how the narratives about the past were used by dominant voices to promote 1990s violence, but also how they were (counter)-used by advocates of non-violence to support cooperation in the *oases of peace*. Chapter 5 focuses on the discourses of violence and Chapter 6 brings examples of selected counter-discourses at supra-local level. As in the following Chapters 7 and 8 which are discussing the cases of two specific communities, the focus is on the discourses that were setting the tone and exerting strong influence on the behaviour of the population.

Two community *case studies* were conducted and their results presented and analysed in Chapters 7 and 8. The two case studies contain features of ethnographic research, involving in depth work with selected members of the two communities, exploring the social phenomena of their past behaviour and analysing the different aspects of their resistance to ethnic fracturing. The case studies refer to the communities in the city of Gorski kotar in Croatia (Chapter 7) and in the region of Tuzla in Bosnia- Herzegovina (Chapter 8). These two communities were selected as the largest communities in the two countries where inter-ethnic cooperation was preserved throughout the war period. Although several other communities in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina attempted to preserve their multi-ethnic character, under extreme pressure of entrepreneurs of violence almost all of them ended up dividing along ethnic lines at some point during wartime. My research was interested in those communities where multi-ethnicity was preserved until the end of the war and which had a significant proportion of at least two ethnic groups.

At the beginning of my enquiry it seemed that there were scarce texts and talks occurred immediately prior to and during the wartime which could be used

for analysing discourses in Gorski kotar and Tuzla related to my research questions. This is why I initially believed that the interviews would be my main source of data, while I was aware that the lapsed time since the war – almost 25 years – would significantly influence the data generated through those interviews. However, throughout my fieldwork and mostly thanks to the intensified contacts and established trust with many members of the communities of the two *oases of peace*, I managed to gather a significant number of very valuable written and recorded texts produced immediately prior to or during the wartime, including personal writings, local media pieces, authentic speeches, press releases and even private recordings of meetings. As the authentic materials occurred prior to or during wartime, over which myself or my informants had no further influence, were the most adequate type of information for my research, I decided to use them as the main source of data, while interviews got a supporting role in complementing or illustrating the information gathered through analysis of “real-time” materials.

For the purpose of the two case studies, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected inhabitants of the two *oases of peace*, as part of the fieldwork in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Croatia. Focusing on the local accounts of the 1990-1995 wartime period, I interviewed 21 persons, including 9 respondents in Gorski kotar and 12 respondents in Tuzla. The strategy chosen for the selection of interviewees was dimensional sampling. The interviewees were selected based on several categories that I had created in advance. Firstly, as my research is focusing on the discourses that were able to influence the behaviour of the population during wartime, I only selected the interviewees who themselves had high or at least medium level of influence over the population of their communities during wartimes. Furthermore, I made sure that my respondents had different types of influence, and created the following categories for that purpose: political, military/police, media, religious and civil society. As the inter-ethnic relations during wartime were in the focus of my study, I made sure to include interviewees from all relevant ethnic groups in each community. I also paid attention to the gender diversity among my interviewees. Finally, in the region of Gorski kotar I included the criteria of territorial coverage and worked with interviewees from different villages and

towns located in those areas which were most at risk of armed conflict. The table of interviewees from the two communities is available in Appendix 1.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, which was conducted during several intervals between early 2014 and mid-2016, I applied the snowball sampling approach, initiating my enquiry with the pre-established contacts in the two communities. These contacts helped me to identify and approach more respondents from the population of interest, and this is how my network of informants kept growing during my visits to the two *oases of peace*.

For the primary data generation, I developed a semi-structured interview guide, consisting of two parts. The first part of the interview followed the form of an oral history interview, inviting the respondents to share their life stories during war times and depict the past in their own words, following their own sense of what was important (Arksey and Knight, 1999). The second part of the interview was structured and aiming to cover a set of aspects that were crucial for addressing my research questions. Those questions were arranged thematically. The analysis of the data collected during the first round of interviews revealed some aspects that I had not considered initially, which crystalized as key for addressing the research questions. This is why I conducted a set of follow-up interviews with 9 interviewees, as many as four interviews with some of them. All interviews were conducted in the local languages (Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian), which are very similar. All initial interviews were conducted in person and most of them took place in the house of the interviewee and without presence of other people. The initial interviews were recorded and the recordings stored safely. Four of the follow-up interviews were also conducted in person, and other four were conducted by phone and one was conducted by Skype.

During my first contact with the respondents, I verbally provided them with clear information on the purposes and methods of my research, the benefits it might have, but also on the potential risks that it entailed. I made sure that the information about the research was transmitted in a clear and easily understandable way and that enough information was given so the participants could take an informed decision about joining the study. All the participants

identified as potential respondents agreed to be interviewed, although one of the respondents was clearly reserved in his answers.

The verbal consent of the interviewees was recorded prior to the interviews. All participants were offered the possibility to withdraw their consent at any time, by orally informing me of that decision. None of the participants decided to withdraw from the research. As part of the consent seeking and consent giving process, I guaranteed the participants that the recorded media and the transcripts would be stored under lock. I also took the responsibility of destroying the tapes and shredding the transcripts immediately after the study was finalized. I guaranteed confidentiality to the interviewees by ensuring that they would not be named or otherwise identifiable in the study.

A set of categories related to the key themes, key concepts and research questions was developed and used for coding of the data collected from pre-existing documents and records, as well as of the data generated through interviews. I applied a thematic approach to systematize the data by those categories.

As proposed by Potter and Wetherell (1987), the analysis of the data had two main phases. Firstly, I searched for patterns, both in the form of variability (differences in the content or in the form of accounts) and in the form of consistency (identification of features shared by accounts). Secondly, I analysed the data in terms of functions and consequences of the discourse, and formulated hypotheses about these functions and effects searching for linguistic evidence. The immersion in the data collected during the first round of interviews revealed the existence of additional aspects that were not covered by the initial categories. Therefore, I developed new categories that were used in the second round of interviews.

Finally, in the last chapter of this study I attempted the cross-case synthesis in order to interpret my findings across the two different case studies, analysing commonalities and differences, and indicating the potential direction of further study.

3.2.3. Challenges and ethical concerns

Already at the stage of designing my research I have identified and reflected on several potential challenges and envisaged the strategies to address them. Prior to engaging in the fieldwork, I prepared and submitted the Research Ethics Application Form, which was reviewed and approved by the Committee for Ethics in Research of the University of Bradford.

Several of the expected challenges materialized during the research, while some others did not. As expected, my origin as a Croat national, my own set of values and my background as a peace and human rights worker put me in a specific position vis-à-vis the research and the respondents. During war my family and I were not affected by direct violence, nor did I lose any of my friends due to armed violence. Although I am a Croatian national, I consider my national group identity to be of low salience. However, as a peace and human rights advocate I do have strong feelings against war and other human rights violations, including divisions based on ethnic identity. Aware of my own strong appreciation for the communities which challenged ethnic divisions and remained ethnically heterogeneous, throughout the research I kept alert of this fact as a possible source of my own biases as a researcher. This is why whenever I identified such potential biases, I made sure to triangulate the information or my own observations.

I further observed that my Croatian ethnic origin did cause a certain level of caution in one of the respondents of Serb ethnic origin in Croatia. I linked that caution to the political events which took place just two days before our interview, and during which inter-ethnic tensions in Croatia were again stimulated. I respected the decision of that respondent to give me short and general answers, without really sharing his own views or experiences. I also got the consent of the respondent to come back to him with follow-up questions and observed that he was slightly more open during our follow-up interview.

The topic of the research being related to hardships experienced during wartime as well as to complex and often sensitive inter-ethnic relationships, I remained aware of the emotional harm that might be triggered by narrating

(which is, in a way, reliving) some of the painful experiences. Even though the communities in the *oases of peace* did not engage in communal violence, they were affected by violence in the rest of the country, e.g. losing family members in other areas, not being able to travel or to communicate with the rest of the world, suffering scarcity, etc. This is why I cautioned the participants in advance about the potential risk of emotional harm, while I was explaining the structure and nature of the interview process. I also kept the contacts of professionals who could provide specialized help in case of emergency. Indeed, several of the respondents got emotional during the interviews, and I was sensitive and empathetic while talking to them, offering support and time to process own emotions. Only in one case I observed that the interviewee was experiencing a strong reaction while going through own wartime experiences. I offered to postpone our interview, but she decided to carry on. After the interview this respondent, just like several other respondents, told me that narrating their experiences brought them the feeling of relief. Also, most of them were very proud of the experience of their communities preserving positive inter-ethnic relations and expressed hope that those experiences would be documented and shared for the benefit of future generations.

While defining the methods of data generation for my research, I have initially considered the use of focus groups. Nevertheless, after carrying out a risk assessment, I realized that some sensitive information that might be disclosed or uncovered during focus groups could put the participants of those group interviews at risk of political or social ostracism. Therefore, I abandoned the idea of using group interviews and concentrated on individual interviews only, making sure that informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality procedures were strictly followed and respected.

Taking into account that my research was approaching the communities in the *oases of peace* as a counter-discourse and practices of resistance to violence, I also expected the respondents' potential bias in the form of the «the good bunny syndrome», when the respondents try to offer answers that they judge the researcher wants to hear (Robson, 2002). I mitigated that risk through the targeted selection of respondents, including those which were in

favour of violent solutions, and by approaching the respondents in a way that did not insinuate my own views on the issue. I also explained to my respondents that my aim was not to establish the “true” or “real” account of events, but to hear their own experiences and perspectives.

Throughout my research I remained aware that different versions of reality or truth can be told through the operation of “emplotment”, thought which the facts are always structured in such a way that they become a component in a particular story. With its innumerable facts, history is always subject to selective interpretation. In this context, the selection of some facts and omission of others is particularly important because their sequence results in different stories with different cause-effect logic. This became evident to me as I was observing the selection of war-related facts and events by different authors, where actions of specific groups were usually explained and sometimes also justified as a reaction to the previous action of another group (e.g. the Serbs attacked due to fear of mounting Croatian nationalism, or Yugoslav National Army was attacking due to the premature recognition of independence of Slovenia and Croatia, etc.). It is important to keep in mind that the focus of this study is not on the causalities of the violent conflict. I rather focus on the contributors to violent conflict – discourses that fuelled violence and promoted it as the (only) solution to the problem. Also, my study adds several actors and events that are usually omitted in conventional narratives on the wartime events, therefore it adds complexity to the wartime (hi)story. However, I am aware that the narratives emplotted in my study, particularly the ones related to the two *oases of peace*, are equally a result of my own selection and interpretation of events, and therefore are only one of the many possible versions of the past.

As a researcher adopting a social constructionist approach, I tried to offer a new perspective and my own meta-narrative of specific aspects of war times in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. My meta-narrative is based on my own interpretation of different discourses and counter-discourses, with the specific novelty of introducing into the “plot” the voices of the people who are usually excluded from it, such as the people from the *oases of peace*. Locating my

work within the framework of Social Psychology and using the method of discourse analysis, my research was guided by the arguments of Potter and Wetherell (1987), eminent social psychologists who argue that the validity of a discourse analysis can be determined by focusing on coherence and fruitfulness or the explanatory potential of the analytical framework, including its ability to provide new explanations and to present new problems.

3.2.4. *Other methodological considerations*

The English translation of all the texts gathered in the local languages was done by myself. This includes several books originally written in English which were available to me only in Croatian. Throughout the study I have been introducing *italic* to highlight specific parts of text that I found particularly relevant. Therefore, the italic in the quotes is also my own, and not of the original authors.

When referring to the armed violence in the former Yugoslavia, in the research I sometimes use singular (war) and sometimes plural (wars). While some scholars consider that it was one war (the war of dissolution of Yugoslavia), others discuss about several wars (war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, war in Croatia). The views on this issue mostly depend on the perceptions of the dynamics of armed violence in the former Yugoslavia, which are not relevant for this study.

In the selection of terminology referring to the overall experience of the two researched communities, I was initially considering two possible terms: *oases of coexistence* or *oases of peace*. The term *coexistence* had the benefit of putting in the focus the resistance to ethnic divisions in the two researched communities, but did not encompass some other aspects of their experiences beyond inter-ethnic cooperation. The term *oases of peace* had the benefit of reflecting also some additional aspects of positive peace in the two communities, as absence of direct, structural and cultural violence emanating from within those communities, but seemed to be somewhat inaccurate as the peace of the two communities was disrupted from outside. This was particularly the case of Tuzla, as the city was exposed to extensive direct

violence from its surroundings, such as shelling, disrupted provision of food which caused hunger, etc. Interestingly, without me prompting this discussion, both in Gorski kotar and in Tuzla several respondents and other citizens mentioned that they disliked the term coexistence, because it made them feel as if they were living one next to the other, while they felt that they were living – together. Respecting and strongly valuing the views of my respondents on the experiences of their communities, I decided to opt for their preferred term and refer to their communities as *oases of peace*. Many of their narratives were grounded in the collective memories of the past, which will be thematically addressed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Grounded in the past: tracing the emergence of key discourses and practices influencing group identification processes, inter-group relations and governance on the territory of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina

«(H)ere one sees the Bosnian peasant of Orthodox faith drop his contribution into the cup of a blind Mussulman who squats, playing his goussle¹, at the entrance of a mosque. Glancing at the peaceful little stalls where Christians, Mussulmans and Jews mingle in business, while each goes his own way to cathedral, mosque or synagogue, I wondered if tolerance is not one of the greatest of virtues». (Lester Hornby, quoted in Malcolm, 1994)

Recalling the observation of Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), who noted that our knowledge shapes our worldviews within which *some forms of action become natural and others unthinkable*, this chapter aims at setting the context and helping understand the historical evolution of selected areas of knowledge as socially constructed meaning and motivator of action in the former Yugoslavia. The three key themes which emerged from the analysis of the available data as strongly influencing the attitudes and behaviours of the population prior to and during 1991-1995 conflict include: *group identification processes, inter-group relations and governance*.

The analysis also indicated that there is a variety of past discourses and events, as well as related *collective memories* in those three areas, which could be used to support violence, but also to support peace, mainly depending on the aim of those selecting and awakening specific collective memories. This is why the same three key themes will be broadly orienting the structure of the subsequent chapters, indicating how some past discourses and practices identified here evolved into discourses promoting ethnic fracturing and war

¹ Traditional instrument in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

(Chapter 5), and how others evolved into promoting inter-ethnic cooperation and peace (Chapters 7 and 8).

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the emergence of key discourses and practices which supported either violence or non-violence during the dissolution of Yugoslavia, helping to respond to the secondary research questions on the evolution of dominant discourses of violence and counter-discourses which were challenging them. Using the existing literature, this chapter explores and refers to the most powerful types of discourses identified in Chapter 3, namely institutional texts, political discourse, media discourse and textbooks.

4.1. Group identification among South Slavs: a complex and continuously evolving process

4.1.1. Group identification dynamics prior to the 19th century

The arrival of South Slavs to the western part of the Balkans, which would much later become Yugoslavia, took place in the sixth and seventh century. Slavs are «the most numerous ethnic and linguistic body of peoples in Europe» (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2014). They are commonly divided into three main groups: East Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians); West Slavs (Poles, Czech, Slovaks); and South Slavs - the group which is in the focus of this study - including Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins, but also Bulgarians. The main connector of the Slavs is the *language*. Belonging to the Indo-European group of languages, Slavic languages are divided into the same three groups specified above: northern, western and southern Slavic languages. As will be discussed later in the text, the notion of the *common language as an aspect of common identity* would be at the very heart of the political movement in the late 19th century that set the grounds for the establishment of the common state of the South Slavs – Yugoslavia.

When arriving to the territory of the Balkan Peninsula, the Slavs - including Croats and Serbs - were pagans. The autochthone population that the Slavs

encountered on the Balkans was called *Illyrians*, and they were the oldest known population living on the territory of the current Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina for which there is written and material vestige.

Upon arrival on the territory of the Western Balkans, Croats and Serbs came across a significant political dividing line: the one that had been fracturing the Roman Empire into its Western and its Eastern side. The Croats settled on the western side of the line, which side also included the major part of Bosnia. The Serbs settled on the eastern side of that dividing line, and progressively spread also into the area of Herzegovina. Since the arrival of the Slavs to the Western Balkans, *many different dividing lines and borders would be traced on this territory*. As claimed by Udovicki (2000, p. 14) «few of the fault lines were of local making. Most had formed through the designs of outside powers, whose intersecting Balkan interests fragmented the fabric of indigenous life in a pattern contradicting the vital needs of the Balkan peoples, and leaving among them a thick haunting deposit of tensions and mutual suspicions». However, as will be elaborated later in this chapter, there were also numerous attempts to build trust and promote unity and harmony among South Slavs, particularly as a way of protecting own group identity and interests against external influences.

The *Ottoman invasions* that began in 14th century left an indelible mark on the history and society of the Slavs in the region. Luketic (2013) rightly observes that the modern discourse on the Ottoman empire – both in the territories subject of this study, particularly their Christian parts, but also in other European territories - is silent on many important historical facts about the Empire, such as *religious tolerance* that often prevailed in it, *acceptance of diversity*, *cultural advances* of the Ottoman era, diplomatic relations and similar. The overall perception of the Ottoman era is almost entirely negative, it is represented as the dark time of repression, killing, kidnapping and dying, which resulted in «an exclusively negative discourse on the “Turks” throughout Christian Balkans, and, in general, in the creation of the “imaginary Turk” as our greatest enemy» (Luketic, 2013, p. 146). This perception played a very important role during the 1991-1995 armed conflict, within the «renewed»

national identity of Serbs and partially also of Croats, which was promoted by the elites to instigate and justify violence against Bosnian Muslims.

The Ottoman army conquered the Kingdom of Bosnia in 1463. The *Islamization* of the large proportion of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina remains one of the key features of the Ottoman rule in that area. A number of discourses related to this process were analysed by Malcolm (1994), who comes to several important conclusions. Firstly, he confirms that *there was no massive or forcible change of religion in Bosnia*, as the policy promoted by the Ottomans was not focused on changing people's religion but on drawing out financial, human and other resources for the benefit of the rulers. Malcolm shows how *the main reasons for passing from Christianity to Islam in Bosnia were of economic and social nature*: in order to avoid specific taxes or have the opportunity to make a career in the apparatus of the Ottoman state, one had to be Muslim. This is an important insight which points at the instrumentalist rather than primordialist nature of group identity, including religious group belonging, which will be confirmed on numerous occasions throughout the history of this territory.

Secondly, Malcolm shows evidence of the interconnection of different beliefs in Bosnia, which were often not based on the religious texts but on pre-Christian traditions and mystic. There is vast evidence that *religious syncretism* was prevailing among the inhabitants of medieval Bosnia, with habits being often «borrowed» from one religious group to another, indicating that limits between different religious (or ethnic) groups were rather permeable, contrary to the generalized perception and primordialist claims. Moreover, it is important to recall that even though the religion was claimed by 1990s dominant nationalist voices as one of the indispensable and everlasting aspects of national identity of national groups in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, this claim is challenged by the analysis of past discourses and practices that will be presented in the next section.

4.1.2. *Social identity discourses in the service of South Slavic unification: the cases of Illyrianism and Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes*

Having experienced the rule of a number of foreign powers, in the nineteenth century the South Slavic elites considered their linguistic ties and their common origin as a factor prevailing over their differences. This can be linked to motivational theories of group identification, explaining that group formation and group identity meet fundamental needs for reducing uncertainty and achieving meaning and clarity in social contexts (Hogg and Mullin, 1999). The in-group identification is closely related to the perceived or realistic threat presented by the out-groups. In the Western Balkans context of mid-nineteenth century, this translated into a perception of *threat for several small ethnic groups or nations to become dominated by culturally and linguistically bigger groups such as Austrians/Germans, Hungarians or Italians*. This might explain the parallel evolution of *two types of group identification processes* – the *national integration processes*, which were undertaken by Serbs, Croats and Slovenes concurrently with the *process of political unification of South Slavs into one state*. It is important to note that the struggle for the national (ethnic) identity came hand in hand with the idea of creating Yugoslavia as a union of different Slavic nations (ethnic groups), and that several key political leaders were pursuing the *common aspects of identity* of South Slavs, rather than insisting on their differences.

The South Slavs' political unification process was neither simple nor without opponents. However, the prevailing stream was the one which saw the unification of South Slavs into a single state as means of overcoming the rule of foreign powers and secure the survival of small and disadvantaged nations in the international arena. The 1990s dominant discourses that were portraying the protection of national identity and Yugoslavia as two mutually excluding concepts, and which were often used by the political leaders to justify the violent Yugoslav dissolution, remained silent about the beginnings of Yugoslavia during which these two categories were complementing, and not excluding each other.

Illyrianism as a step towards modernism also took part in Serbia, where it involved a revolt against conservative clerical leadership. The secularization of Serbian national feeling was one of the contributions of a philologist Vuk Karadzic, who promoted the national feeling based on the language, not religion. This and other experiences clearly demonstrate that what is considered as an important trait of identity, or what becomes salient and what doesn't, greatly depends on the leadership and its agenda. Furthermore, the group identity aspects which are made salient can be used to unify people (e.g. language) or do divide them (e.g. religion), to appeal for violence or to promote cooperation, and those aspects are clearly not fixed or pre-determined.

In the case of Croatia, Banac (2001) claims that the approach to Croatian national movement was a careful balance between *political Croatian feeling and cultural Illyrian feeling* (later on Yugoslav feeling), in which religion played almost no role. It is highly important to note that religion, which was promoted as one of the core aspects of national identities in the 1990s and even proclaimed as one of the main causes of violent conflicts during break-up of Yugoslavia, was considered as nearly irrelevant during previous national movements. In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Malcolm (1994) observes that prior to the WWI many renowned inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina publically referred to themselves a "Croats of Muslim religion" or "Serbs of Muslim religion", mainly reflecting their feeling of *cultural identification*. These examples confirm that collective identities can have a number of similar forms (ethnic, political, cultural, national, etc.), which are not clearly delimited and include or exclude a number of different aspects. These examples also illustrate the conceptual framework exposed in Chapter 3, which proposed that «the identifier of ethnic identity can be anything» (Slack and Doyon, 2001, p. 139).

When *the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes* (later renamed to *Kingdom of Yugoslavia*) was created in 1918, its Constitution described Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as «three tribes of the same nation», adding even more complexity to the group identification terminology. In his review of the history textbooks used in the time of the Kingdom, Petrungaro (2009) observes the

predominance of the auto-stereotype over the hetero-stereotypes. While in the post-Kingdom period the history textbooks would contain a number of predominantly negative hetero-stereotypes about «the others», mostly other ethnic groups from the region, the textbooks of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were focusing on the *auto-stereotype, which subject was the «Yugoslav person»* - the one who was to embody the new Yugoslav national identity. «The characteristics of that person were loyalty to the governing dynasty, inclination to coexistence with other Yugoslav nations, fidelity to the new state» (Petrungaro, 2009, p. 42). This is an example of *top-down interventions into the social identification processes* that will become very common on the territory of Yugoslavia, as will be shown in this and next Chapter.

Petrungaro (2009) further points at the strategy of the Kingdom's authorities promoting intentional forgetting, whereby the citizens were requested to stop looking at the past and only look towards the future. In the attempt to promote the «new», Yugoslav group identity, the King himself asked the population to erase from their minds anything that happened before his dictatorship. *Attempts to deny or ignore the past for the sake of unity*, rather than efforts to understand the past and deal with it, would also become a pattern that would be repeated throughout Yugoslav history, discouraging critical thinking and poisoning relationships among different identity groups. The top-down interventions into the social identities, including the manipulation with the past, will continue throughout 20th century, as we shall see in the next sub-heading.

4.1.3. Evolution, complexity and multiplicity of social identification prior to the break-up of Yugoslavia: ethnicity, nation(hood), citizenship and other categories

A number of factors related to the Yugoslav context must be taken into account to unfold the complexity of social categorization in the country, which had major implications on the war-time discourses and behaviours. The first one of those factors that is analysed below is the terminology used in the three-level system of national rights introduced after WWII.

Nations, national minorities and ethnic minorities

In the nascent 1945 Yugoslavia the terms *narod* and *narodnost* were given specific meanings that would play an important role in the political discourse and significantly influence the group identification processes in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav times. As described by Bringa (1993, p. 85) «(a) key concept within socialist nationality policies is represented by the terms "nation" (*narod* or *nacija* in Croatian / Serbian) and "nationality"² (*nacionalnost*). Both terms are most commonly translated as "ethnic group" in Western literature». Hromadzic (2014, p. 264) warns against seeing collective identity in pre-war Bosnia-Herzegovina through the prism of the Western idioms of group identity, because «transplanting Western terminology to the Balkan context tends to flatten and assimilate different forms of local collective identity into the Western models of nation and ethnicity». As elaborated in Chapter 5, I concur with Hromadzic and argue that the perception of the Balkans, including its group identities, through the Western lenses and without taking into account the specificities of local group identification processes contributed to discourses and practices of violence during 1991-1995 conflict.

As mentioned before, when the new Yugoslavia was born in 1945, after WWII, it was defined as a federation of republics with three-level system of national rights, assigned to *nations*, *national minorities* and «*other nationalities and ethnic groups*». Initially five groups were recognized as nations: Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Macedonians and Montenegrins. Bosnia-Herzegovina was an exception – it was the only republic without a majority of a single nation, and this fact would play an important role during the break-up of Yugoslavia. In addition to Serbs and Croats, Bosnia-Herzegovina was also inhabited by Muslims. Being a group defined by religion, Muslims were initially considered

² While it is challenging to adequately translate the concepts that were loaded with ideological and popular meaning specific for Yugoslavia, and although in some other contexts the most adequate translation for *narodnost* might be nationality, I would still argue that the more appropriate translation of *narodnost* in the Yugoslav context is national minority (or ethnic minority), because the main difference between *narodi* (nations) and *narodnosti* (national minorities) resulted from Yugoslavia being or not being their main homeland. If one of the Yugoslav republics was its main homeland, the group was recognized as a constitutive nation of Yugoslavia, while if the majority of the members of that group lived elsewhere, outside of Yugoslavia, that group got the status of *narodnost* - a national minority.

as a national minority. They got the status of a nation at an advanced stage of Yugoslavia, in 1971, which is another evidence of the changing character of group identity politics in Yugoslavia.

Albanians and Hungarians were the two largest national minorities in Yugoslavia, among eight others who were all granted a number of language and cultural rights. Thirdly, there was the categorization of *ethnic groups*, but it was reserved only to those groups who lacked their own kin-based states, such as Roma. Therefore, the understanding of the term ethnic group in the Yugoslav context was different to the one granted to the same term by Western discourse.

The complexity of group identities in Yugoslavia was further characterized by *distinction between one's national belonging and one's citizenship*. I was a citizen of Yugoslavia of Croatian nationality. While citizenship reflected the state of residence (Yugoslavia), the choice of nationality or belonging to an ethnic group was personal. As clarified by Bringa (1993, p. 85) «[...] in the multi-ethnic socialist state national identity is different from and in addition to citizenship. On an individual level it leaves room for manipulation and choice, since self-ascription and self-identification are the ultimate decisive factors. It is not necessarily a question of a person's state or place of residence. It is, in short, an identity a person can either inherit or adopt».

However, while it was leaving room for personal decision on national or ethnic group belonging, the state was the one defining which groups would get what status. This is why Bringa (1993) highlights that when considering the relationship between ethnicity and nationality, the literature often ignores the active role of the former socialist multi-ethnic states (such as Yugoslavia or USSR) in defining nationalities by conferring nationality status to some ethnic groups within their borders and contesting it to others. So «while in the West ethnic and national identities might be imagined and manipulated by individuals and communities, in socialist regimes it is the state that does the imagining» (Bringa, 1993, p. 85).

Changes in the administrative categories creating social identity uncertainty

During Yugoslavia, the heterogeneous social space was promoted and celebrated using the notion of brotherhood and unity. *The changing nature of administrative identity categories* in the country should be taken into account as another Yugoslav specificity. The list of administrative categories kept evolving with every census, which was held approximately every ten years. This certainly had an impact on the self-perception of the population as well as on their self-designation for administrative purposes. While in Croatia those changes had less effect, in Bosnia-Herzegovina they were more complex and significant.

The large number of changes that have occurred in the administrative categorization of the people living in Bosnia-Herzegovina is best illustrated by Bringa's (1996) description of the case of a man by the name of Atif. Born in the 1920s, throughout his life Atif was registered in the following categories defining his national belonging: «undefined», Croat, Yugoslav, Serb and Muslim. If Bringa would to repeat her study nowadays, and if Atif was still alive, it is very likely that today he would be «categorized» in the «newest category» - as Bosniak.

As observed by Jovic (2013), usually the nations decide on their leaders, but in this case the leaders were deciding on their nations. However, as rightly pointed out by the same author, the evolution of identity terminology is not some general, political category, but it deeply encroaches upon personal lives of individuals. Fundamental group identity issues were put in front of the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina and influenced their lives. Although further research would be needed to gain deeper insight into the levels and consequences of this phenomenon, there is no doubt that continuous changes of identity terminology have been creating a sort of *social identity uncertainty* among the population.

In such context, and taking into account the examples such as the one of Atif, it becomes evident that the widespread reductionist approach of considering Bosnia-Herzegovina as home of three ethnic groups with clearly defined and deeply internalized ethnic identities, was largely inaccurate.

Nevertheless, it was the main basis for pursuing the political arrangements and crafting the future of the country during 1991-1995 conflict.

As explained above, during Yugoslavia the census categorization kept changing, mostly affecting the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina of Islamic religion. Since 1971 they were given the possibility to declare as Muslims in the national sense³, in addition to Croats, Serbs, Yugoslavs and other nations and nationalities, and in the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution they were confirmed as a nation. Sarac-Rujanac (2012), Jovic (2013) and other authors relate this change in identity terminology and recognition of Muslims as a nation to various context-related issues. These include the role of Yugoslavia in the Non-aligned movement comprising numerous Islamic countries and the related attempt by Tito to portray himself as «a friend of muslims» by giving more visibility to Muslims in Yugoslavia.

Analysing several identity-related studies and surveys carried out in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1980s, Sarac-Rujanac (2012) informs that they clearly indicated that *the inhabitants of that republic were against artificial identifications and changes in identity*. This only confirms that the individual and collective identity feelings had little in common with the administrative changes made in terminology, as the changes were continuously imposed top-down by the elites. In that context, one of the surveys showed that less than two per cent of the surveyed population in 1980s supported the newly introduced idea to change the name of their group identity from Muslims to Bosniaks. Nevertheless, in 1993 in the midst of war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bosnian political, academic and religious elites decided to implement this change. Filandra (2012) considers that this decision was an attempt to increase the national character of the group until then called Muslims, to make them look less as a religious group and more like a nation. This is another example how *group identities have been manipulated by the elites in*

³ To mark a difference between religion and national belonging, when the term Muslim was introduced to designate national belonging, it was written in the local language with upper-case initial letter (Muslim), while religious belonging was written with the lower-case initial letter (muslim). It is not hard to imagine how much confusion this symbiosis, but also a possible differentiation of national and religious identity, was creating to large parts of the population. For example, one could be of Muslim nationality and an atheist at the same time.

discrepancy with and largely ignoring the identity feelings of the population, which was under continuous pressure to keep «adjusting» to the new identity terminology. The resistance to such pressure and other factors supported the development of some more «popular» self-categorization terms, such as Yugoslavs or Bosnians.

Yugoslavs and Bosnians: two examples of supra-ethnic national identities

The possibility to declare as Yugoslav as national identity category was included for the first time in the 1953 census. Its formal description stated that this category would be used by *nationally undeclared persons*. In relative numbers, by 1981 census the number of Yugoslavs was highest in Croatia and Vojvodina (8.2% of the total population) and in Bosnia-Herzegovina (7.9%), while it was lowest in Slovenia (1.4%) and Kosovo (0.1%).

Discussing the interethnic relations in the former Yugoslavia, Sekulic (2001, p. 167) considers that «periods of interethnic peace start to melt the limits of the groups. In Yugoslavia that process is marked by the increasing number of individuals who declare themselves as Yugoslavs. The growing number of Yugoslavs in Croatia was blurring in the nationalist minds the clearly established lines between Croats and Serbs, establishing a transitional category which, instead of discontinuity, created continuity between national groups. When in the 1981 census the number of Yugoslavs increased significantly, and mostly in Croatia, this created a feeling of discomfort not only among open nationalists, but also among the “communist party” cadres».

Opting for Yugoslav identity as a supra-ethnic type of group identity can be seen as an act of resistance to national(ist) options and adoption of the project of common destiny. Research by Sekulic et al. (2004) identified several characteristics prevailing in the group of persons identifying themselves as Yugoslavs: they were mostly urban population, often from mixed marriages and with higher level of political participation.

The other supra-ethnic type of identity is reflected in the term Bosnian (Bosanac)⁴. Bosnian was a very common term in Yugoslavia referring to all inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina, regardless of their ethnic or national belonging. It was «a republic-wide, territorial identity» (Hromadzic, 2014, p. 266), which common use clearly demonstrates the interconnectedness and shared culture of different ethnic groups that were living in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The 2013 census in Bosnia-Herzegovina showed that this type of self-categorization is still very popular among the population of this country, as we shall see in Chapter 9.

4.2. Inter-group relations among South Slavs: long-term coexistence interrupted by several episodes of politically driven violence

In this section I examine several key moments influencing the relations among different social identity groups on the territory relevant for this study, focusing on discourses and practices of either cooperation or of violence among ethnic and national groups. The analysis indicates that, contrary to the claims about «ancient inter-ethnic antagonisms», during most of the time spent on the common territory different groups of South Slavs lived together in peace, forming a heterogeneous society. No armed conflict between them was recorded before WWII. Some of the political discourses and practices, such as the ones of Illyrianism in the nineteenth century and the one of Yugoslav Communists during and after WWII, proactively supported inter-group cooperation and insisted on the factors uniting different groups. However, other political discourses, such as the ones of pro-Nazi regimes of Ustashas or Chetniks during WWII or the ones of nationalist leaders in the late 1980s and 1990s, promoted resentments, fear and salience of exclusive national identities, which fomented violence.

The analysis indicates that it was the variety of political discourses, rather than the existence of bottom-up movements, that was guiding the behaviours of the population towards violence or towards inter-ethnic peace. Narratives of

⁴ Not to be confused with the more recent term **Bosniak**, also written **Bosniac** (**Bosnjak**), introduced since 1993 to define the Muslims from Bosnia.

both types of behaviour existed in the collective memories, and could be awakened to instigate peace or to instigate violence. Fear of being dominated by others was one of the most salient common denominators of the studied social identity groups, but the strategies of addressing this fear varied significantly, as we shall see in the next section.

4.2.1. Uniting to protect own national identities and interests

The peoples who inhabited the territory that would become Yugoslavia had experienced a long history of foreign domination: from Greeks and Romans, to Ottoman, German, Italian, Austrian-Hungarian, French and other rulers. Living on the crossroads of many dividing lines and having experienced a number of external rules, in the early nineteenth century their elites began to consider the idea of *South Slavic unification as a strategy to protect their national identities and interests*. This idea named Illyrianism appeared in the context of the collapse of two empires, the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian ones. As we have seen in the previous sections, national feeling and the protection of different groups' identities (national or ethnic identities), which will later be claimed by many as the main reason for the break-up of Yugoslavia, were actually at the very heart of the idea of the creation of Yugoslavia. In other terms, *the same reasons which were invoked for the creation of Yugoslavia were given for its violent dismantling*.

Although the Constitution of *the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes* described Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as "three tribes of the same nation", neither the force of the state machinery and official discourse nor the strength of South Slav unitarian spirit succeeded in forging a genuine nation out of these three "tribes" (Prpa-Jovanovic, 2000). The Kingdom never became a nation state, and the political tensions appealing to group identity interests would be recurrent throughout Yugoslav history. However, these *political tension were mostly present at the governance level and almost never translated into intolerance at the level of common people*. On the contrary, high levels of interaction and cooperation among citizens of different religious identity were often observed, as described in the quote opening this Chapter.

The first tensions in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would start soon after the adoption of a new constitution in 1921, which institutionalized the *domination of the majority* – in practice this meant Serbs - and installed a highly centralized state. The exceedingly centralized model provoked resistance from Croatian and Slovenian representatives⁵. The political tensions led to violence in 1928, when three deputies of the Croatian Peasant Party were shot in the Yugoslav parliament by a radical deputy from Montenegro. A popular Croatian leader Stjepan Radic was among the victims. His death certainly radicalized the Croatian national movement and aggravated the Serbian-Croatian political relations. On top of that, King Alexander took advantage of the situation and dismissed the National Assembly by a *coup d'état*. He suspended the constitution and set up a dictatorship, suppressing all forms of democratic activity in the name of Yugoslavism (Prpa-Jovanovic, 2000). He called himself a “unifying king” and also renamed the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Under the excuse that there should be no intermediary between the king and the people, he introduced the authoritarian rule and divided the country into provinces named after major rivers. This was an *attempt to remove the historical boundaries and promote the Yugoslav identity*, but also to *settle the ethnic tensions by denying their existence*. However, this strategy will prove ineffective, as we shall see from the following section

4.2.2. Extremist leadership in Croatia and Serbia committing group identity-based atrocities during WWII

Despite recurrent tensions, no armed conflict ever broke between Croats and Serbs until WWII. The same applies to Bosnians and other identity groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina. There was a history of political tensions – which, as previously explained, would mostly occur and remain at the level of political

⁵ As noted by Prpa-Jovanovic (2000, p.52), «Croatian Yugoslavism, the current that triumphed during World War I over Croatian ultranationalism, gradually lost its sense of optimism and enthusiasm in clash with real-life Yugoslavism. The Croatian public came to view the formula of three tribes in the constitution as a mask for Serbian expansionism and as the assimilation, if not the destruction, of the Croatian people». This view and this feeling would become a significant aspect of the Croatian national identity agenda, pursuing self-determination as a way out of subjugation.

leadership - as well as a history of cooperation and common goals and aspirations. However, several extremist movements that gained power during WWII and whose members committed widespread atrocities targeting specific ethnic groups would leave deep scars in the inter-ethnic relationships of the people living in Yugoslavia. These would serve so many times in the future as justification for new episodes of violence. The two main *extremist movements* were the *Ustasha movement in Croatia* and the *Chetnik movement in Serbia*, both of which also *spread into Bosnia-Herzegovina*.

On April 10, 1941, the German regime proclaimed the Independent State of Croatia (ISC, in Croatian Nezavisna Drzava Hrvatska or NDH) which also included all Bosnia-Herzegovina. ISC was a puppet state and one of the most cruel and barbarian satellite regimes of the Nazi Germany. It was run by Ustashas, extremist wing of the Croatian nationalist movement. The regime was based on the principles of racism and intolerance, and proposed the *ethnic cleansing of the Croatian territory by removal of Serbs, Jews and Roma* as one of its key goal. This was evident not only from the practices, but also from the formal discourse of Ustasha regime, including its mass media.

Goldstein (2009, pp. 31-32) illustrates this with quotes of several Ustasha leaders published in the national media. Among other, they stated: «Serbs have spread among Croats all the bad habits that are inherent to the Serbs, such as immorality, gambling, alcoholism, fighting and stealing»; or «Serbs left us with a terrible, disgusting, unwanted heritage, which we have to eradicate immediately, because the Croatian nation is one of the bravest guardians of the western heritage». The discourse was equally radical towards Jewish people and the Roma.

The racial discourse of ISC leadership was operationalized through orders and acts. The law on racial belonging and protection of Aryan race was proclaimed in April 1941. The official newspaper *Croatian people* (Hrvatski narod) published the definition of an Aryan and forbade marriage between Aryans and non-Aryans. Catholic and Muslim Croats were considered Aryans, while orthodox Serbs and other population was considered as non-Aryans. Ustasha regime also prohibited the use of Cyrillic alphabet, mostly used by

Serbs, as well as the use of the words which were not «in the spirit of the Croatian language». Serbs and Jews were told to move out of their houses, and were forcibly evacuated in case they disobeyed.

History textbooks followed the political orientation of the new regime. The “new” national history was written, based on the «radical de-yugoslavisation of the Croatian national history» (Petrungaro, 2009, p. 72). *The repertoire related to the cooperation and complicity among Yugoslav groups was replaced by the repertoire of violence, particularly between Croats and Serbs.* The attempts to present the Ustasha regime as a logical continuation in the Croatian history, the inter-ethnic relationships as characterized by tensions and conflicts, as well as the continuous desire of Croats to have their own independent state, are clearly reflected in the 1944 history textbook. «It took full 839 years for the old Independent State of Croatia to get its full sovereignty. Generations and generations have dreamt about it and from time to time actively pursued it, but what nobody achieved in those 839 years was finally achieved by the Poglavnik, dr. Ante Pavelic [head of ISC], with the help of his mighty allies» (Srkulj, 1944, p. 262). Fifty years later, similar discourse would be used by Croatian president Franjo Tudjman, who often spoke about a thousand years old dream of Croatian nation coming true in the new Croatian state proclaimed in 1990.

Both Ustashes and Chetniks were *justifying their own violence by presenting it as a response to the violence committed by other groups*, and a similar pattern would be used during 1990s armed conflict. The use of symbols and insignia of Ustashes and Chetniks by some of the wings of the parties in conflict during 1991-1995, and affirmative references to those regimes made by the key political leadership in that period, will greatly contribute to the massive perception of threat by large number of people, based on negative collective and individual memories of past atrocities.

4.2.3. Brotherhood, unity and national equality: positive inter-group relations promoted in Tito's Yugoslavia

While Ustashas and Chetniks were promoting ethnic intolerance and committing atrocities based on ethnic identity, they were opposed by a new movement that evolved during WWII. It was the antifascist movement led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which called for an armed resistance to Nazi and Fascist occupation of the country. Its members opted for the guerrilla type of war and called themselves Partisans. They attracted a significant part of the local population which was terrified by the atrocities committed by Ustashas and Chetniks, as well as by Italians in Dalmatia and Istria. *The Communists opposed the fratricidal war based on ethnic identity and promoted the notion of brotherhood and unity, as well as the concept of national equality.* The movement soon gained popularity in all parts of Yugoslavia.

The new notion of equality of the nations, as well as several other key elements of the discourse that would prove critical in the socialist Yugoslavia, such as their right to self-determination and separation of the nations, were introduced in the Declaration following the second session of Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AFCNLY), held in 1943 in Jajce, Bosnia-Herzegovina⁶. Most scholars agree that the promise of federalism was an attempt to overcome nationalisms, to establish national equilibrium and to overcome challenges faced in the past, particularly by guaranteeing to the non-Serbs that the centralized approach, which favoured Serbs in the past, would not be repeated. On the other hand, the right to self-

⁶ Article 2 of the Declaration states: «One of the most important sources of power of our struggle for the liberation of nations lays in the fact that the unique movement for the liberation of nations of Yugoslavia, as well as its army of national liberation, evolved from the liberation movements of all our nations. To initiate their struggle against the occupying forces, the nations of Yugoslavia did not need of any agreements on equality, or anything similar. They took arms, started liberating their country and consequently not only acquired, but ensured for themselves *the right to self-determination*, including the *right to separation and unification with other nations*. All the forces that participate in the movement for national liberation recognize these rights to all our nations. This is why the nations of Yugoslavia got closer together and established links in their joint struggle. During two and a half years of heroic struggle against the occupier and its allies, in the overall population of Yugoslavia the remnants of the great-Serbia hegemonic politics were destroyed, just like the attempts to disseminate hatred and discord. At the same time, the remains of the *reactionary separatism* were defeated. This created *not only material and political, but also the moral conditions for the creation of the future brotherly, democratic and federal union of all our nations, the new Yugoslavia, based on the equality of rights of all its nations*».

determination of the nations, which was maintained throughout the time of existence of Yugoslavia, would be claimed in 1990 in several republics, initially in Slovenia and Croatia, and would become the basis for the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

4.2.4. Raise of nationalism after the death of Tito

After Tito's death, major tensions and an *increasing nationalist tone* were first exacerbated in the autonomous province of Kosovo. The fact that a large number of Serbs left Kosovo in the 1980s - for economic reasons or in search of personal safety, or often for a combination of the two - was astutely used by Slobodan Milosevic, the ascending Serbian politician, to portray himself not only as a protector of the oppressed Serbs, but also as «the only one capable to protect them». His address to the crowd gathered at Gazimestan, a historical place in Kosovo, in June 1987, will be remembered as one of the key interludes into the war in Yugoslavia. During the day-long event marking the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo (1389), during which medieval Serbian state was defeated at the hands of the Ottoman Empire, Milosevic pronounced the well-known sentence alluding to his violent plans:

«Six centuries later, again we are in battles and quarrels. They are not armed battles, though such things should not be excluded yet» (Silber and Little, 1995, p. 77)

As observed by Udovicki and Torov (2000), Milosevic appeared as the only politician who was sensitive to the plight of the Serbian public highly frustrated by the apparent indifference of the regime to the fate of Kosovo Serbs. With the help of media, particularly the highly popular daily *Politika* and the official television, as well as by one part of the Serbian Academia, Milosevic portrayed himself as the «saviour» of Serbs and their only hope. As will be seen in the rest of this Chapter and in the following one, promoting the tunnel vision and the role of the political leader as a saviour will become characteristic for the nationalist governance in the 1990s.

In addition to the political leaders, specific circles in the academia significantly contributed to the evolution of discourses of violence from the 1980s. The Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA) played a significant role in the launch of a virulent discourse that would invade the public discourse and exacerbate the climate of fear and hostilities in the 1990s. In 1985 SASA created a committee which was tasked with preparing a Memorandum on «current social issues». The draft document was allegedly leaked to the media and immediately triggered a scandal due to the severity of its tone and content. As observed by Udovicki and Torov (2000, p. 89), «the Memorandum launched a new and virulent vocabulary, which in the next few years imbued the public discourse». It spoke of Serbia as a victim of «continuous anti-Serbian coalition» of forces including Slovenia and Croatia, but also all other republics of Yugoslavia. Describing Serbia as a victim of discrimination in Yugoslavia and Serbs as victims of disintegration, the text goes as far as naming the situation of Serbs in Kosovo as a genocide that requires «revolutionary struggle», «open confrontation» and «defeat of the aggression».

As observed by Milosavljevic (1995), the active role of the intellectual elite in the elaboration of this document was leaving the perception of objectivity, of a professional rather than political discourse, and in this sense its importance and weight was heavier than the one of clear political propaganda, even if the content was the same. Despite criticism from many actors, SASA never denied the contents of the Memorandum. Its discourse turned into a victimization storyline of Serbian leadership and a justification for violence against other national groups.

The SASA Memorandum propelled Milosevic and his so called «anti-bureaucratic revolution», the wave of popular unrest and «organized spontaneous protests» orchestrated by Milosevic. The pressure from Serbia got its response in Croatia, also in the form of nationalism. Dissatisfaction of the broader population with the rapidly deteriorating economic situation and the menacing discourse coming from Serbian leadership served as a wind into the sails of the Croatian political groups promoting the idea of full Croatian

independence. A similar process took place in Slovenia, and the swift departure of the two delegations, the Croatian and the Slovenian one, from the Congress of Alliance of Communists of Yugoslavia taking place in Belgrade in January 1990, would mark the beginning of the formal break-down of Yugoslavia. Several characteristics of the systems that had been put in place to manage Yugoslav communities and inter-group relations highly contributed to the violent nature of this break-down, as we shall see in the next section.

4.3. Managing communities for peace or managing them for violence: South Slavs and Governance

The third theme that arose from my immersion in the literature and collected data is governance or systems that were being historically put in place to manage the communities in the focus of this study. My analysis revealed several characteristics of those systems which played an important role in the evolution of discourses and practices of violence, as well as in the development of their counter-discourses. Systems that were being put in place to manage the intergroup relations and relevant group identities were in the focus of my interest, and pointed at a historical diversity of state-driven policies and strategies addressing intergroup dynamics. Those strategies varied from promoting inter-group cooperation and equity to fostering ethnocentrism and hostility towards «the others». The evolution of these two approaches towards discourses of war or counter-discourses of nonviolence will be explored in Chapters 5-8. The analysis of the above strategies is complemented by the examination of several additional aspects of governance which influenced the attitudes and behaviours during 1990s, such as generalized acceptance of unlawful behaviour in some areas, lack of democratic experience, cult of the leader or scarcity of critical media on the territory inhabited by South Slavs, among others.

4.3.1. *Beginnings of statehood among South Slavs*

The initial sense of national identity of several groups of South Slavs – including Bosnians, Serbs and Croats - was built around the period of medieval prosperity and *statehood that preceded foreign rule*. Those periods of independence and prosperity took place in different times for different groups, and were preserved in myths, legends and folk songs important for the development of national identity including national pride.

Serbs created their state at the beginning of 9th century, but it soon fell under Bulgarian rule. The medieval Serbian state was at its peak in 14th century, during the rule of emperor Dusan. For Croats, the year 925 remains «at the heart of the Croat national consciousness to this day» (Udovicki, 2000, p.14). This was the year when Croatia was granted autonomy under King Tomislav. For Bosnians, the year 1180 marks the beginning of the Bosnian medieval independence and power, which was characterized by three important rulers: Kulin ban, ban Stjepan Kotromanac and king Stjepan Tvrtko. Under the second ruler, Bosnia expanded to the territory of Herzegovina, while under the third one, in 14th century, Bosnia reached the maximum of its territory, including parts of today's Croatia. Despite many voices claiming the opposite, some prominent scholars insist that Bosnia has been a coherent entity for centuries (Donia and Fine, 1994), and that Bosnian territorial state developed a strong identity within its borders.

An important characteristic of the territories that were named after the ethnic groups residing in this part of the world, such as Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and similar, is that *throughout history these territories were frequently changing size and borders*. This characteristic would be exploited by the nationalist Serbian and Croatian leaderships during 1990s, as they would challenge the borders established during Yugoslavia and claim the right to the maximum of the territories that their states ever had.

4.3.2. *Vojna Krajina – territory of agreed unlawfulness and in continuous state of war*

In Croatia, the Ottoman invasions triggered the establishment of the so called Military Frontier (*Vojna Krajina*), one of the most important dividing lines that would have a strong influence on the political and social developments in Croatia ever since. Since 1102 Croatia was part of the Hungarian Kingdom. *Vojna Krajina* was established in 1578 and designed as a human shield area protecting Europe from Ottoman incursions. It was a buffer zone spreading in the form of arc from north-east to south-east of Croatia. As the land of *Vojna Krajina* was mainly devastated by Ottoman incursions, the offer was made by the ruling elites to members of the group called Vlachs (later on called Serbs), who fled the Ottomans from other areas and who were showing so called high military potential, *to inhabit that land and protect Europe in exchange for certain privileges, such as exemption from paying taxes, formal land property titles and enjoyment of local autonomy*. Evidence shows that the mentioned groups of Vlachs developed a *rigid military mentality, which was fostered by the imperial authorities*. From the moment of its establishment up to date, the area of *Vojna Krajina* remained one of the poorest areas of Croatia. Importantly, south-eastern part of the region of Gorski kotar, which is in the focus of the case study presented in Chapter 7, made part of the area of *Vojna Krajina*.

Bearing in mind that the armed violence in 1991 Croatia began in the area of *Vojna Krajina*, where the majority of Croatian Serbs lived, several aspects related to the establishment of *Vojna Krajina* are particularly relevant for this study. Firstly, setting up of *Vojna Krajina* was the first time that the Croatian Parliament lost (or, more correctly, gave up) its jurisdiction over one part of Croatia, which was consequently divided into *Civil Croatia*, ruled by the local elites, and *Military Croatia*, ruled directly by Vienna. Secondly, as noted by Goldstein (2003, p. 128), «*Military Frontier was a safeguard for Croatia, but at the same time for that territory it meant a continuous state of war – a constant “low intensity conflict”*», generalized insecurity and risk of travel, as well as undeveloped economy. Irregular payment of salaries of the defenders

encouraged robbery and created a *state in which stealing on one or another side of the Frontier became generalized and morally acceptable way of living*».

While recognizing the inter-dependence of Croats and Serbs related to Military Frontier, Udovicki (2000) considers that this arrangement fomented distrust and tensions between the two groups. «The resentment that Serbs, who were seen as intruders, encountered among all strata of the Croatian population merely strengthened their internal cohesion and militancy, and their belief that “home” was in Serbia», claims Udovicki (2000, p. 20) and concludes that «had Vienna never formed the Krajina in an effort to keep Europe out of the Ottomans’ reach, the history of Croat-Serb relations may have turned out rather differently».

4.3.3. State-induced violence against members of other ethnic groups: poisoning the inter-group relations during WWII

During WWII the foreign rulers enjoyed support from *local allies whose governance was particularly appalling because it included state-driven promotion of violent discourses and practices against members of other ethnic or national groups*. The Ustasha regime in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina was particularly outrageous for its concentration camps. Some 26 concentration camps existed during the Independent State of Croatia (ISC), the most notorious being Jasenovac. The number of persons who died at Jasenovac is still a matter of dispute, just as many other aspects of this disgraceful episode of the Croatian history. The estimated number of deaths is ranging between 60.000 and 100.000 persons.

Ustasha regime also ruled in Bosnia-Herzegovina, committing atrocities against Serbs in a number of places, while considering Muslims as fellow Aryans. Over time the widespread violence practiced by ISC leadership encountered indignation and modest attempts of resistance in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Several resolutions were written in 1941 in major towns of Bosnia-Herzegovina, mainly by religious leaders, objecting to atrocities. In

addition to resolutions from Mostar and Bijeljina, one such resolution was sent from Tuzla, one of the *oases of peace* explored in Chapter 8 of this study⁷.

The Head of ISC Ante Pavelic was placed above the law and the individual rights were «replaced» by collective rights, making ISC a notorious *example of non-democratic rule*. It is important to note that Pavelic was making efforts to present himself as a successor of Croatian national leaders such as Radic and Starcevic, and portraying ISC as a *continuum of the aspirations of Croatian people for independent state*. At the same time, ISC was all but independent, because it fully depended on Germany and Italy. The same claim of continuity would be heard at the beginning of the 1990s from Franjo Tudjman, the first president of post-Yugoslav Croatia. His attitude towards ISC remained very ambiguous, significantly contributing to the ethnicization of the conflict in former Yugoslavia, as will be elaborated in the next chapter. The use of symbols and rhetoric from ISC during 1990s would exacerbate fears of the Serb population in Croatia and encourage them to join the rebellion orchestrated by Slobodan Milosevic.

In Serbia, a collaborationist regime was also set up, under the name of Chetniks. The Chetnik movement had been initially established during the period preceding the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Although re-established in 1941 as a resistance movement, *Chetniks turned into another collaborationist and racist group particularly hostile towards Croats and Muslims*. The founder of Chetnik movement Draza Mihajlovic proclaimed that the political aim of Chetniks was the restoration of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the creation of great Yugoslavia consisting of great Serbia - spreading all the way to Slovenia, including all Bosnia-Herzegovina - and small Croatia consisting only of its current north-western part (Dizdar, 2009). Serbian nationalism was at the

⁷ Sent to the leadership of ISC in December 1941, Tuzla resolution protested against lack of order, due to which many Serbs were upset and willing to revenge. The resolution asked for political measures and punishment of those responsible for disorder. Interestingly, some 50 years later this same tendency towards order and justice, coupled with the capacity of the local authorities to ensure them despite chaos prevailing in their surroundings, would become one of the major contributors to the preservation of inter-ethnic coexistence and cooperation in that city during the 1990s war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

very heart of Chetnik movement, and it denied all non-Serbs the right to their own group identity.

The Chetniks' programmatic document was written by Stevan Moljevic in 1941, entitled «Homogeneous Serbia». Moljevic propagated the idea of Great Serbia as «unification of all territories inhabited by Serbs». In words of Chetnik leader Draza Mihajlovic, «wherever there are Serbian tombs, it is the Serbian land». The same idea would be later promoted by Slobodan Milosevic, under pretext that Serbs are not safe in the areas where they don't rule. The atrocities committed by Chetniks were not fully documented thus the number of victims is not known up to date, but the list of known victims amounts to some 50.000 Muslims and Croats killed in the period of 1941-1945.

4.3.4. Post WWII Yugoslavia: the attempts to make nationalism irrelevant

The governance systems that promoted hostility towards specific ethnic and national groups found opposition in the Communist Party members and the AFCNLY, which was constituted in 1942. During its second session held in 1943, AFCNLY became the supreme executive and legislative body of Yugoslavia. It took several decisions that would mark the future of Yugoslavia: it decided to establish Yugoslavia as a federation of republics, based on the right to self-determination of southern Slavic nations: Serbs, Croats, Macedonians, Slovenes and Montenegrins; it proclaimed equity of the nations and national minorities as one of its key principles; its leader Josip Broz Tito was proclaimed Marshal and Prime Minister of Yugoslavia; King's Petar II Karadjordjevic return to the country was banned and the government in exile revoked.

A number of military successes and the recognition by the Allies made the Communists win the war on the territory of Yugoslavia. However, starting from the 1944, there were *massive revenge operations of Tito's Communists against the so called «enemies of the people»* – those who had collaborated with the occupying forces, as well as the «class enemies», including bourgeoisie, clergy and all others who might have been still willing to support

the old regime (Goldstein, 2013). Enemies and potential enemies were being persecuted without trial, forcibly evicted and killed.

On November 29, 1945, the Federal National Republic of Yugoslavia (FNRY) was declared under leadership of Tito and the League of Yugoslav Communists (LYC). For 35 years Tito would remain the head of the Yugoslav state⁸. The massive support that Tito and Yugoslav leadership enjoyed from the people from all walks of life was certainly strongly influenced by the *hope that violence would be overcome by tolerance and solidarity*. Tepavac (2000, p. 65) claims that «Tito's slogan "Brotherhood and Unity", which today is frequently an object of scorn, was not empty demagoguery in a country where one million seven hundred thousand men, women and children had lost their lives, many because of ethnic hatred. The slogan reflected new hope in a population that had undergone a catharsis». Indeed, this was a new attempt to establish governance system that would help overcome the inter-group tensions and build trust and cooperation.

Drawing on the lesson learned from the past, Tito and his Communist Party leadership adopted a new approach to national identities in Yugoslavia. While in between the two wars the Yugoslav unitary policies were attempting to "create" one Yugoslav national culture out of the three "constitutive tribes", the Communist Party *attempted to supersede the national culture by ideology*. This means that rather than trying to discourage the political participation based on national identity, Tito and the communists attempted to establish a political system that would be *above* the national identity, to create a supranational culture. Hodson et al. (1994) consider that *many in the Yugoslav regime were convinced that modernization and the increasing importance of institutions of more rational character would weaken the existence of national identities*. In such scenario, *there was hope that an efficient educational system, mobility of the population, increased communications and commerce*

⁸ The period of Tito's rule could be broadly divided into 3 intervals: i) the 1945-48 interval of strong Soviet influence; ii) the 1949-74 interval of centralized state with intense political and economic reforms, and iii) the 1974-80 interval of decentralization.

would undermine the national feelings and lead towards the ethnic origin becoming irrelevant.

During the initial post-WWII years the Communist leadership focused on the creation of a unitary and centralized state under strong Soviet influence. The nationalization of private businesses and collectivization of agriculture were introduced as a way towards social justice and socialism as a new political order. Stalin's attempts to control Yugoslavia were received with a lot of concern in the political leadership and rejected in 1948, when «a historic, courageous and resounding *no* had been delivered to Stalin, with the overwhelming support of the Yugoslav people» (Tepavac, 2000, 67). Although some authors question such development considering that it was actually Stalin who excluded Yugoslavia from the Comintern (Malcolm, 2011), most scholars agree that Yugoslavia was the first communist country that openly and successfully opposed Soviet control. This event was of crucial importance for the creation of a freer and richer society in the communist Yugoslavia (Goldstein, 2013) when compared to the countries behind the iron curtain.

4.3.5. Yugoslavia: high standards of living, lack of freedom of speech and critical media

Indeed, as a consequence of the independence from the Informbiro and the Soviet Union, *the overall levels of human rights and freedoms in Yugoslavia were much higher than in the countries of the "Soviet Bloc"*. However, there were also serious *restrictions and breaches in a number of civil and political rights* including major limitations in the freedom of speech. Any attempt of challenging the official authorities was suppressed and sometimes severely punished. Most of the political prisoners were sent to an isolated island called Goli otok (literal translation: Naked Island), where they were subjected to forcible works while being "re-educated". According to Goldstein and Goldstein (2015) some 15.000 people were imprisoned on Goli otok, and some 400 of them died there.

The lack of freedom of expression severely affected the media in the country. Kurspahic (2003) explains that the Yugoslav press law prohibited a

very broad scope of activities and punished spreading «false information that threatened the national interest». He further elaborates that «such a general description of “threats” to and “enemies” of the state, combined with the unlimited power of the Party *apparatchiks* at all levels – local, regional, republican and federal – to interpret and implement the “law” in a way that would protect their privileges and authority, imposed on *all Yugoslav media a climate of self-censorship and reliance on exclusively official sources*» (Kurspahic, 2003, p.7). The media environment that was created in such conditions would have direct long-term consequences not only on the media workers, but also on the public consuming media contents. As will be elaborated in Chapter 5, *lack of freedom of speech combined with the lack of tradition of critical and independent media will have very negative effects during 1990s violent conflict.*

The levels of economic and social rights in Yugoslavia were relatively high. As expressed by Tepavac (2000, p. 71) «Yugoslavia was the only country that was well off, indeed rather comfortable, under Communism, and above all in regard to its living standard. Many inside and outside the country thought Yugoslavia had succeeded in finding an original road to socialism». For many years Tito managed to navigate between the Soviet and the Western models, with a high level of pragmatism and ensuring economic growth largely supported by foreign aid, developing the cult of leader, as elaborated below.

4.3.6. Yugoslavia: cult of leader, culture of fear and incapacity to deal with national issues

The educational system and all other aspects of public life in Yugoslavia were strongly characterized by the *cult of the leader* – Tito. At least one city or town in each republic received his name, as well as one of the main streets or squares in each city. Tito’s birthday on May 25 was declared a national holiday celebrated as «the day of the youth», with a number of rituals culminating in a major event taking place in Belgrade. A number of songs praising Tito were composed, one of the most popular ones stating: «Comrade Tito, we swear that we shall not deviate from your path» and «Comrade Tito, white violet, you

are loved by the entire homeland». As will be seen from the subsequent chapters, *the tradition of uncritically following the leader in a one-party system, including the lack of opposition or critical civil society, will be one of the key factors contributing to the unhindered spreading of dominant discourses of violence in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, promoted by new, nationalist leaders.*

Internally, Tito combined his discourse on peace with the continuous reminders to the Yugoslav citizens on the threats and enemies, both internal and external. «We should operate as if we were to live one hundred years in peace, but we should prepare as if tomorrow there would be war» was one of his popular statements repeated on numerous occasions. Another slogan that Tito and Communist Party leaders commonly used was: «The enemy never sleeps». Aware of the internal fragility of the innovative system established and adjusted on different occasions, and of the “disturbance” that Yugoslavia presented as a nonaligned country in the divided world, *Tito and the communist leadership* certainly had good reasons to be concerned. However, there is evidence that they *were spreading the culture of fear among the population of Yugoslavia with the aim of consolidating their role as rescuers and the only true providers of safety.*

Confirming that assumption, Sekulic (2004, p. 27) observes that «recalling the horrors of the civil war, *the fear of tumults was promoted and the perception was being created that the existing regime was the only guarantee of peace and stability*». As presented in Chapter 3, numerous scholars including Galtung (1990, 1998) explored the relations between fear and group violence and concluded that, while fear is a natural and often beneficial reaction, its high levels decrease our rational capacities, which can benefit different political agendas. *The strategy of fomenting fear of enemies of different types, which sets the ground for violence and often weakens any opposition to the regime, was used as a governance approach in Yugoslavia. It was also adopted by the leadership of several new states in post-Yugoslav times, fomenting inter-group suspicions and strongly contributing to the 1990s violence.*

The highly centralized approach and the initial hope of Tito and his leadership that the national voices would be gradually silenced in the socialist society and lead towards a generalized supra-national identification did not give desired results: more and more claims for decentralization and recognition of national categories were appearing from the 1960s. According to Banac (2001), Tito himself felt that the unitarism was undermining the national equality in the country and opted for a higher level of national freedoms for Croats, Albanians and Bosnian Muslims.

The tendencies towards decentralization of Yugoslavia initiated in the 1960s were coupled by students' movements taking place in the Eastern Europe, and particularly inspired by the 1968 Prague spring in Czechoslovakia, requesting political liberalization of that country. A movement encompassing a variety of ideological and social tendencies, named *Croatian spring*, would develop in Croatia and culminate in 1971. The movement had two streams: one with a tendency towards an antifascist and democratic identity of Croatia with more independence within Yugoslavia, and the other one based on national exclusivism, which in many aspects previewed to build on the tradition of the pro-Nazi Independent State of Croatia (Goldstein, 2013). Both streams were protesting against the unfair treatment and economic abuse of Croatia within Yugoslavia, requesting significant reforms in the political and economic system.

Banac (2001) claims that *Tito was unable to deal with the national issue and tried to solve it with a number of unsuccessful measures*. Goldstein and Goldstein (2015) confirm that Tito was in general indecisive and partially confused in that matter. He first tried to understand and cooperate with the leadership of the movement, but slowly his discourse became more threatening to end up stating that «Croatia became a major problem in terms of wild nationalism», and «under the masque of the national interests all sorts of devils gather there, nationalism, contrasting opinions, even the counterrevolution» (Goldstein and Goldstein, 2015, p. 673).

Tito's attempts to keep the balance and cooperate with the new stream in Croatia failed and slowly his approach turned into a real purge of the Croatian

Communist leadership. In early 1972 the entire Croatian leadership was forced to resign, several thousand of persons were arrested and many intellectuals were imprisoned after fake judicial processes. *Those promoting critical thinking in the media were accused of «falling under international influence»*, a serious accusation in communist terminology (Kurspahic, 2003). Tepavac (2000), who was serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia at that time, remembers that, after taking a decision to crush the unrest in Croatia and the related demands for reform, Tito said the prophetic words: «If you saw what I see for the future in Yugoslavia, it would scare you». *Requests for democratic reforms were similarly repressed one year later in Serbia.* Several authors claim that *Tito was simply unable to allow for the democratization of the country.* Instead, he was accumulating power and what was once Titoist Yugoslavia became nothing more than Tito's Yugoslavia, with him as the only functioning institution. He was not any more the head of the state, but the state itself (Tepavac, 2000). For Banac (2001), the violent ending of Croatian spring meant for Croats a national humiliation which, in retrospective, also marked the end of Croatian Yugoslavism.

Yugoslav leadership made several efforts to overcome the challenges of the centralized state, which made the political and economic functioning of the state increasingly difficult. In an attempt of decentralization, the 1974 Constitution – the fourth and last constitution of Yugoslavia - gave increased powers to individual republics, confirming the 1971 Amendments that were giving sovereign rights to the federal units, i.e. republics. Republics and provinces were given veto power in the federal assembly and the right to manage their own economies. The attempt was made to keep the national issues within the Communist party, avoiding the rise of nationalism through traditional nationalist groups. With the 1974 Constitution the republics acquired many aspects of the states (Goldstein, 2013). This would become the basis for the claim of independence of Slovenia and Croatia in 1990.

4.3.7. *Decomposition of the state system after Tito's death: sliding into nationalism*

Rarely any citizen of the former Yugoslavia will forget the TV breaking news announcement on the 4 of May 1980, when the highly distressed speaker pronounced the sentence: «Dear comrades, comrade Tito passed away». The derby football match between Hajduk from Split and Crvena Zvezda from Belgrade, two of the most successful football teams of Yugoslavia, was interrupted as the players and referees broke into tears, and the tens of thousands of supporters spontaneously started singing a popular song «Comrade Tito, we swear to you that we shall not deviate from your path».

However, the deviations from «Tito's path» started very soon after his death and the *1980s in Yugoslavia were characterized by the political and economic crisis, break-down of the socialist ideology, loss of authority of the Communist party and the general decomposition of the state system*. The so called rotating collective leadership of the state, whereby one representative from each republic and autonomous province were rotating as heads of the state each year, was established to fill the leadership vacuum left after Tito's death. Nevertheless, this structure proved incapable of reaching consensus on any important issue. The political impasse was worsened by the economic crisis with increasing foreign debt and shortage of imported products, such as gasoline and coffee. The austerity measures contributed to the increasingly heated debates over the economic relations of the republics and autonomous provinces. It became clear that the long-term strategies of support to the poorer republics, such were Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo, which were to ensure equal opportunities for development, did not yield desired results. In such circumstances, the tensions among political elites were mounting, and the decomposition of the state seemed unavoidable.

Several authors, such as Malcolm (1994) and Goldstein (2013), emphasise that *a federal or a multinational state can only function if based on truly democratic institutions, which was not the case of Tito's Yugoslavia*. Goldstein adds that, while there were many good intentions and the feeling that what was being done was «fair», *one major aspect that was lacking in Yugoslavia was*

the open debate and a democratic freedom to express opinions on the most pressing issues. This was not allowed in Tito's system, which *proved fatal particularly with reference to national grievances.* The lack of space for addressing them helped nurture extreme nationalism. Tito's lack of understanding of democratic debate is well illustrated in his statement: «They say that there is no criticism in our country, while I am myself the greatest critic of anything bad» (Tepavac, 2000, p. 75).

Sekulic (2004) draws attention to the process of decentralisation of Yugoslavia which allowed to the Communist League of each Republic to get monopoly over their territory. This process, resulting from the 1974 Constitution, created a fragmented political structure with centrifugal tendency that was kept under control during Tito's life. The same author further indicates that *the dissolution of Yugoslavia was triggered by the changes in the broader political environment and loss of internal legitimacy.* He points out that the legitimacy and domination of a ruling class in a specific state is not necessarily based on ideology, but often on the perceived threat from some other group, that the governing class uses to present itself the "guarantee of order".

In Yugoslavia, *the perception of the threat from the East, i.e. from URSS, was one of the main basis of legitimacy of the Yugoslav ruling class. This threat disappeared with the new geopolitical context and European integration process.* Sekulic (2004) therefore considers that with disappearance of the bipolar world the forces that kept Yugoslavia together also disappeared. This was *coupled with nationalism which was used strategically by the communist ruling elites in different republics in order to maintain power by presenting themselves as a «guarantee or order».* In an interview given as early as in 1981, a renowned dissident and theorist Milan Djilas predicted the break-up of Yugoslavia and warned that what its peoples were faced with was not a classical nationalism but a more dangerous, *bureaucratic nationalism built on economic self-interest.*

During 1980s Yugoslavia was facing a severe degradation of the economic situation. An attempt to deal with that problem was made by Ante Markovic, economist and Yugoslav prime minister who took office in early 1989. He

embarked on the reform of the Yugoslav economic system and gained large scale popularity by bringing inflation from 2800 per cent down to 4 per cent (Udovicki and Torov, 2000). However, his economic programme was openly sabotaged by the leadership of Slovenia, Serbia and Croatia, which had already embarked on the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia.

4.3.8. Multiparty elections in a non-democratic environment: prelude to war

First multiparty elections since WWII took place in the formerly Yugoslav republics in 1990. Many authors consider that those *elections indirectly supported the spread of violence, due to the victory of nationalist parties or coalitions in most republics*. I believe that this assertion should be considered in the context of lack of democratic tradition, limitations on freedom of speech and lack of critical media, among others.

In Croatia, Parliamentary elections were held in March and April 1990, in a highly tense atmosphere. The politically strategic use of fear, analysed in Chapter 2, was made and the fear instigated from two sides. The Serbian elites were spreading fears among Serbs living in Croatia by promoting the idea that their lives and wellbeing would be threatened if the country got full independence. At the same time, the Croatian elites were contributing to those fears by using nationalist and discriminatory discourse, including insignia from ISC and division of Croats and non-Croats into different «levels» of citizens. During election CDU won some 40 per cent of the votes, which in the existing electoral system secured to this party almost two thirds of the seats in the Parliament. That summer, Croatian tourist season was interrupted by a growing number of roadblocks installed by paramilitary forces of ethnic Serbs on the key roads connecting the coast of Croatia with the inland. The *spiral of distrust, discontent and violence would escalate during the referendum on the independence of Croatia*, held in May 1991. Serb leaders called for the boycott of the referendum. To the question: «Are you in favour that the Republic of Croatia, as a sovereign and independent state which guarantees cultural autonomy and all civil rights to the Serbs and members of other national

minorities in Croatia, can enter into association with other states?», over 93 per cent of the voters answered positively.

The Parliamentary elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina were held in November 1990, six months after the Croatian ones, with three nationalist parties – those formed by Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats - winning the majority in most places. While the war was ravaging in Croatia in 1991, most citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina were still hoping that they would not be reached by the same calamity. However, at the same time when its independence was declared in April 1992, Bosnia-Herzegovina would also slide into armed violence that would take over 100.000 lives of its citizens, tearing its multicultural society into pieces. The occurrence of the widespread violence was neither inevitable nor prompted from the grassroots levels. It was, as will be elaborated in the next chapter, instigated and driven through dominant discourses of the elites in the outburst of what Djilas rightly named a bureaucratic nationalism built on economic self-interest.

4.4. Tracing the emergence of key discourses in the three selected themes: conclusions

In this chapter I attempted to trace the emergence of the discourses and practices relevant for understanding the evolution of dominant discourses of 1991-1995 violence and some of their counter-discourses. The chapter was structured around three themes that were confirmed in the process of gathering and analysis of relevant data, namely group identification processes, inter-group relations and governance.

The findings of the chapter point at *very high levels of complexity and malleability of group identities on the territory of the former Yugoslavia*. The tracing and analysis of group identification processes presented above clearly contradict primordialist views on ethnic and national groups as «fixed», «bounded entities» or «natural order of things». They confirm the accuracy of constructivist and instrumentalist views on group identities, showing that those identities are flexible, open to frequent modifications of name, content and salience of specific traits, as well as suitable for adaptation to specific political

agendas. This can be clearly perceived from numerous changes in the group identities analysed in this chapter, including appearance and disappearance of specific identity groups, continuous changes in the group identity definitions used during census, sudden major shifts in self-perception of own group identity traits, sudden top-down changes in the names of specific groups, etc.

Therefore, one of the main conclusions of this chapter discusses the *ethnic identity paradox* in the case of dealing with the 1991-1995 conflict in the former Yugoslavia: while the main strategies of dealing with this conflict were based on the assumption that ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia were homogenous and defined by fixed traits, evidence shows that group identities were not static and that groups were largely heterogeneous. In the subsequent chapters I will elaborate on how the discourses on Yugoslav ethnic groups or nations as bounded entities became part of the dominant discourse supporting violence, while in the *oases of peace* multiple group identification processes were maintained and promoted to support cooperation and peace.

The historical analysis of key inter-group relations shows that *South Slavs have been living together for many centuries, establishing different types of alliances, which were interrupted by several episodes of top-down instigated violence*. Therefore, the repertoire of collective memories on inter-group relations contains both narratives of inter-group complicity and cooperation, such as at the times of Illyrian movement or Yugoslavia, as well as memoirs of group identity-based atrocities, the most outrageous ones having been committed during WWII under the pro-Nazi regimes of Ustashas and Chetniks.

The analysis further shows the diverse range of strategies of governance applied on this territory. In terms of state-driven policies addressing inter-group dynamics, the outcomes of the analysis indicate that *managing the inter-group relations was often very challenging*, but also that *governance discourses and practices were crucial in orienting the members of different groups towards inter-group cooperation or inter-group hostility*. Several additional aspects broadly or more closely related to governance – such as low levels of democracy, tradition of cult of leader combined with recurrent spreading of fear of “enemy”, severe restrictions on freedom of speech, lack of independent

media – were identified as contributors to future behaviours of the population during 1991-1995 conflict.

In the next chapter I will follow the evolution of several of the identified discourses into dominant discourses of violence, in combination with additional discourses of war identified during data collection, generation and analysis.

Chapter 5: On the road to violence: identification and analysis of dominant discourses which supported violence in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1991-1995

«Literal and figurative death of complex histories and hybrid identities has been reluctantly pronounced in Bosnia [...] With ethnic partition in place, nationalist parties victorious, populations increasingly homogenized, and ethnic cleansing still in operation, there seems little alternative to unhappy resignation about the lost possibilities». (Campbell, 1998, pp. 209-210)

Any attempt to uncover the genesis of a war as a social phenomenon must incorporate discursive and institutional continuities which render violent conflict a *legitimate* and widely *accepted* mode of human conflict (Jabri, 1996, p. 1).

The aim of this chapter is to uncover some of the discursive continuities through which the war(s) in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Croatia became widely accepted and legitimized option(s). In this attempt I am focusing on those discourses that had the power to influence the ways in which the problem and its potential solutions were shaped, i.e. the discourses that significantly influenced the knowledge, feelings, actions and interactions of people in those two republics of the former Yugoslavia.

As elaborated in Chapter 3, the most influential discourses comprise *institutional texts, political discourses, media discourses* and *textbooks*. In the case of media and political discourses, in this Chapter I am making further distinction between international and local versions of those discourses – distinguishing the views from abroad and the views from within the war-affected territories – as I consider that they played different although complementary roles and had different levels of influence on the wartime events and developments.

The analysis of the dominant discourses of violence is broadly oriented by the three key themes adopted in Chapter 4, i.e. group identification processes, intergroup relations and governance, which are closely interlinked. The origins of some of the dominant discourses of violence could be traced in the past discourses presented in Chapter 4, while others were of the more recent making. A schematic outline of dominant discourses of violence and their counter-discourses is presented in Appendix 3.

In the following section I will explore some of the discourses about the territory and society in the focus of my study that got generalized and dominant in the international arena. I argue that those dominant discourses strongly contributed to the widespread violence at direct, structural and cultural level, as they shaped the perception of the international community on the causes and proposed solutions for the 1991-1995 conflict.

5.1. The Balkans: «take a walk on the wild side»?

Balkan, or the Balkans, is primarily a geographical term. From the 19th century it refers to the peninsula limited by the Adriatic sea on the west, Black sea on the east, Aegean sea on the south, while its northern limits are defined either by the rivers of Soca, Sava and Danube, or by the Alps. However, as pointed out by Luketic (2013, p. 19), «over the past two centuries Balkans turned from the geographical term into a strong metaphor; the term reached such a semantic weight that it can't be used any more in a value-neutral sense». The author refers to the *widespread perception of the Balkans as a place of endless, deeply rooted hatreds and conflicts, while people who live on the Balkans are seen as irrational, cruel and barbarian*. The fantasies on the wild Balkans «can go so far to consider the violence as some sort of Balkan genetic substance, a permanent deviation of the people from this territory, to which sometimes paranormal, monstrous and vampire levels are ascribed. The origin of those fantasies is in the understanding that specific territories merit specific people, specific type of behaviour and even specific destiny» (Luketic, 2013, p. 21).

The widely spread international perception of the Balkans as a territory of irrational and barbaric people played a crucial role in the context of the 1991-1995 violent conflict. Firstly, due to such perception, the 1991-1995 violent conflict was largely perceived in the international arena as *inevitable*. It was seen as yet another one of the numerous wars among the small but homogeneous barbaric tribes in an area that was infested for centuries with violence. Silber and Little (1995) observed this phenomenon already at the earliest stages of the war, noting the international mediators behaved as if the war had no structural causes whatsoever, as if the cause of the conflict was some vague but often cited Balkan temperament, or some southern Slavic cultural or genetic tendency towards a fratricidal war.

Referring to the influential figures in the international arena, Gagnon (2004, p.1) notes that «they have resorted to the language of the premodern: tribalism, ethnic hatreds, cultural inadequacy, irrationality; in short: the Balkans as the antithesis of the modern West». This argument is supported by Campbell (1998, p. 90), who finds that «generalizations, encompassing characteristic that are all equally applicable to other circumstances, serve to mark the Balkans as backward, foreign, barbaric, uncivilized, fundamentally different – any of the significations that can be applied to “our” orientalisised others».

The stereotypes on the Balkans, its group identification processes and inter-group relations, largely influenced the views of the international community on the violent conflict in the former Yugoslavia, as well as its attempts to manage the conflict under auspices of the United Nations and European Community. Understood as the war caused by animosities of three homogeneous ethnic groups, the conflict was often treated as fundamentally unresolvable, and the solutions, when sought, were considering ethnic leaders as the only counterparts in that effort.

The *generalized perception of inevitability of violence* on the Balkans significantly influenced the actions (or the lack of action) of the international community during the war, but also the self-perception and the actions of the populations inhabiting this geographic area. The widely adopted fatalistic

approach of the local population towards the mounting violence can be at least partially explained by the generalized negative image of the area. The external consideration of the population as irrational and barbaric became part of its self-image.

The widespread international view that in the Balkans violence was common and inevitable also strongly supported the *legitimation of violence* and helped the political leadership in the former Yugoslavia in the process of mobilization for violence. In that regard, the political discourse of warlords in the former Yugoslav republics and the international diplomatic and media discourse were mutually reinforcing, all pointing out that violence was the only option. In such context, the voices calling for non-violent solutions to the conflict remained isolated and lacked political and social support that would help them overturn the dominant discourse of (inevitable) violence, as will be seen in Chapters 6-8.

Furthermore, the generalized perception of the Balkans and its inhabitants played a significant role in the *construction of national identities* on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. For the Croatian society, the term Balkans was directly associated with the enemy. While the dominant discourse and the political elites refused the idea of Croatia ever being part of the Balkans, «getting away» from the Balkans was one of the basis in the creation of the «new Croatian identity». This meant being different from the neighbours and getting into the «right club» - the Europe. Anecdotally, even the renowned cinema Balkan placed in the center of Zagreb was renamed to - Cinema Europa.

The situation was even more complex in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where there were several official discourses, and the attitude towards the Balkans varied. In Serbia prior to the war the term Balkans had negative connotations related to the religion, the notion was linked to the Muslim influence of the «Turks» and as such despised as cruel and primitive. Interestingly, as noted by Luketic (2013), in a reaction to the sanctions and criticism of Milosevic's politics by the western European states, the narrative of Europe as mean and unjust was

reaffirmed, while the narrative on the Balkans as carrier of authentic spiritual and cultural values was built in Serbia.

The stereotypical views of the Balkans also involved the widely spread problematic idea that its territory was inhabited by small but *homogeneous groups* who have been in violent conflicts for centuries and had *static group identities*, reflecting primordialist views on group identities. In line with this stereotype, the adjective «ethnic» was immediately attributed to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia by the international community, without too much thought on other potential causes of the conflict. This is also why *the choices of solutions to the conflict were limited to the formation of ethnically coherent states*. It is worth to note that the conflict was almost never referred to as «ethnic» by the population of the area where it was taking place, where it was rather named aggression, defensive war, homeland war, etc.

The simplistic and stereotypical views of the Balkans, which were perpetuated by the media and political discourses and adopted by the academia and the general public, facilitated the reductionist perception of the conflict as an ethnic one and distracted the attention from the more complex analysis that might have led to different kind of (re)actions from the international arena. The nationalist leaders in the former Yugoslav countries welcomed, embraced and reinforced the discourse on homogeneous national groups in need of their own nationally coherent states, as will be elaborated under the next heading. This approach greatly helped them achieve their personal goals.

5.2. Ethnicizing identities to ethnicize the violent conflict and its proposed «solutions»

5.2.1. Pinned to the wall of ethnic identity: imposing ethnic and national identification as «the only choice»

One of the main characteristics of the late 1980s and early 1990s in the former Yugoslavia was the sudden salience of ethnic and national identification, which overshadowed all other types of group identities. In this

context, a renowned journalist and writer Slavenka Drakulic (1993, p. 51) observed:

«Along with millions of other Croats, I was pinned to the wall of nationhood—not only by outside pressure from Serbia and the Federal Army but by national homogenization within Croatia itself. That is what the war is doing to us, reducing us to one dimension: the Nation. The trouble with this nationhood, however, is that whereas before I was defined by my education, my job, my ideas, my character—and, yes, my nationality too—now I feel stripped of all that. I am nobody because I am not a person any more. I am one of 4.5 million Croats».

The national belonging, which was an optional identity trait in the past - the one that a person could adopt and change deliberately, as we have seen in Chapter 4 – became the exclusive way of defining and grouping people. In words of Drakulic (1993, pp. 51-52):

«What has happened is that something people cherished as part of their cultural identity –an alternative to all-embracing communisms, a means to survive - has become their political identity and turned into something like an ill-fitting shirt. You may feel the sleeves are too short, the collar too tight. You might not like the colour, and the cloth might itch. But there is no escape; there is nothing else to wear».

Parallel to the enforcement of ethnic or national identity, discourses on ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia, entailing the idea that ethnicity was the cause of conflict and violence, were adopted and promoted by many actors. They were largely embedded in the stereotypes comprising the idea that «ancient ethnic hatreds» existed among irrational ethnic groups living on the Balkans, as we have seen under the previous heading. However, it should be highlighted that there is no evidence of any “long-term suppressed” hatred among ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia. On the contrary, analysing the data collected in 1985, 1989 and 1996 in Croatia, Sekulic et al. (2002) demonstrate that *ethnic intolerance did not increase before the war*. The levels of *intolerance significantly increased only after the war*, indicating that *intolerance was a consequence, rather than a cause of conflict*.

In the analysis of variables that influenced the inter-group relationships, Sekulic et al. (2002) found a close link between increasing levels of intolerance and the homogenization of the population, including the sharp decrease in the mixed marriages. Describing the effects of the dominant discourses on the social norms in Croatia, the authors conclude that the overall framework in the perception of the «others» of Croats changed under the influence of those discourses. With the salience of nationalism, *intolerance became not only acceptable but the «obligatory» type of social behaviour*. Applying the framework of Abdelal et al. (2009), we can say that it became a new norm within the «renewed» content of social identities of national groups

As the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina was being portrayed as ethnic, the *ethnic identity was becoming increasingly salient*. This was necessary to mobilize the population for war, as the degree of identification with a specific group and incorporation of the group identity into one's personal identity play an important role in person's willingness to engage in the conflict. Hence, by defining the political violence in the former Yugoslavia as «ethnic», space was made for the «ethnicization» of the conflict. Searching for protection and safety, the populations in both Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina re-prioritized different aspects of their own social identities, giving salience to the ethnic belonging at the expense of other group identities which got ignored as secondary or irrelevant at that moment. The discourse on ethnic violence helped create new realities and supported new divides along ethnic lines.

Being Croat, Serb or Muslim/Bosniak suddenly became extremely important. Furthermore, in their relational comparisons ethnic groups became increasingly closed and exclusive, which presented severe challenges to the pre-existing inter-ethnic relations. Oberschall (2000, p. 993) explains that «according to several informants, when politics became contentious, it strained friendships across nationality. Either one avoided discussing public affairs and politics with a friend in order to remain friends, or one stopped being friends, and turned for discussion of such matters to a fellow ethnic with whom agreement was likely. In either case, exchange of political views across ethnic boundaries is impoverished. *Each group becomes encapsulated; dialogue and*

understanding cease». This encapsulation was one of the new traits of ethnic identities, which are explored in the next section.

5.2.2. *New traits of the «renewed» ethnic identities*

The repositioning of the ethnic identity and its salience prompted new developments in what Abdelal et al. (2009) identify as four types of content of social identity, i.e. constitutive norms, relational comparisons, social purposes and worldviews of in-groups. With regards to constitutive norms as rules defining what is appropriate and what is not, *a major change occurred in the levels of acceptance of violence committed by members of own group towards the members of the out-groups*, particularly those belonging to the «enemy» ethnic group. Massive expulsions of civilians from the territory «pertaining» to a specific ethnic majority, evictions from homes or from workplace purely based on ethnic belonging, as well as other violations of human rights, were taking place with the vocal or silent acceptance of the masses, which were often not making any difference between the civilians and the combatants of the «enemy group». Almost overnight violence against the “others” turned into a normality, as long as it was committed in an apparent interest of own group.

In the same spirit, unconditional loyalty to the key *social purpose of the group, which was defined as establishing of own state or state-like sovereign territory* was expected from each member of the ethnic group, regardless of the price of that sovereignty. *Patriotism was defined in terms of readiness to die and kill for the territory imagined by the political leadership*, therefore according to the new social purposes the territory was valued more than a human life.

In terms of new relational comparisons, Freud’s notion of *narcissism of minor differences* applied to the ethnic groups which invested their efforts in the *search for differences and denial of common identity aspects*. This was reflected, among other, in the *forcible changes in the language*, whereby several ethnic groups tried to «purify» their «own» language by denouncing and expelling the terminology or syntax that appeared as originating from other groups. The *linguistic puritanism* was promoted at all levels and created a lot

of debate and confusion. *Religion*, which as we have seen in Chapter 4 played marginal role in the group identification processes in the past, suddenly became salient as the principal aspect of differentiation among different groups. Catholic and Orthodox churches, as well as Mosques, suddenly got invaded by the «new believers».

The prevailing *worldview*, as explained above, was that the violence was inevitable and the only mean of securing the survival and wellbeing of own ethnic group. In such context, the *communication with members of others group was judged as treason*. Attempting to ignore or deny the common Slavic origin, a joint state and the common language that in Yugoslavia was called Serbo-Croatian, the ethnic groups started developing the portfolio of own uniqueness. This entailed additional changes in their worldviews, including major shifts in their interpretation of the past events.

It is important to note that with political changes and war-related uncertainties many people demonstrated *a surprising capacity to deny or alter numerous aspects of own group identities*. Jovic (2013, p. 148) observes that «(t)he previous Us, which now becomes an Enemy Other, has a constitutive function for the new identity. For many individuals a ritual and public rejection of previous identity often was a condition for being accepted in the new Us group». This might explain why so many people suddenly claimed that they were religious when in the past they were not, that they have never been members of the Communist Party when many of them actually were, etc. It appears that *the memories of people were modified in function of the construction of new identity*.

There is ample evidence that in the dissolving Yugoslavia nationalisms were imposed top-down, promoted by the elites, and not originating in the grassroots. Peer pressure was put on ordinary people as members of ethnic groups to “prove” their ethnic affiliation by cutting their ties with members of the “enemy” ethnic group, by using nationalist symbols etc. In case of ignoring such expectations, they were exposed to ostracism and suspicion. As observed by Oberschall (2000 p. 996) «ordinary people could not escape ethnic polarization». Except, I would add, in very rare cases where the local

leadership was unfavourable to such polarization, like in the cases of the oases of peace explored in Chapters 7 and 8.

5.2.3. *Dominant discourses ethnicizing the “solutions” of the conflict: legitimizing direct violence and consolidating structural and cultural violence*

Stiks (2010, p. 78) recalls the common way in which the president of Croatia Franjo Tudjman used to open his speeches. Tudjman would usually exclaim: «Croatian women and men, citizens...». Using such discourse, he was making it clear that he was leading a country which made a difference among the citizens who were of Croatian ethnic group and all the others. In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina a similar «order» was installed by the Constitution of the country, which firstly lists Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats as constitutive nations and only then mentions the citizens.

For President Tudjman and the leadership in Croatia, the Croatian independence was a realization of «one thousand years old dream of Croats» to have a sovereign state, but also an opportunity to seize its outstanding financial gains. In his well know book *Bespuca povijesne zbiljnosti (Wilderness of historical reality)* Tudjman expressed a view that violent changes such as the ones performed after WWII had twofold consequences: while on the one side they deepened historical gaps, on the other side they led towards ethnic homogenisation of specific nations, to major harmony in the composition of the population and state boundaries of specific countries, which can have positive effects on the future developments, in the sense of decrease in the causes of new violence and triggers for new conflicts (Tudjman, 1994). In that context, homogenization of Croatia was a desired outcome for its President, and it entailed the departure of Serbs as a «price» of lesser problems in the future. Milosevic's aggression in the framework of his project of Greater Serbia helped Tudjman in portraying all ethnic Serbs as enemy.

The search for solutions to a specific problem is very much dependant on the way the problem has been posed. In the cases of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, it can be argued that the *solutions adopted presumably with the purpose of reducing direct armed violence implicated new sources of structural*

violence, such as discrimination of minorities, as well as cultural violence in terms of strengthening prejudice and stereotypes among ethnic groups. Moreover, on several occasions *the proposed solutions even intensified direct violence*, i.e. when triggering expulsions of specific ethnic groups after the announcements of ethnic divisions of territory.

As indicated by Campbell (1998), in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina the most prevalent problematization involves *the ethnicization of the political field*, which «has helped organize Bosnia into an «intractable» problem such that the apartheid politics of partition could be proposed as the most «realistic» solution. In bowing to the force of conceptual determination, those who operated in such terms replicated and reproduced the strategies of violence they ostensibly sought to ameliorate» (Campbell, 1998, p. xi). In other terms, the idea that specific national community requires the nexus of demarcated territory and fixed identity was not only insufficient to enable the response to the Bosnian war, but also complicit and necessary for the conduct of the war itself (Campbell, 1998, p. 13).

Kurspahic (2003, pp 114-115) gives examples of how the proposed solutions contributed to violence instead of reducing it. He observes that «in March 1992, when the European Community negotiator from Portugal, Jose Cutileiro, introduced his proposal for a Bosnia divided into three ethnic cantons, there was no sizable town in the country that could be claimed as Muslim, Serb or Croat. The proposal nevertheless gave Serb ultranationalists an excuse for “ethnic cleansing” in the territories they claimed belonged to the Serbs. When in January 1993 British Lord David Owen and former American Secretary of State Cyrus Vance introduced the next set of maps dividing Bosnia into ten ethnically-based provinces, Croat ultranationalists undertook a “cleansing” of their own in Herzegovina and Central Bosnia». In such context, the Muslim political leadership also gradually shifted from its initial idea of multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina towards exclusive preoccupation with Muslim interests and territories. In other words, the proposed solutions entailing long-term structural violence were often a trigger of new direct violence.

The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina, popularly known as the Dayton agreement because it was brokered by the USA and reached in Dayton, Ohio, was signed by Alija Izetbegovic, Franjo Tudjman and Slobodan Milosevic in Paris on December 14, 1995. The greatest benefit of this agreement was stopping direct armed violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The preamble of the Agreement states that it was made out of desire to promote enduring peace and stability. However, the nature of this framework for peace has often been challenged, not only by the opinion-makers and the academia, but also by the realities in the post-agreement Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The highly problematic basis of this agreement is that *it legitimized the outcomes of the widespread direct violence* translated into killings and mass expulsions of population of specific groups from different areas of the country. The agreement divided Bosnia-Herzegovina into two entities that were shaped by means of violence – the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Srpska Republic. The first entity, with some 51% of the overall territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, is inhabited mostly by Bosnian Croats and by Muslims/Bosniaks. It is further divided into 10 cantons, divided along ethnic lines. Srpska Republic, populated almost exclusively by Bosnian Serb, occupies some 49% of the territory. As highlighted by Hromadzic (2013, p. 263) «the fact that Dayton agreement reinforced and cemented an ethno-nationalist (di)vision of Bosnia-Herzegovina is crucial, since this generated a particular “spatial governmentality” – an ideological, political and social mechanism of territorial segregation and disciplining of ethnically conceived peoples in Bosnia-Herzegovina». The socially heterogeneous space has been forcibly transformed into politically and ethnically homogeneous, following a problematic assumption that the ethnic heterogeneity was a cause of violence and that ethnic homogeneity would be a source of peace.

Unfortunately, the peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina was conceived in a one-dimensional way, as a simple absence of immediate armed hostilities. The Agreement did not preview tackling the sources of structural violence (e.g. position of minorities within ethnicized territories) and cultural violence

(deepening stereotypes and prejudice due to lack of contact), but actually contributed to those sources. By “redressing the mismatch” between people and territory along ethnic lines, Dayton agreement caused «flattening and suffocation of trans-ethnic sensibilities» (Hromadzic, 2013, p. 263). It forcibly reduced the complexity of social identities to one dimension – the ethnicity. In this way, it took away the relevance and the power from supra-ethnic categories and political views.

Hromadzic (2013, p. 263) further notes that «the war-orchestrated annihilation of the “common house” was reified through the state-building model, creating a sanitized political context in B-H. This installation of socio-political segregation under the banners of multiculturalism, coexistence and “tolerance” works in practice to cement, naturalize and culturalize ethnic animosity (...). The excess, institutionalization and territorialisation of ethnic nationalism led to the *ethnicization of ordinary life*». Indeed, the ethnicization of identities preceded by a number of ethnicity-based negative war experiences, became a source of inter-ethnic animosities as a consequence of war. These animosities translate into cultural violence that is the basis of potential future direct violence.

The segregation of territory and *ethnically conceived people* was accompanied by introduction of the *consociational model of democracy* into Bosnia-Herzegovina, a model based on power sharing of elites from different ethnic groups, usually applied in so called deeply divided societies (such as Lebanon or Northern Ireland). This model unavoidably entails transfers of people, either through massive violence or in a more organized way, but transfers which are ethically very questionable and that remained largely unquestioned as they were often perceived as unavoidable.

As emphasised by Campbell (1998, p. 117) «the international diplomacy has been a conduit through which the tension between the objectified culture of nationalist projects and the lived experience of Bosnia has been resolved in favour of the nationalists». The same author points at the need to seriously question the conceptualization of «multi-ethnicity» that was apparently attached to the new structure of Bosnia-Herzegovina. He stresses (p. 142) that

«seemingly the sheer presence of more than one ethnic group within the external borders of the state, even if those groups were in their own spaces, was sufficient for the polity to qualify as multi-ethnic».

No strategies that would result in the pluralization of possibilities of being together on the same territory were considered, nor did the non-nationalist local initiatives, such as the one in Tuzla, receive particular attention or support. Campbell (1998, pp. 209-210) therefore concludes that «literal and figurative death of complex histories and hybrid identities has been reluctantly pronounced in Bosnia», as indicated in the quote opening this Chapter. However, the persistence of counter-discourses, such as the truly multi-ethnic Tuzla city, shows that identities imposed by the elites are not always adopted by the population, which is sometimes ready to struggle for continued heterogeneous social spaces. Unfortunately, spaces like Tuzla became an exception on the territory where nationalist leaders were determined to achieve the “perfect match” of population and territory, as will be presented under the next heading.

5.3. From heterogeneous social spaces to homogeneous political spaces: nationalism in the service of «redressing the mismatch» in the association between population, territory and destiny

5.3.1. Nation-states as «the only solution» and cultural pluralism as non-imagined community

Space can be conceived in geographic terms, but also as a social and political phenomenon. Social space is always heterogeneous, which can become problematic to formal politics because they require a certain level of homogeneity. As a result, as indicated by Hobsbawm (1993), the rise of the modern state brought the construction and *imposition of homogeneous political space on top of the heterogeneous social realities*.

The time of the war in the former Yugoslavia was also the time of creation of new political spaces on top of very complex social realities. New states were being declared based on the Constitution of Yugoslavia which was granting

the right to self-determination to its republics. The legitimation of violence by ruling elites was closely linked to the fact that, as indicated by Jabri (1996, p. 97), war is «naturally» seen to be the preserve of the state, either in its original formation or in its continuity. This is confirmed by Tilly (1985), who puts emphasis on the *constitutive role of violence in the emergence of states* and elaborates on the constitutive relationship between war-making and state-making.

In the case of Yugoslavia, acceding to violent, armed «solutions» was used as a pretext both for state preservation and for state creation purposes. Violence was first used as a justification of efforts to ensure the continuity of the state (Yugoslavia), by the leadership of YNA, in close cooperation with Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic. In parallel, violence was also used and justified as part of the process of state-making. In fact, both Milosevic and Tudjman tried to «re-create» the geographic space of the republics of former Yugoslavia by using the ethnic commonality, attempting to form states that were of larger size than the original republics of Croatia and Serbia, as they would include parts of other republics inhabited by Croats and Serbs.

Those territorial aspirations were never overtly communicated, but were rather hidden under the pretended defence of lives and other rights of own ethnic brothers and sisters in other republics. However, in practice Milosevic was promoting the idea first attributed to the Chetnik leader Draza Mihajlovic, considering that «wherever Serbian graves are found, it is Serbian land». Even less overtly, Tudjman attempted to achieve the same objective by intervening in the political space of the sovereign state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, trying to take control over and then annex parts of that country inhabited by ethnic Croats. Although both leaders used the rhetoric of victimization of own ethnic group as justification, their attempts fully correspond to Gellner's (1993) definition of nationalism as a political principle holding that the political and the national unit should be congruent.

Nationalism typically attempts to create a compelling *association between a population, a territory and a destiny*. Furthermore, Sekulic (2001, p. 158) describes the Croatian Democratic Union type of nationalism as *integral*

nationalism, by which he understands «the ideology according to which all the activities in the society, from individual longings to each group activity, must be at the service of the nation, its politics and aims defined at the national level. Such nationalism is usually characterized by hostility towards the principles of liberalism and pluralism, because it perceives the nation as an organic community that principles of political and cultural pluralism divide artificially (...) [In such type of nationalism] *nation and state are not tools for reaching a goal, they are the supreme goal itself*». This approach was confirmed on numerous occasions by the Croatian President Tudjman, who often used the motto «(We shall give) everything for Croatia, (we shall not give away) our only and eternal Croatia for anything in the world». In such context, giving a life for the nation-state was perceived as the maximum expression of loyalty to the nation and its leadership, while promoting cultural pluralism and cooperation with other nations was seen as treason. These were some of the key traits of the «new» Croatian social identity, leading towards negative inter-group relations.

The case of Bosnia-Herzegovina was largely different. It was the only republic in Yugoslavia which did not have one national group as its «owner», therefore it did not have the implicit idea of nation-state during Yugoslav times. Filandra (2012) and other authors indicate that, when faced with the risk of dissolution of Yugoslavia in the late 1980s different groups within the communities of Bosnian Muslims were unison in one thing: desire for the survival of Yugoslavia. They did not wish nor did they feel ready for the breakdown of the Yugoslav Federation, and once it happened they found themselves facing a great challenge of how to preserve their identity and the lives of their group members.

Despite the desire of many to maintain the unity of Yugoslavia, in the 1990s the heterogeneous society in Yugoslavia was sacrificed to the idea of homogeneous states, or *in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina state-like structures within one larger state*. In that context, Serbian and Croatian nationalists were pursuing the idea of independent homogeneous states «adding» a portion of Bosnia-Herzegovina with Serb and Croat population to

their own territory. With regards to the leadership of the Muslims, or Bosniaks as they got called from 1993, during the initial year of the war their elites led by Alija Izetbegovic, who was also serving as the wartime President of Bosnia-Herzegovina, gradually shifted their approach from the struggle for inclusive and heterogeneous Bosnia-Herzegovina towards the nationalist approach and discourse.

Jovic (2013, p.145) emphasises that «the 1993 decision to remove the name Muslim and accept the name Bosniak was a result of numerous circumstances, among other of the shifting of the Bosniak political leadership from the statehood towards national idea, i.e. from the idea of treating Bosnia-Herzegovina as a unique three-national state of all its citizens and nations towards the idea of exclusive representation of separate Bosniak interests». The same shift can be traced in Izetbegovic's public discourse, in which he adopts a nationalist discourse justified by lack of alternatives and violence against Bosniaks/Muslims. In his address at the convention of his Party of Democratic Action, on March 25, 1994, Izetbegovic said:

«In one of our respectable newspapers I read that our soldiers are dying for co-existence, dying so we could live together. Living together is a nice thing, but I think I can freely say that it is a lie that our soldiers are dying for such cause. If anybody had *illusions about living together*, then it was us. But things cannot be based on lies and we cannot lie to our nation. Our soldier up there, who suffers in the mud, does not do that so he can live together, but in order to *defend this piece of land* that others want to take away from him. He risks his life to defend his *family, his land, his nation*». (Izetbegovic, 1995, pp. 77-78).

Clearly, the priorities of Izetbegovic shifted from living together to defending own families, land and nation. Just like in the discourse of Croatian leadership, territory became more important than human life. The president of Bosnia-Herzegovina abandoned the idea of heterogeneous society in his country as an illusion, a lie. The same happened at the sub-national level in most of the country. However, in Tuzla the mayor and his team, along with the citizens of

that town, would not abandon that “illusion” but would rather prove that it could become a reality, as described in Chapter 8.

Different categories were used by national leaders in describing the war, often in the attempt to justify own use of violence. All leaders used the dichotomies aggression – defence, as well as occupation - liberation. In such framework, each one of them claimed to be defending his people and liberating territories, while it was always the “Other” who was the aggressor and the one occupying it. In Croatia, the most common term was *homeland war*, which is still used and indicates that the final aim of that war was the creation of a sovereign state home of one nation, the Croats. Tudjman also often used the term *imposed war*, masking his own accountability and stressing its «unavoidability». He further used the term *just war*. According to the just war doctrine, «war undertaken in the name of specific values or as punishment for aggression is considered as a positive good, particularly in terms of territorial integrity and political sovereignty» (Jabri, 1996, p.106). Such dominant discourses contributed to an atmosphere in which *the war became normal or even desired*.

This was further reinforced by the use of religious terminology, which gave to the war an aura of sublime action, and to the leader a role of Messiah who resurrects and makes miracles. Religious terminology was very often used by President Tudjman:

«By *resurrecting* – in the crucial electoral time – the silenced and hurt national consciousness and the fettered pride of the Croatian people, as well as the misplaced hope of all citizens of Croatia, we have instigated the enthusiasm of revival» (Franjo Tudjman in his address to the Croatian Parliament on May 30, 1990, quoted in Pavkovic, 2008, p.47)

«In this difficult moment when we are on a historical crossroad, I call upon you, *brothers and sisters*, to fulfil your *sacred duty* of the defence of the homeland. (Franjo Tudjman in his appearance on Croatian National TV on October 5, 1991)

Jabri (1996, p. 136) observes that «the concept of the nation and the national identity upon which it is based is so deeply embedded and pervasive across time and space that the *division of humanity into a world of separate nation-states seems to be the natural order of things (...)*Through the naturalization of what is a political construct, *the “nation”, as a bounded entity, is reified at the expense of other models of representation*, and the interest of particular dominant groups in society are defined as being in the general “national” interest». This is how some of the very particular interests of the elites, such as remaining in power or own enrichment, were legitimized simply because they were the only representatives of the ethnic groups or nations. This is also one of the main reasons why, although well-articulated, some of the alternative voices were not given adequate attention. For the international community they were not representative enough, they did not have the narrative authority as they were not representing the ethnic groups that were supposedly in conflict, but other groups which were treated as irrelevant. *Giving the power of representation exclusively to the leaders of ethnic/national groups clearly contributed to the violence in the former Yugoslavia*, as other voices from the affected communities could not find the space to be heard. This was very convenient to the elites in power, as it helped them marginalize alternative voices and views both in Croatia and Serbia, as will be exposed in Chapter 6.

As the nation-states were «imagined» as the only solution, the ethnicities were perceived as a problem that needed to be solved and cultural pluralism was seen as an anomaly. In such context, the outcomes of direct violence were solidified by further structural violence, as presented in the following section.

5.3.2. «Othered» by institutional texts: constitutions reshaping inter-group and intra-group relations by legitimizing structural violence. The case of constitutional nationalism and ethnic engineering

Changes in the constitutions of both Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as of several other formerly Yugoslav states, included a major paradigm shift in the organization of the state and the relations between the state and its

citizens. The impact that this change had on the population of these two countries is multifaceted – from the psychological and behavioural, to the political one. In both cases the new states started their independent life by «belonging to some of their citizens more than to the others», in comparison to how they were institutionally defined before. In Croatia this was achieved by defining the Republic of Croatia as:

«the nation state of the Croatian nation and the state of the members of its national minorities: Serbs, Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians, Jews, Germans, Austrians, Ukrainians, Rusyns, Bosniaks, Slovenians, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Russians, Bulgarians, Poles, Roma, Romanians, Turks, Vlachs, Albanians and others who are its citizens and who are guaranteed equality with citizens of Croatian nationality and the exercise of their national rights in compliance with the democratic norms of the United Nations and the countries of the free world» (Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, 1991)

While the defenders of this formulation claim that there is nothing problematic in distinguishing the nation to which the Republic is a nation-state from all the national minorities, because it is clearly stipulated that they all have equal rights, those who oppose such formulation consider that the Serbs were «downgraded» from being a «constitutive nation» in the Republic of Croatia during Yugoslav times into becoming one of the multiple national minorities. They base their claim on the following text of the 1974 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Croatia:

«The Socialist Republic of Croatia is the nation state of the Croatian nation, the state of the Serb nation in Croatia and the state of the nationalities [national minorities] who live in it» (Ustav Republike Hrvatske, 1974)

The opponents of the mentioned formulation in the new Croatian constitution further claim that this «downgrading» has put the Serbs in the category of «all the others» despite the fact that they constituted a significant portion of Croatian citizens (12.2% in 1991), being a much larger group than any other «minority». This instigated fears of the Serbs from Croatia about their

status and future in the new Croatian state, despite the guarantee of equality stipulated in the Constitution.

Another important aspect of the Constitutions and citizenship legislation of most post-socialist countries, highlighted by Stiks (2010), is the *privileged status that those countries awarded to the members of their ethnic majority who were living abroad*. Jovic (2013) informs that this also happened in Serbia, which opened the doors for the Serbs from Bosnia-Herzegovina to apply for citizenship in Serbia as well as to participate in constituting Serbia as their nation state.

Analyzing the citizenship laws of post-socialist countries, including Croatia, Stiks (2010) identified three categories of people: the included, the excluded and *the invited*. While due to the newly established administrative rules many non-Croat inhabitants of Croatia found severe obstacles in obtaining citizenship, forming the group of excluded, other Croats, particularly those from Bosnia-Herzegovina but also from oversees, were invited and supported in obtaining Croatian citizenship. Stiks (2010, pp. 80-81) concluded that «such constitutional redefining of the state and adoption of new laws on citizenship on that basis often *create a situation in which those who were until recently the citizens* – like in the case of former multinational federations – *were turned into foreigners or “second class citizens”, and those who were foreigners* (actually national minorities in neighboring countries or descendants of those who live abroad for economic or political reasons) *promoted into legal citizens, with more rights than those who live (and pay taxes) within the confines of the state*». This type of actions was in the service of what Stiks (2006) names *ethnic engineering*, or the intentional policy of the elites through which the laws and the administrative practices were used to influence the ethnic composition of the population, in benefit of the ethnic majority group.

Based on an analysis of the constitutions in the formerly Yugoslav republics, Hayden (1993, p. v) forged the term *constitutional nationalism* to describe «constitutional and legal structure that privileges the members of the majority (ethnic) nation over the minorities in each state», warning that such arrangements are very likely to instigate instability and war. Viewed within the

framework of Galtung's theory on violence, *constitutional nationalism amounts to the institutionalized structural violence, which increases injustice and promotes direct violence*. Indeed, as we shall see in Chapters 7 and 8, the experiences of the *oases of peace* confirmed that discourses and practices of local authorities treating all inhabitants as equal citizens, rather than as members of majority or minority, played critical role in maintaining communal peace in those communities.

While the new Croatian constitution contained a long list of national minorities, the Constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina reduced the national structure to the three *constitutive* nations, while all the rest of the population was considered as Others. The Preamble of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995) states:

«Bosniacs, Croats, and Serbs, as constituent peoples (along with Others), and citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina hereby determine that the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina is as follows»

It is important to note that the constituent nations (peoples) are put at the first place and then followed by the notion of «citizens», implying some type of division between inhabitants belonging to constitutive national groups and the group of citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina, of which the first one is considered to be more important.

Furthermore, the political power in Bosnia-Herzegovina was distributed along ethnic lines, as the key political functions were reserved only for the constituent nations, making the "Others" politically irrelevant, unable to accede to specific functions, thus overtly discriminated and exposed to structural violence. In that context, one can conclude that the constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina is also characterized by high level of constitutional nationalism, but instead of privileging one, it privileges three nations.

The constitutional nationalism and the uncertainty created by it undoubtedly supported the fears of different ethnic groups in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and their consequent additional approaching to and closing into their ethnic identity groups. *It became clear that the new states were not ready*

to protect the rights of all citizens equally, therefore some citizens needed to search protection elsewhere, mostly within their ethnic identity groups. This is how Serbs from Croatia started relying on the Serbs from Serbia, while Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina sought help from Croats in Croatia, etc. This resulted in major changes in the social norms and behaviors of members of different groups, and supported the ethnocentrism of majorities, translated into their *widespread attitude of «this is our state, if the others are not satisfied here, they are free to leave».* As described by Stiks (2010 p. 80), although the Constitutions offered them the usual democratic rights, *the minorities were considered as “historical guests”* on the territory belonging to the “autochthonous” ethnic group. And when laws and constitutions are used to institutionalize discrimination, violence is, unfortunately, a logical consequence. Its instigation will be further supported by the abuses of specific collective memories, as elaborated in the next section of the study.

5.4. Uses and abuses of collective memories: history in the service of violence

5.4.1. A difficult relationship with the past

Social groups such as ethnic groups and nations rely for their legitimacy on a remembered past of that particular community. As will be elaborated in this and subsequent chapters, the memories of the past inter-group relationships can be used to mobilize communities for cooperation and peace, but also for violence.

The nation, as explained by Jabri (1996, p. 137) is «built upon an imagined distinctive history and culture, containing a symbolic order that is utilised in times of adversity to mobilize entire collectivities against other bounded communities». Additionally, the relationships with the past are very important in terms of the role that narratives of wars play in the collective behaviour. Jabri (1996, p. 140) further clarifies that «*war is a constitutive element of collective identity* reproduced in collective memory through national narratives of past glories in the face of threats against national sovereignty and survival. (...)

Nations are constructed around narratives of war, the heroes of which acquire symbolic significance in the reproduction of a national identity based on war».

Jabri's explanation is highly relevant for the nations that were inhabiting Yugoslavia. Analysing different studies and writings on the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Campbell (1998, p. 84) warns that most of them «suggest that the conflict was constituted in history, which implies that the hostility has an identifiable point of origin and is transmitted from generation to generation until it reaches the present». This approach – the linear history - makes the tragic nature of the present look inevitable and restricts the solutions to repression of the ancient hatreds until they reappear again, not leaving any room for imagining and constructing better future. However, Campbell confirms Jabri's view that history is a resource of the contemporary struggle and the questions of history are violently deployed in the present for contemporary political goals. There is broad evidence that over decades the political leaderships on the territory of Yugoslavia were making use of history to promote their own political and economic goals. The study of history school textbooks in Yugoslavia and the countries that succeeded it clearly confirms this.

The history textbooks during Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav times were characterized by linear and black-and-white approach. Petrungrar (2009) observes that the 1990s history textbooks in Croatia inherit the structure and the *non-critical approach* of the socialist textbooks, but significantly change the content. They were subject to «de-yugoslavization», in a sense of strong reduction of the content related to Yugoslavia, and the change of tone whereby Yugoslavia was portrayed as a deviation from the original Croatian idea of full independence, and Tito was depicted in negative light, as a dictator who, although himself a Croat, served the Serb interests. Once again, the *history was extremely simplified, with dualistic historical interpretations which prevented the students from any deeper or critical considerations towards historical events*, but this time the emphasis was on the Croatian state and those who served it, who were celebrated as heroes. From WWII the focus shifted towards Homeland war. Once again *the war took a major part of the content of history books* with detailed descriptions of its most cruel aspects.

Croats were portrayed as victims, mostly of the Serbs, and the history of the neighbouring countries was so reduced that «students learned more about the history of Japan than of the history of Serbia» (Petrungraro 2009, p. 97). The approach characterized by selective remembering and intentional overseeing of specific parts of history, combined with ideological and non-critical attitudes, was used in the textbooks, but also in other types of public discourses and public life, significantly contributing to the cultural and structural, and consequently also to the direct violence on the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

5.4.2. Selective remembering and directed forgetting as contributors to violence.

Jabri (1996) warns that the ability to consolidate and reproduce authoritative power is dependent on the capacity to manipulate the memory traces of a community and control information gathering and dissemination which generate and reproduce the discursive institutional continuities which “bind” societies. This ability can be traced in the discursive power of different authorities on the territory of Yugoslavia. As described above, the information gathering and dissemination was controlled during and after Yugoslavia through history textbooks, among other means.

The memory traces that were highlighted during Yugoslavia were those of mutual cooperation of ethnic and national groups inhabiting the country, constituting the “brotherhood and unity” discourse which was at the very basis of the creation and *raison d’être* of Yugoslavia. As presented in Chapter 4, the narrative and the ideology of brotherhood and unity was often constructed at the expense of *directed forgetting* of the episodes of violent or non-violent conflict among leadership or representatives of different ethnic and national groups, which at several occasions culminated in atrocities⁹. The directed

⁹ I remember my own confusion in the late 1980s and early 1990s when narratives and insignia related to the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) started appearing in the public space. I felt puzzled because I didn’t remember learning about those events at school or hearing about them from any other sources. I

forgetting was supported by repression of nationalism and other dissenting voices in the country, and discouragement of any critical thinking, including critical media. In my view, it is *this lack of space for and habit of critical thinking which significantly contributed to the swift replacement of one ideology (socialism) by another one (nationalism), leading to the 1991-1995 violence.*

All of the sudden, in the late 1980s, the insignia from ISC and the songs about some of its leaders appeared in the public discourse in Croatia as part of the growing independence movement. At the same time, alarms were being raised in Serbia over that discourse, relating it to the deaths of many Serbs during ISC. Episodes of WWII with details of Ustasha crimes against Serbs found plenty of space in Serbian media in the late 1980s and were intertwined with the ongoing political events. What is more, with support of Serbian Orthodox Church, the bones of the persons killed by Ustasha regime were excavated in many villages, carried around and then reburied in inflamed ceremonies making the menacing links between the past and the present. At the same time, Chetnik insignia was sold on the street in Belgrade as early as in 1985, and the preoccupation with Kosovo mythology was high in the public discourse (Kurspahic, 2003, p. 27).

Invoking WWII imagery was particularly popular among the elites in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Considering the independence of Croatian state as the ultimate goal, and showing readiness to disregard the methods that would allow for the realization of that goal, in 1990 Tujman pronounced his frequently quoted opinion that ISC was not only a quisling formation and a fascist crime, but *also* an expression of political aspirations of the Croatian people for their independent state. With the re-adoption of the Croatian flag checkboard used during ISC, the nationalist songs celebrating leaders of ISC becoming extremely popular and the history textbooks embellishing ISC and portraying it as the realization of the Croatian nation dream (Petrungraro, 2009), the non-Croat population got concerned about their future in the newly

had a vague idea that «something bad» happened in Croatia in the early 1940, but there was a certain veil of mystery around those events. The simplified storyline that was promoted during my childhood in Yugoslavia was that the peoples of Yugoslavia have always been and would always be living in harmony, as this storyline was at the very heart of the idea of Yugoslavia.

independent Croatia. With his apologetic approach to ISC, Tudjman helped Milosevic look credible in the eyes of his Serbian fellows whom the president of Serbia claimed to be protecting. And vice versa, Milosevic's nationalist politics were supporting Tudjman's idea of urgency of forming an independent Croatian state where Croats would finally feel protected.

The changing narratives about the past could be also observed in the changes of names of towns, streets, squares, etc. during the breakdown of Yugoslavia. The name of the town of Titova Korenica (Tito's Korenica) in Croatia was changed into simply Korenica. The names of most of the streets in Belgrade which were related to socialist times were also changed. The Square of Victims of Fascism, one of the main squares in Zagreb, was renamed into the Square of Great Croats. The name of the Highway of Brotherhood and Unity, connecting several former Yugoslav capitals – Ljubljana, Zagreb, Belgrade and Skopje - disappeared together with the ideology carrying that name.

With the aim of de-constructing the Yugoslav political space, *the elites in Croatia and Serbia turned the Yugoslav storyline upside down*, and all of the sudden the population of Yugoslavia «discovered» that the narrative of brotherhood and unity was «false» and that in Yugoslavia most national groups felt oppressed, discriminated, prevented from expressing their national identity feelings, etc. *The collective memories of the past violent conflicts and their relation with national identities started (re)appearing, and the history of cooperation of the national groups was «cornered» and sent to the «forgotten side» of the history in Croatia and Serbia.* In Bosnia-Herzegovina, as the only republic which did not have one national group as the “owner”, the discourse of unity was maintained in many places in parallel with the collective grievances of Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats.

With the emerging discourses of ethnic or national grievances, the ethnic diversity of the former Yugoslavia stopped being a symbol of pride and became a perceived source of problems. In 1989 on Kosovo Polje Milosevic would yell: «Never again would Islam subjugate the Serbs!» (Volkan, 1997), while Tudjman would scream in his 1991 speech on Zagreb main square: «The time

when the Croatian destiny was decided upon in Vienna, in Budapest or in Belgrade, is over!».

The *cult of own group victimization* was revived and other ethnic groups started being portrayed as sources of problem, which strongly affected the inter-group relations. When conflicts are perceived and defined as inter-ethnic, the narratives of those conflicts start being eloquent on the instances of violence between the two ethnic groups and silent about at least three other types of interactions between or within those groups. Firstly, instances of intragroup (intra-ethnic) violence tend to be forgotten or ignored. Gagnon (2004) points out at a number of instances when Serbs have attacked other Serbs, Croats killed other Croats and Muslims fought against other Muslims in former Yugoslavia. Such instances have been systematically overlooked by ethnic leaders, but also by internal and external observers as they tended to «complicate the plot», or blur the myths of unity and conformity. A similar kind of oblivion concerns in-group resistance or desertion, so no narrative on the 1991-95 war in the former Yugoslavia includes the experiences of draft evaders that were numerous in all ethnic groups. For example, some 200,000 Serbs preferred to flee Serbia and hide abroad, enduring severe negative consequences including financial hardship and stigmatization of their families, to avoid being drafted and sent to fight on the side of the Serbs in Croatia. Furthermore, the narratives on alleged interethnic conflicts are systematically silent on the aspects of inter-group (inter-ethnic) cooperation prior to, during and after the conflict. Communities preserving ethnic coexistence, such as the ones explored in the two case studies in this thesis, are just one type of such cooperation during war, but there are infinite examples of intermarriage, friendship and cooperation among ethnic groups that disrupt the theory of ancient ethnic hatreds.

In this context, *in the late 1980s and early 1990s the collective memories experienced a very significant politically driven transformation*¹⁰. This was also

¹⁰ I recall feeling very confused with the sudden shift in the narratives of collective memory, which were sometimes directly opposed to my personal memories. This includes narratives claiming that the communist party in Yugoslavia banned all public aspects of religion, while my family was attending mass and celebrating Christmas and Easter every year; or narratives claiming that people were forced

observed by Oberschall (2000), who introduces the concept of *double cognitive frame*, claiming that the ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia had specific cognitive frames (or cognitive models) for regular times, different from the cognitive frames for crisis times, the latter being based on the negative experiences in times of past wars. The same author further claims that «Tito had wanted to eradicate the crisis frame, but it simmered in the memories of older people, the families of victims, intellectuals and religious leaders. Milosevic, Tudjman and other nationalists did not invent the crisis frame: they activated and amplified it» (Oberschall, 2000, p. 989). Evidence shows that the crisis frame includes acceptance of violence by large parts of the population, as violence is often pursued in the mistaken belief that some greater good will come of it (Curle, 1995).

In relation to the above, and adopting a definition of the *collective memory* of the past conflict as a *widely shared knowledge of the past social events that may not have been personally experienced but are collectively constructed through communicative social functions*, Bar-Tal (2011) warns that complex experiences of violence are often transmuted into simple narratives of collective ethnic victimization, which become a permanent source of fear and mistrust between ethnic groups. As will be observed from the analysis in the next section, such narratives became a very useful tool for instigating fears and mobilizing people for violence.

5.5. Cult of ethnic self-victimization: linking past with present and using defensive war discourse to legitimize own violence

5.5.1. Ethnic self-victimization as justification of own group violence

Prior to the break-up of Yugoslavia, both Serbian and Croatian leadership started invoking centuries-old grievances and sufferings caused by “the others”. The most striking example is the Serbs’ mourning over the Kosovo Polje battle in 1389, which 600th anniversary was used by Milosevic to reignite the dormant collective trauma and to mobilize masses for revenge. To

to join the communist party, which was not the experience of my parents or their friends, and similar examples of «memory shifts».

stimulate the reigniting of the collective memory, the organizers of the commemoration made sure that the remains of prince Lazar were placed into a coffin and taken on a tour around all towns and villages in Serbia¹¹.

Although the political elites in Serbia attempted to portray the reigniting of collective memory as a spontaneous movement, there is clear evidence that key events were carefully orchestrated. The Serb example of self-victimization was the most extreme one, however it was not isolated. Debating about the concentration camp of Jasenovac, where during WWII thousands of people were killed by Croatian ISC authorities, Franjo Tudjman suggested that the main victims of Jasenovac were - Croats. Tudjman (1996) insisted that Croats were victims of accusations of having killed more people than they actually did. Although he theoretically recognized that even if only six people were killed, and not some sixty thousand according to his estimations, it would still be a horrible and huge crime, Tudjman (1996) switched the paradigm and transformed the Croats into victims of conspiracy of those who were attempting to define them as a «genocidal people».

The cult of own group victimization was reinforced by the renewal of the memories of WWII. *Creating synergies between the past and the present, a specific type of mythical consciousness was created, which was preventing people from distinguishing between the mythology and the reality of the times they were living in* (Skopljanac Brunner, 2000). The self-victimization approach was used to link the past sufferings with the events taking place during the 1991-1995 armed conflict. As noted by Campbell (1998, p.8) «all parties to the violence in Bosnia, both inside and out, have at one time or another invoked the image of the Holocaust and its context to justify their actions and make

¹¹ Linking the developments of 14th and 20th century, a monument was erected with the inscription of prince Lazar's threatening curse:

«Whoever is a Serb and of Serb birth
And of Serb blood and heritage
And comes not to the Battle of Kosovo,
May he never have the progeny his heart desires!
Neither son nor daughter
May nothing grow that his hand sows!
Neither dark wine nor white wheat
And let him be cursed from all ages to all ages!»

demands on others for a response». This placed them on the side of victims in the past, and was extended to the ongoing events as a “proof” that once again they were victimized. Furthermore, several layers of self-victimization could be observed during the 1991-1995 conflict. In addition to considering themselves as victims of other ethnic groups, parties to violence also invoked being victims of the «Western politics», «inaction of the world», a number of «conspiracies» and other factors. The narratives of self-victimization that were often used to justify own group violence have had a strong influence on the behaviours of group members.

Analysing how seeing the self as the victim places the in-groups on the moral high ground and at the same time serves to justify inflicting harm on the out-groups, Brewer (2000, p. 135) highlights that the *victimization can become part of the shared belief system* and «the remembered victimization can be activated at any time to mobilize *feelings of vulnerability, in-group defence and moral righteousness* in response to perceived contemporary threats», even when the perpetrator is not the same. Volkan (1997) introduces the notion of «*chosen trauma*» to refer to the collective memory or a shared mental representation of a calamity that once befell a group’s ancestors, which is transmitted from one generation to the next one. He further elaborates on this by claiming that «a political leader may re-ignite a dormant group memory that affects collective thinking, perceptions, and actions. When such a shared mental representation of the original injury is reactivated, it may distort a large group’s perceptions. New enemies involved in current conflicts may be perceived as extensions of an old enemy from a historical event» (Volkan, 1997, p. 46).

This was certainly the case of the «chosen trauma» of Serbs related to the battle on Kosovo Polje. For the understanding of the violent events in the years that followed its 600th anniversary commemoration, it is important to note that the rage over the defeat in the battle on Kosovo Polje was addressing Ottomans from the past, and Bosnian Muslims were perceived as an extension of the Ottomans, and therefore exposed to revenge. Volkan (1997, p. 67) claims that «under Ottoman rule Serbs became perennial mourners [...] The

Serbs held on to their victimized identity and glorified victimization». Dobrica Cosic, writer, academic and one of the instigators of Serbian nationalism, made a clear link between self-victimization and justification of own violence in 1970, during his inauguration as member of Serbian Academy of Science and Arts. On that occasion he claimed that the Serb nation has always been winning in war and losing in peace. His statement was clearly praising violence as a tool for meeting Serbian interests. Cosic is one of the co-authors of SASA Memorandum from 1986, which, as we have seen in Chapter 4, is «a list of Serbian grievances against “the others” from ancient times to present-day Yugoslavia, and a battle cry to rectify those grievances» (Kurspahic, 2003, p. 33).

5.5.2. Defensive war discourse and its consequences

For all parties involved the 1991-1996 armed conflict, the war was a *defensive* one. YNA was defending Yugoslavia, as per their mandate; Serbian leadership was defending the interests of the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia and preventing a repetition of atrocities that they suffered in ISC. Croats were defending their own land and people in Croatia, as well as the interests and lives of their fellow Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina were struggling for the very survival of their community in that country. No party considered oneself as aggressor, attacker or conqueror. The self-defence discourse in the framework of *win-lose narrative* often served as justification of own group violence and was largely supported by the media.

Furthermore, there was a *generalized perception that at some point violence became inevitable*, that no other means were left to protect the population, which got engulfed in a circle of violence. As the armed conflict was growing, violence was being perceived as the only choice and a duty of every person caring for own community and homeland. Describing the avalanche of violence which placed some very challenging choices in front of many individuals in Croatia, Ostric (2010, pp. 32-33) observes: «Croats were not “called” into the war, the war was dropped on them. Bombs started falling on their houses, the lives of their beloved ones were threatened (...) In such situation, many people

who were against the war and many critics of the authorities changed their mind and joined the army (...) In this tragic situation everybody has to make their own, individual, existential choice, there are no general ethical principles which would tell us what to do».

The self-victimization of different ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia opened the room for *group homogenization* on the one hand and for the *de-humanization of the opponent groups on the other*. Jabri (1996) observes that the discourse of war aims at the construction of mythology based on inclusion and exclusion. The categorization sharply contrasts the insiders from the outsiders who are the “others” or the deserving enemy, the development also observed among ethnic groups in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as we have seen in the analysis of «new» ethnic identities in the initial part of this Chapter. Jabri (1996, p.7) further expands on this by stating that «once violent destruction of the enemy and its valued resources comes to define a relationship, the rules of the game or the rules of “everyday life” change. Behaviour that is unacceptable in peace-time becomes legitimate in time of war. Specifically killing, torture, rape, mass expulsions, ethnic cleansing and the creation of concentration camps are explained by such terms which essentially state that while war goes on we must expect such occurrences, or simply not be surprised by them».

This is precisely the discourse and practice that was promoted by the leadership of different ethnic groups during 1991-1995 war. This change in the social norms was prompted by coupling the discourse of «we are victims and they are victimizers» with the discourse «the only way that we could save ourselves is by defeating them», presenting violence as the only option and condition for own group survival. As argued by Elcherot and Spini (2011, p. 186), «narratives of collective victimisation tend to portray the suffering of “in-group” members not only as a common fate, but also a unique or exceptional. In other words, the suffering of “others” is forgotten or downplayed». This was confirmed during the 1991-1995 war. Analysing the Belgrade daily *Politika*, Skopljanac Brunner (2000, p. 140) observes that «the victims of the “other side” were never mentioned. The “others” even when civilians, were not victims

but enemies who wanted to “eradicate everything Serbian”». Moreover, *victimization of own group was contrasted by the vilification of the other group*, often using exaggerated messages and transferring the meaning from political to mythological level. For instance, the vilification of Croatian army by Serbian media was represented in the recurrently used image of Croatian soldiers making necklaces of the fingers of Serbian children. Such discourses contributed to the feelings of fear, rage and desire for revenge against the «ethnic enemy». They were instigated by the elites, who were presenting themselves as the only ones able to save their nation.

5.6. The situation is critical and the threat is imminent, but your leadership is here to save you: political elites as «saviours» and nationalism as the new principle of governance and legitimacy

When in 1987 Milosevic stepped out of the meeting room to respond to the crowd’s cry for help and exclaimed «No one is allowed to beat you!», he became a Serbian hero. The saviour of mistreated Serbs in Kosovo got in the focus of all media with his promise to bring back safety and dignity to his terrorized compatriots.

The strategic approach to securing own legitimacy by self-portraying themselves as saviours and «the only guarantee of safety and order» was systematically used by the ruling elites during the breakdown of Yugoslavia. This approach was also used as an effective tool for de-mobilization of opposition forces which were advocating for democratization of Croatia and Serbia, as described by Gagnon (2014) and other authors. The so called tunnel vision of the situation, which concept was presented in Chapter 4, was fomented in such way, narrowing the prism through which members of society interpreted reality and excluding non-violent approaches to the conflict.

The *zero-sum discourse on the conflict*, whereby the interests of the ethnic groups were portrayed by the elites as mutually exclusive, and armed solutions of annihilation of the enemy presented as the only possible solutions, strongly contributed to the acceptance of violence by most population. Those who were struggling against this severe reduction of the prism, calling for

democratization and non-armed, win-win solutions, were quickly labelled as «the enemies of the nation», «anti-patriots», «servants of foreign interests», or simply bad Croats, Serbs or Muslims, as we shall see in Chapters 6-8. Through such denigration they were often successfully demobilized.

It can be observed that similar tactics of keeping the power by preventing democratization and denigrating opponents were used by Tito during Yugoslavia and by the leaders of the states emerging from Yugoslavia, such as Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia or Franjo Tudjman in Croatia. As for Alija Izetbegovic, he gradually turned from defender of multi-ethnic character of the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina into the «saviour» of his ethnic group, using Muslim-centred discourse and denouncing initiatives for multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina as pure «romanticism». In his address to the convention of Party of Democratic Action (PDA) in March 1994 he states:

«Of course, as they say, diplomacy is just the embellishment of the military situation. Our political victory, and we should not forget that, is a result of military efforts, result of the military situation that enabled it (...)
» (Izetbegovic, 1995, p. 69)

From using the non-ethnic terminology, such as the terms Chetniks or Yugoslav army, to describe the enemy, Izetbegovic gradually started using ethnic terms, sending a message that all members of that ethnic group were the enemy and contributing to inter-ethnic mistrust and violence:

«I am wondering if the Serbs are going to fool the world once more. They have succeeded to pull its leg several times» (Izetbegovic, 1995, p. 76).

Finally, just like Milosevic and Tudjman, Izetbegovic started «worrying» also about the members of his ethnic group in other republics and playing the role of their saviour, too. Referring to the region of Sandzak in Serbia, which has a large community of Muslims, he states:

«There will be no lifting of sanctions [imposed on Serbia] until there is just peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina and until *our brothers in Sandzak* get their rights. And, speaking of Sandzak, I would like to mention that we

consider the Muslim national council of Sandzak as the only legitimate representative of the people of Sandzak» (Izetbegovic, 1995, p. 77).

In order to remain in power, political elites needed to prevent the peaceful transition from one-party system to democratic governance. In the post-communist era, they needed a new principle of legitimacy and they found it in the *ethnonationalism*.

Furthermore, *radical groups in complicity with national authorities started creating parallel local military and governance structures, which were becoming de facto authorities*. In order to seize power radical groups would use militias and purge the regular and other moderate local authorities, disseminating fear among local population. This was possible in the situation of breakdown of the state, sending a clear message to large parts of the population that the state was no longer ready or capable to protect them¹².

The parallel structures often operated in complicity with the ruling elites from the national level, as they were contributing their political and economic goals. This new pattern of governance and a turning point towards violence was observed throughout Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. As will be seen from Chapters dedicated to the two case studies, preventing the appearance of para-military and para-governance structures was crucial for preserving positive inter-group relationships in the two *oases of peace*.

Both Serbian and Croatian leadership managed to channel people's dissatisfaction with the deteriorating standard of living into the idea of inequality and discrimination of their nation in Yugoslavia, coupled with resentment towards other nations. As observed by Kurspahic (2003, p. 66) «*each group's nationalism played into the hands of the other*. Milosevic's threat of Serb domination awakened the "thousand-years-old dream" of Croatia's independences. Tudjman's takeover, based on his Croatia-to-Croats promise,

¹² For example, in eastern Croatia such major shift occurred when in the city of Osijek parallel governance was installed by radical Croatian right wing structures. Its aim was to instigate violence between Croats and Serbs and seize properties and power in that region. In order to achieve this aim, radical forces killed the head of the police in Osijek Josip Reihl-Kir, who was a moderate Croat promoting cooperation and non-violence between Croats and Serbs.

gave an excuse for the Serbs to rebel and declare autonomy. That, in turn, served as a perfect pretext for the CDU's mass purge of all public institutions and services of all those considered unreliable or unpatriotic».

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, three nationalist parties – those claiming to represent Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats - agreed to promote each other amongst voters prior to the 1991 elections, in order to ensure the defeat of the non-nationalists. Ethnic nationalists from all groups were playing into the hands of each other to seize or maintain power, while at the same time the dominant discourses were speaking of inter-ethnic violent conflict, mistakenly presenting ethnic diversity as a source of conflict in the former Yugoslavia. As we shall see in the next section, most media wholeheartedly supported such dominant discourses and contributed to violence.

5.7. Media in the service of war: spreading fear, fostering divisions and instigating violence

Media discourses play crucial role in shaping the realities and strongly influence the actions of the population in any country. It is important to recall that Yugoslav media was controlled by the Communist Party, first centrally and then, after the process of decentralization in the 1970s, from the republics' capitals. As presented in Chapter 4, in Yugoslavia there was no tradition of free and independent media, the news were regularly filtered and the self-censorship omnipresent in the country where criticism of the system would most often lead to the declaration of the author as the «internal enemy». In such a context, the majority of editors and journalists were accustomed to perceive media as means of information or a service for ruling party propaganda and not a truth-seeking institution. Accustomed to follow the political directives without questioning and probing, most media workers simply switched loyalty from communist party to the new nationalist leaderships and got into the service of a nationalist propaganda.

In Serbia, Milosevic established close collaboration with key media outlets, controlling some 90 per cent of all information available to Serbs. The Belgrade daily *Politika*, once a highly respected and prominent daily paper, played a

special role in Milosevic's mission to establishing Greater Serbia. Founded in 1904, *Politika* was the oldest and the most widely read daily paper in Yugoslavia. Udovicki and Torov (2000, p. 89) highlight that «*Politika* was a paper the public identified with the country's best liberal traditions. Unlike any other daily or weekly, it had always enjoyed the aura of a national treasure. At the same time, on a more intimate level, common readers saw it as an inseparable part of their household life, a cherished family friend». Kurspahic (2003) considers that as of 1987 *Politika* became the mouthpiece of Serb nationalism. The author particularly points at the newly established rubric «Echoes and reactions», which was formally introduced as the part of the paper which was «edited by the people», in principle transmitting letters and views of the common people, but was actually used to attack any opponents to Milosevic's political aims. Gradually the list of enemies was extended and *Politika* turned into «an unrestrained eruption of not only cheap homely pseudo-patriotism, chauvinism and uncontrolled political gossip, but also the eruption of blind hatred towards Albanians, Croats, Muslims, Slovenes, Macedonians... and "Serb traitors"» (Kurspahic, 2003, p. 46).

Reviving the negative memories of the past and linking them to the feeling of present threat was one of the main roles of the Serbian mainstream media. As an illustration, on August 25, 1991, *Politika* wrote that Croatian President Tudjman was planning to kill off Serbs in his republic adding that the genocide would be carried out «silently and without any realization by the world public about what is happening in Croatia» (Ramet, 1992, p. 225). There are numerous other examples of news fabrication, with Serbian media being the most exaggerated, reaching such extremes as the *Politika* headline on October 3, 1991, stating: «Croatia is getting ready to produce and atomic bomb». After the Croatian town of Vukovar was completely destroyed and most of its population killed or expelled by the Serbian forces, Serbian TV reported that Vukovar was «levelled but free». Another common feature of media fabrication was justification of atrocities of own group by stating that the opposing group was purposely killing their own members simply to blame the others. For instance, Belgrade media claimed that Muslims organized a marketplace massacre in Sarajevo simply to denigrate the Serbs.

A similar scenario of the key media being seized by the nationalists took place in Croatia. This was possible thanks to the process of privatization, during which media outlets changed owner and from social property turned into state property. During the privatization process the ruling party made sure to get control of the most important business, including media outlets. They were purged from all professionals considered as «unreliable». For example, in September 1991 more than 300 employees of Croatian national television were told that their entry passes were no longer valid – most of them were of Serb nationality or had Serb spouses or opinions not supporting the ruling party.

Oberschall (2000, p. 987) claims that «*the media unleashed the war of words and symbols before the war of bullets*». In this war distortions, fabrications and pure lies were commonly used to such extent that they belied peoples' personal experiences. For discerning the influence of the media on the behaviour of groups and individuals during break-up of Yugoslavia several important aspects of the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav context need to be taken into account. Firstly, it is important to keep in mind that there was a lack of critical approach to the media, inherited from the socialist times, as explained in Chapter 4.

The second aspect to be taken into account is the generalized *loss of professional standards among media professionals* in Serbia and in Croatia. The standards were «*sacrificed to the national cause*», which led not only to the uncritical nationalist discourse but also to the high levels of falsification of news. While serving the goals of the leadership of their ethnic group, many influential media workers disregarded all ethical and other professional norms and dedicated to fabrication of lies. The truth and objectivity were sacrificed at the altar of the homeland, transforming media into propaganda with agitating purposes. Fabricating news and lying became a norm required by the patriotic call to duty. As a plastic example of blind patriotism, Kurspahic (2003, p. 182) quotes a young female Croatian TV journalist who proudly announced on the air: «I am ready to lie for my homeland!».

The lack of critical approach and the high level of trust of the population to some of the key media outlets, combined with the loss of professional standards in those outlets, made the influence of the media strongly harmful. Serbian and Croatian leadership used similar methods to influence media outlets – they privatized them and seized control over them. In Croatia, the three key daily papers – *Vjesnik*, *Vecernji list* and *Slobodna Dalmacija* – became the voices of the regime.

Unlike in Croatia and Serbia, in Bosnia-Herzegovina a number of media outlets remained loyal to the tradition of inter-ethnic tolerance. The most influential paper promoting responsible journalism was daily *Oslobodjenje*. After their premises were set afire from Serb positions, they continued publishing from a shelter underneath their building. The magazine *Dani* was another example of independent and critical medium in the country.

According to Kurspahic (2003), the constant line of the Bosnian media in the months preceding wartimes was their opposition to war. However, during the war several media outlets – such as the magazine *Ljiljan* and the weekly *Zmaj od Bosne* – started promoting violence against non-Muslims. The a priori suspicion of Serb neighbors and the negative speech against so called mixed marriages were some of the key characteristics of extremist Muslim media. For example, *Ljiljan* was denouncing the mixed marriages as result of «ideological abuses» of the communist era and called the children of those marriages «disoriented» (Kurspahic, 2003, p. 117).

A few media outlets in Serbia and Croatia refused to be manipulated and maintained integrity and high ethical values challenging the discourses of war. Their characteristics and influence will be explored in Chapter 6.

5.8. Dominant discourses of violence: conclusions

The above analysis of dominant discourses in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina during 1991-1995 conflict indicates that national and international discourses of the ethnic nature of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia prevailed despite a number of voices providing clear arguments against such

understanding. Conceiving the conflict in ethnic terms legitimized ethnic fracturing as the only «imaginable solution» in the European context of nation states and nation state-like territories as homogeneous political spaces with a match of population, territory and destiny.

Such «solution» disregarded the rich and complex history of group identification processes on the territory of the former Yugoslavia and continued imposing top-down identity categorization as had been the case also in the past. In the context of the dissolution of Yugoslav state, nationalist elites used and fomented the fears of the population in order to meet their own interests and goals. The salience of ethnic identities was instigated and other ethnic groups portrayed as enemies, with help, among other, of negative collective memories of inter-ethnic hostilities, which were revived to foster the feeling of unsafety.

With support of the nationalist media and international community, ethnic leaders imposed themselves as saviours and succeeded in portraying violence as necessary and justified and promoting it among the population. Ethnic group identities developed new traits in which violence against out-groups was largely accepted and persons with insufficiently high levels of ethnic identification exposed to ostracism. All this supported the process of *ethnicization* of the violent conflict which several alternative voices tried to challenge and stop. Their efforts will be analysed in the next chapter of this study.

Chapter 6: Alternative voices: an overview of the evolution, key characteristics and influence of selected counter-discourses opposing war

«The honesty of a nation reflects, among other, in its readiness to admit the atrocities which were committed in its name. That might be the highest level of the national feeling, the most noble and the most difficult at the same time» (Matvejevic, 1993)

In this chapter I identify and explore some of the most prominent counter-discourses at supra-local level to the discourse of war in the former Yugoslavia. As seen in Chapter 3, counter-discourses are defined by Jabri (1996, p. 7) as *«those representations that deconstruct and delegitimize war»* and thereby *«fragment myths of unity, duty and conformity»*. My identification and analysis of counter-discourses does not pretend to be exhaustive, but rather illustrative. It aims at looking into several examples and key characteristics of counter-discourse to the discourse of war at *supra-local level* before undertaking in-depth analysis of two community experience of counter-discourse at *local level* in the *oases of peace*. Oriented by the three key themes of this study, I will analyse the *«alternative social worlds»* that these counter-discourses were proposing in terms of group identification, inter-group relations and governance.

Alternative voices opposing discourses and practices of war in the 1990s disintegrating Yugoslavia originated mainly from the *civil society movements* and *anti-war oriented media*. In addition, numerous individuals with different levels of power, including a large number of draft evaders, stood up against pretended military solutions to the conflict in the country. Finally, specific communities, such as the two in the focus of Chapters 7 and 8, lived the experience of anti-war discourse as they rejected the discourse on the ethnic causes of the conflict and therefore opted for solutions which did not involve inter-ethnic fracturing and violence. I will first explore some of the key initiatives coming from the civil society organizations.

6.1. Civil society mobilizing against discourses and practices of war

As we have seen in Chapter 4, in the former Yugoslavia there was a lack of critical civil society organizations. One-party system of governance and lack of freedom of expression prevented the evolution of political and other pluralism. Nevertheless, following significant changes in the political arena, civil society movements started developing in the 1980s, and some of them will play critical role in mobilizing citizens against massive organized violence in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

With regard to the civil society counter-discourse in Serbia, one of the main voices of resistance to the discourses of violence came from the activists's group *Women in Black*. Opposing militarism, war and masculine violent politics of Serbian leadership, this group organized its first action on October 9, 1991, starting a series of protest that would last throughout the war, but also after it. Inspired by similar movements in other parts of the world, such as Israel and Italy, *Women in Black* organized weekly vigils, which were charged with symbolism around three notions: black, silence and body. Every Wednesday from 1991 to 1996, they protested against violent events that were taking place, such as the aggression of the Serbian regime in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the violent mobilization of men for war, the exodus of the Serbian civilian population from the region of Krajina in Croatia, and many others.

As explained by Zajovic (2007), the symbols that Women in Black used were anti-patriarchal, alternative, subversive and rebellious. Black was used as a symbol of mourning for all the victims of war and violence in the former Yugoslavia. As quoted in Bilic (2015, p. 138), in 1992 Women in Black declared:

«We are a group of women who stand in silence and dresses in black every week to express our disagreement with this war. We decided to show the women's side of the war. In our countries women dress in black to show grievance for those who are close to them. We dress in black for all the victims of war. We dress in black because people are evicted from

their homes, because women are raped, because cities and villages are burnt down and destroyed»

Silence was used to condemn those who produced war and violence. Zajovic (2007, p. 8) states:

«We chose silence because we do not have the words to express the tragedy, suffering and pain produced by war and violence. We choose silence because we do not have the words to express our bitterness towards the state-organized crimes of the Milosevic regime (...) Silence is an invitation to understand and to listen to oneself and others».

Silence was also used as a means of non-violent defense and a line dividing Women in Black from passers-by, as activists were making all efforts not to respond to the provocations from numerous observers. The third symbol Women in Black used was a body. The activists were using own bodies to protest in silence and were very often exposed to criticism, insults, threats and other forms of verbal and physical violence. With their bodies Women in Black have been literally and symbolically creating the space of freedom and empathy, space for alternative political views which were rejecting the culture of destruction and death.

Nurturing dialogue among women from all warring sides, *Women in Black* were promoting *group identification based on gender above ethnic group identification*. They combined *solidarity among women* with *solidarity among all those who were rejecting violence*, in which effort they supported and were supported by male individuals and groups. As an example, during six months between October 1991 and February 1992, they joined citizens' initiative holding daily antiwar candlelight vigils in front of the Serbian Presidency Building against the forced mobilization of men in Serbia, using the slogan «solidarity with all those who rebel against the war». They were proactively supporting conscientious objectors and draft evaders in Serbia, whose numbers reached tens of thousands.

Protesting against atrocities orchestrated by Serbian authorities, Women in Black were a continuous reminder to the society in Serbia of all the evils that

were being committed «in their name». They challenged the concept of inter-ethnic conflict and were systematically exposing the atrocities committed or instigated by their own government and requesting its accountability. As such, they were portrayed as traitors of own nation, often threatened and banned. The black color they were dressing was often associated with «dark and obscure powers». They were stigmatized, followed by police and the organization was exposed to court cases. However, throughout the war and after it, they remained a mirror of the Serbian society and – although protesting in silence - turned into one of the loudest counter-discourses to the discourse of violence in Serbia.

The context in Croatia had many similarities, but also many differences when compared to the Serbian civil society resistance to violence. The key difference is clearly expressed by Ostric (2010, pp. 31-33), who was wondering how to be a pacifist in an attacked country. Analyzing the difference in the contexts of Croatia and Serbia, Ostric explains:

«The war was taking place on others' territory, nobody was threatening Serbia. The number of draft evaders (in Serbia) is high, they come out publically. The ethical dilemma is simple. But for the majority of Croats, this war was something very different. They were not called into the war, it came uninvited to them, to their towns and homes (...) Maybe at an earlier stage something could have been done differently, but the moment came when armed resistance was the only remaining choice».

Although faced with such a dilemma, Croatian civil society did develop a counter-discourse to the discourse of violence, mostly gathering around the *Anti-War Campaign* initiated in Zagreb in July 1991. The Campaign initiated by a few people gradually grew into a network gathering local and international volunteers, working on a number of issues such as consciousness objection, support to refugees and displaced persons, education for peace, gathering data on war crimes, etc. A number of solid NGOs still operating in Croatia were born within the Anti-War Campaign, which was also publishing a paper titled ARK-zin. In Jankovic and Mokrovic (2011, p. 225), Bilic summarizes the work of the Anti-War Campaign in Croatia:

«Although they have never denied to their co-citizens the right to self-defense, the activists of Anti-War Campaign struggled against the generalized militarization of the Croatian society, which would use the act of aggression as an excuse for the limitation in human rights. A lot of energy was invested into the preservation of communication channels in the region (...) which offered an alternative perspective and acted against the homogenization of the society based on the national issue».

As a dissenting voice *daring to propose non-violent solutions in the times when Croatia was under attack*, and as such *disrupting the homogenization based on ethnic belonging*, activists of Anti-War Campaign were often exposed to harassment and criticism. Challenging the idea of courage as readiness to kill or die for the Homeland, Srdjan Dvornik (in Modric, 1993), one of the peace activists, pronounced the sentence used as the opening quote of this study:

«Today the highest level of courage consists in stating that you don't hate anyone and that you don't want to kill anyone».

The *gender-related aspects of counter-discourses to the discourse of war merit to be stressed*. The share of women's participation in anti-war movement and women's groups among all groups protesting against armed violence in most Yugoslav republics was very high. In Serbia, in addition to Women in Black, there were movements such as Women against War, the Women's Antiwar Caucus and the Women's Parliament (Torov, 2000). In Croatia, mothers of the young men who were serving their military service in the Yugoslav National Army (YNA) in 1991 launched an appeal to the leadership of Yugoslavia and its army trying to prevent that their sons are sent into a fratricidal war. On January 18 and 19, at the main square in Zagreb, they collected over 64 000 signatures to that appeal and handed them over to Stipe Mesic, Croatian member of presidency of Yugoslavia.

In late August 1991, forming the movement named *Mothers for Peace*, they organized a March for peace with thousands of people walking to Belgrade with a clear request to the YNA leadership: «give us our sons back!». Thousands of mothers from Croatia, but also from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo, marched to Belgrade to meet with the YNA

leadership. Their positions and expectations were clear: by marching together, they rejected in practice the view on the ethnic nature of the conflict. By requesting that their sons are released from the army, they rejected the idea of their sons dying for any political aims. However, they were not received by army officials and returned disappointed on October 30th, 1991. On the same day a massive antiwar protest was organized in front of the office of the Command of the fifth military region of YNA in Zagreb.

Antiwar protests as a counter-discourse to violence were organized also in other republics. A series of demonstrations against the war took place in *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, culminating in the major protest organized in Sarajevo on April 5, 1992. Between 50.000 and 100.000 citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina of all nationalities (Malcolm, 1994) gathered to protest against violence and divisions. Sniper fire was opened on the protesters from Holiday Inn hotel, which was under control of Serbian Democratic Party. Two female students, a Muslim and a Croat, were among six victims that were killed by nationalists in Sarajevo that day, announcing the horrors that this city and its citizens would go through in the years to come. In Serbia, the demonstration of solidarity with people of Sarajevo gathered a column of 150.000 citizens carrying a black ribbon in silence through downtown Belgrade.

Many actors of resistance (including the communities in the *oases of peace*) offered alternative views on the parties in conflict through insisting on the concept of citizenship, civic life and civilization. One of those actors was the organization *Serb Civic Council (SCC)*, which supported the sovereignty of Bosnia-Herzegovina and opposed the ethnicization of Bosnian politics. In a proclamation issued to the Serb people in Bosnia in July 1995, quoted by Campbell (1998, pp 46-47), the Council calls on the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina to *return to their anti-fascist traditions and respect the legitimate authorities of the country which guarantee equal human and civil rights for all citizens, irrespective of their ethnic belonging*. This message resume some of the key characteristics of the anti-war discourse: it was *building on the grounds of Yugoslav experience of anti-fascism* described in Chapter 4, as opposed to neo-fascist tendencies of new nationalist leaders; it was insisting on *equality*

of citizens as opposed to de facto inequality based on minority/majority dynamics; it was *inviting citizens to respect the legitimate authorities*, as opposed to supporting parallel civil and military structures that were being put in place by nationalists. The ideas promoted in this proclamation will prove to be some of the key characteristics of the counter-discourse to the discourses of violence in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as will be seen through the examples of *oases of peace* in the continuation of this document.

This was also the political agenda of the Union of Reform Forces (URF), the non-nationalist political party in Bosnia-Herzegovina which had very little electoral success, winning majority only in the city of Tuzla in the 1990s elections. The general term that was used in Tuzla and more broadly in Bosnia-Herzegovina opposing to nationalism and tribalism was the term «*citizens' option*». This was and remains an important alternative view on the group identities and the war. As a Bosnian army commander, quoted by Campbell (1998, p. 47), stated: «(the war is) about civilization. It's not an ethnic war; it is a war of ordinary people against primitive men who want to carry us back to *tribalism*».

The voices of the anti-war civil society movements were echoed by several independent anti-war oriented media outlets, which will be analysed below.

6.2. Anti-war media defending professional and ethical standards

As we have seen in Chapter 4, in Yugoslavia there was no tradition of critical media. Accustomed to serve as means of propaganda for the ruling party, most media outlets simply switched from communist to nationalist owners, joining and supporting their nationalist goals. However, a few media outlets refused to become part of the war propaganda and, at great personal and institutional sacrifice, defended professional standards and ethical values above the patriotic call of duty (Kurspahic, 2003). The examples of such outlets include daily papers *Borba* in Serbia and *Slobodna Dalmacija* in Croatia at the very beginning of the war. Apart from their anti-violence approach, they have in common the method by which they were silenced by the nationalist elites – through “privatization”, by imposing new nationalist editors and editorial politics

that made the professional journalists resign and join or form new, independent outlets.

Already in the late 1980s, years before the outbreak of armed violence, *Borba* was loudly warning about dangers of rising nationalism and demagoguery of the Serbian regime. It attracted top level journalists who were abandoning other media to join this prestigious paper. Milosevic tried several methods to silence *Borba*, including by causing artificial shortages of printing paper and supplies. Several *Borba*'s journalists were kidnapped in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The pressures culminated with the annulation of the privatization of *Borba* by the public prosecutor in 1994 and imposition of the new, regime-controlled editor, after which the majority of journalists left *Borba*, and some of them formed a new daily called *Nasa Borba* (Torov, 2000).

Slobodna Dalmacija, an influential daily paper published in the city of Split in Croatia, denounced in 1991 Croatian violations of the human rights of Serbs – an issue that no other media in Croatia dared to deal with (Balas, 2000). The political leadership in Croatia decided to solve this “problem” by privatizing the paper through issuance of stock, after which it imposed an editor obedient to the nationalist elites. Just like in the case of *Borba* in Serbia, most quality journalist left the paper. Several of them then formed what would become a *journalistic masterpiece of resistance to violence and human rights violations, a politico-satirical weekly Feral Tribune*.

Published in June 1993, in the midst of the war in Croatia, the first issue of *Feral Tribune* proclaimed that the aim of the magazine was «mobilization till the final victory of reason in the Homeland war». By indicating that «only if you laugh from ear to ear, you can actually show that you are armed to teeth», the editors announced their *goal to oppose violence and madness by combining humor with the top level political and social analysis*. One of the most important contributions of this magazine was in revealing the hidden objectives of the ruling elites, warning about their existence and questioning their justness. The magazine has been *informing about the progressive enrichment of the elites including president's family, who were profiting of the process of privatization of state properties taking place in the chaotic war-time circumstances and*

characterized by the highest levels of corruption. In this way, the magazine was challenging the dominant discourse about parties in conflict and the aims of the «Homeland» war.

When in his famous speech, held on the central square in Zagreb in 1992, the Croatian president Tudjman exclaimed: «We have our own Croatia! It's ours and it will be the way we want it to be!», the message was mainly understood as reaffirming Croatian sovereignty and independence. However, the evolving socio-political situation in the country raised concerns about the meaning of the terms “we” and “ours” in Tudjman’s statement and the potential unveiled objectives of the Croatian political leadership and elites, camouflaged under the discourse of Croatian autonomy.

Furthermore, *Feral Tribune* was *unveiling the involvement of the Croatian political and military elites in the partition of the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina.* The major shift in the Croatian politics, from the defensive war in Croatia to the aggressive war with hegemonic aspirations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, strongly challenged the positive self-image of Croats as victims of the armed conflict. That self-image was further challenged by *Feral*’s systematic denouncing of serious human rights violations of Serbs and other minority groups in Croatia, through forced evictions, dismissal from work and other forms of abuse. Through its work *Feral Tribune* provided *an alternative approach to patriotism, courage and loyalty to the nation*, which was also reflected in the work of Women in Black in Serbia, and can be summarized in the words of Predrag Matvejevic in the opening quote of this chapter.

Challenging the dominant discourse on the parties in conflict as “Croats versus Serbs” with a counter-discourse on the parties in conflict as “Rational people versus Irrational people”, considering as true patriots all those who stood up against violence or rejected to participate in it, in opposition to the “false” patriots who were using the war to attain their own economic and political interests, *Feral Tribune* was a source of relief and strength to many citizens. The manifestation of its power is clearly reflected in the fact that dominant elites in Croatia invested numerous efforts to close the paper down. From the imposition of special taxes, through the court cases against its

journalists, to drafting of one of the editors into the army and directly threatening its staff, many attempts were undertaken by the elites to shut *Feral Tribune* down. However, not only did the magazine survive war and post-war period, but for many citizens it became a daily «source of mental hygiene», as observed by Dinka Corkalo Biruski in a documentary film «A Mirror of Evolving Society» (Gariwosa, 2012). Like a true mirror, *Feral Tribune* was making its readers face many unpleasant truths, but also encouraging them to think critically and act as responsible citizens, which was a unique endeavour of great intellectual, practical and moral weight.

The media that maintained integrity against all odds during war in the former Yugoslavia also included monthly *Republika* and *Radio B92* in Serbia. In Croatia, regional *Novi list* published in Rijeka maintained a moderate and non-nationalist approach. Zagreb-based *Radio 101* was another voice of freedom. It irritated the nationalists in power to the extent that it took mass street protests of citizens in 1996 – with some 120.000 people attending the protest – to prevent the authorities from closing it.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina the mass media environment was different, because the key media outlets including Sarajevo Radio and Television as well as the daily paper *Oslobodjenje* managed to maintain independence from nationalist parties. Kurspahic (2003, p. 96), the former editor of *Oslobodjenje*, recalls:

«The SDP regularly charged that we were anti-Serbian, CDU that we were anti-Croat, and SDA that we were anti-Muslim. “We wouldn’t be so good if we were not so bad!” *Oslobodjenje* answered the criticism, borrowing from an ad for a controversial New York radio station and finding the attacks by nationalists in power the best investment in our credibility».

The struggle of nationalists against the anti-war media included destruction of transmitters of Sarajevo Television. Most media workers were under constant threat of armed violence. In addition to that, *Oslobodjenje* and other print media were struggling with the shortage of newsprint. Despite all odds, they continued publishing and struggling for a truly multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition to *Oslobodjenje*, magazines such as *BH Dani* and

Slobodna Bosna were amongst the most influential wartime print media maintaining a critical view against nationalism. Despite all their efforts, just like in Croatia and Serbia, the media outlets in Bosnia-Herzegovina offering critical and independent views and denouncing widespread violence had only limited influence on the course of the events in the former Yugoslavia.

6.3. «Narod» («people») versus «politika» («politics»): the use of the term «narod» as a counter-discourse and an alternative view on group belonging and parties in conflict

The great complexity of social identification processes in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina was explored in Chapter 4. Several supra-ethnic terms evolved (such as Yugoslavs, Bosnians), complementing or substituting the ethnic classification of citizens. An additional concept which is worth exploring and will be analysed because *it became part of the counter-discourse to the discourse of ethnic conflict, is a polyvalent term «narod».*

This multi-functional notion is used in a variety of meanings. In administrative terms and in the framework of dominant discourses, the term refers to the «nation». However, in the popular discourse it is used to describe «common people», «peoplehood» or «folk», implying a different type of group identity. This popular meaning can be illustrated with a quote from the news of Radio Delnice in Gorski kotar emitted on the 17 of September 1991, when the term «narod» was used four times in two sentences, while informing on the arrival of the new commander of the Yugoslav National Army to Delnice:

«The fact that he came to Delnice in a very crucial time – after departure of the commander whom *narod* trusted, was the first topic of our conversation, together with his own attitude toward *narod*, toward his military duties, the infrastructure that *narod* built and offered to its army. The people of Gorski kotar, all the *narod* of Delnice, lived until recently together with the soldiers from all Yugoslavia».

During the 1991-1995 war the evolution of the two-fold meaning of the term «narod» reached highly opposing meanings. In its meaning of «nation» the

term became highly exclusive, following the rise in the salience of national identities and their increasingly restrictive constitutive norms described in Chapter 5. At the same time, the same term «narod» remained highly inclusive when referring to common folk. Hromadzic (2014, p. 266) describes the later use of this term as «unsettled, non-threatening and apparently apolitical notion to provide a space for solidarity and “popular politics”». She further observes a *discursive mechanism that opposes «narod» to «politika», i.e. peoplehood from the political elites which implied injustice, corruption and immoral force of the politics, beyond and above ethnic divisions*. In this context she notes: «*Narod* is thus excluded from the benefits of the war and financial gains, which renders it “clean” of dirty political agendas, yet marginal and victimized, and contributing to its own oppression» (Hromadzic, 2014, p. 266).

I found evidence of such use of the term «narod» in the interviewees conducted in the two *oases of peace*.

«*Narod* would never destroy all those resources.... But it was in the interest of representatives of ethnic corpses!» (Interviewee 13, from Tuzla)

«*Narod* was easily fooled, they were receiving confusing messages from different sides, but those up above were pulling the strings» (Interviewee 4, from Gorski kotar)

As we can see from the above, *the term «narod» was used as a counter-discourse to the discourse of ethnic divisions, as resistance to ethnic classification and sign of solidarity among ethnically divided people*. Such use of the term «narod» is clearly supporting an *alternative perception of opponents in the 1991-1995 violent conflict*. The prevailing view about the conflict among different ethnic groups is challenged by the idea that the parties in conflict were political elites from all ethnic groups, as equally corrupt and self-interested, on the one side, and *narod* from all ethnic groups, who was paying the price of their political agendas, on the other side. However, this type of counter-discourse remained of low influence while the ethnic discourse prevailed and remained dominant. The imposition of the ethnic partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina by local nationalist projects and international policies has

flattened the multi-layered social identity discourses (Hromadzic, 2013) and directed the discussion on the causes and possible solutions of the Bosnia-Herzegovina problem towards ethnic identity. A similar process took part in Croatia, reducing the variety of social identities to a single dimension - the ethnic one.

6.4. Silenced or marginalized: limited influence of alternative voices on the course of events in the former Yugoslavia

As indicated by Jabri (1996, p.5), in wars «[a]ffiliation and identity come to be defined in terms of exclusionist social boundaries. To be a dissenting voice is to be an *outsider*, who is often *branded as a traitor to the cause* and, therefore, deserving of sacrifice at the mythical altar of solidarity. What would previously have been blurred social boundaries become sharpened primarily through a discursive focus upon features, both symbolic and material, which divide communities to the extent that the desire for destruction of the enemy is perceived to be the only legitimate or honourable course to follow».

Indeed, alternative voices in the former Yugoslavia challenging the legitimacy and the widespread acceptance of violence, uncovering a variety of aspects of violence and proposing a different discourse on its causes, actors and aims, or simply proposing non-violent solutions to the existing problems, were regularly blamed as traitors and their efforts were frequently undermined. Different pejorative terms, such as «foreign mercenaries», «Yugo-nostalgics», «enemies of the Homeland» and others, were used to discredit them in the larger public.

Jabri (1996, p. 97) further explains that mobilization of support for war is built upon *representations of grievance*, whereby *sectional interests usually applicable to the elites are represented as grievances applicable to the entirety of the community*. This is why there are two aspects of discourse of war that need to be closely looked into with a critical eye: who are the *parties in conflict*, and what is the *issue* over which the conflict is fought. Different alternative voices and counter-discourses to the discourse of war posed these two questions and most often were either disregarded or exposed to public

criticism because, as Jabri (1996) explains, *nonconformity or dissent is conceived as treachery against not simply the leadership, but the community as a whole*, and any contradictions are either directly prevented from reaching the political agenda or are negated in the name of a *mythical solidarity against a constructed common enemy*.

In that context, alternative voices in the former Yugoslavia were often a target of hostility and stigmatization by the dominant discourse. As they were not representing the national elites, they were subjected to suspicion of representing some illegitimate interest which were a threat to the national interest. This is well reflected in the words of Franjo Tudjman, who was furious after his return from USA in 1996 when he found out that 120.000 Croatian citizens protested against the closure of Radio 101, the only critical voice in the electronic media. Tudjman's words reflect well his perception of the «alternative voices» in Croatia:

«We will not let those remnants of the Yugo-Communist system, nor those of the Yugo-Serbian one, (...) nor to those political amateurs, headless scatter-brains, who don't see what is really at stake today in Croatia and in the world with all sorts of regional plans (...). We will not allow those who tie themselves even with the black devil against Croatian freedom and independence. Not only to the black, but also to green and yellow devils (...)» (Franjo Tudjman at Zagreb airport, November 1996).

Moderate and alternative voices in the former Yugoslavia were marginalized and silenced by a variety of methods applied by the dominant nationalist forces. Their electoral defeat in most of the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina and great part of Croatia was largely due to the nationalists persuading the population that splitting the «ethnic vote» would expose them to a threat by the opposite ethnic group. Furthermore, despite many efforts of the civil society in most republics to organize massive protests against the mounting violence, the lack of tradition of civil disobedience in the former Yugoslavia turned out to be a major handicap and took a huge toll on the antiwar movement, which remained fairly isolated and unable to inspire the support of wider populations. Coupled with that, the lack of experience and limitations to the influence of

critical, independent media should be taken into account. Although among the wartime media there were alternative voices that were antinationalistic, critical and ethical, most of them were of limited reach and the nationalistic outlets were much more vocal. For instance, Milosevic had control over 90 per cent of Serbian media, and even used the existence of the alternative media as proof of free press in Serbia. Tudjman also got into control of all major media outlets in Croatia, which enjoyed his political and economic support.

In addition to political pressures, anti-war movements and independent media outlets were *exposed to economic hardship*. While the official press under control of the authorities was state-subsidised, the independent media had to face the challenge of economic crisis which was affecting both their ability to publish in combination with the readers' declining standard of living including capability to continue buying and consuming independent media. Furthermore, court cases against independent media with severe economic consequences were another tool often used to silence the counter-discourse. Kurspahic (2003) further explains that the success of the nationalists in silencing alternative media should be observed in the context of the public that had been unused to critical media of different sources: the Yugoslav public had only been exposed to the communist-controlled media, which was now replaced by nationalist-controlled media. The lack of tradition of independent media caused a lack of critical approach to the media contents.

Furthermore, journalists from the independent media were often *targeted by the warring sides*. Several Borba journalists were kidnapped by Bosnian Serbs in 1992. Just like all other groups and individuals opposing war methods, they were *publically denounced as anti-patriots, traitors and foreign mercenaries*. As many initiatives related to independent media and anti-war discourse were funded by Soros Foundation, hostility towards that foundation developed top-down. Those working on projects funded by them were tagged with a pejorative term "Soros's people" (*Sorosevci*), which implied that they were not patriot but sold themselves to the foreign power.

As summarized by Gagnon (2004), conservative forces in Serbia and Croatia used strategies of demobilization of alternative, non-violent forces to

avoid fundamental economic and political changes. «By using the image and discourse of injustices being perpetrated against innocent civilians by evil others defined in ethnic terms conservative elites managed successfully to divert attention away from the demands for change (...) The violence served to reconstruct political space at home, in Serbia and in Croatia, by disqualifying anyone who disagreed with the president or the ruling party as enemies of justice, as either dupes or tools of the evil forces responsible for these injustices, as traitors» (Gagnon, 2004, pp. 181-182). In such circumstances, the dominant discourses of war gained widespread acceptance, imposing violence as inevitable, legitimate and effective way of «solving the problem».

6.5. Alternative voices: conclusions

In this chapter I presented and analysed a selection of counter-discourses to the discourses of war, originating from Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. The analysis of those counter-discourses shows that several of them *attempted to problematize the problem*, i.e. challenge the way the problem of violence in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina was conceptualized, questioning its ethnic «nature». They often recognized and warned about *nationalism as a main cause of conflict*. In this context they *opposed ethnic identification with the group identification category of citizens*, as a supra-ethnic category of equal individual right-holders in a specific state. This distinction between nation-state or nation-state-like territory as a «war trophy» and a state as an organized community equally accountable to all its citizens, proved as a key difference in the conceptualization and consequent actions of nationalists and non-nationalists.

By unveiling the hidden agendas of the political elites, the counter-discourses proposed different classification of inter-group relationships and parties in conflict. Their «alternative versions of truth» included strong evidence that relevant inter-group relations in the conflict included «politicians versus the folks», «rationality versus irrationality» or «tribalism versus civilization». Many anti-war initiatives, particularly those initiated by groups of women, engaged members of different ethnic groups in demanding peace,

therefore showing in practice that members of different ethnic groups had common goals.

All counter-discourses challenged the ways in which the problem in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina was being addressed, i.e. *they protested against the widespread violence* and other types of massive human rights violations and requested that solutions to be found in constructive manner. *Rejecting the generalized idea about inevitability of violence, they were requesting accountability of the governing bodies and respect for the rule of law.* With their own actions, they were fighting for freedom of speech and critical media as prerequisites of democratic societies.

Although alternative voices to the discourse of violence were present in all former Yugoslavia, their influence on the evolution of the situation in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina remained limited. Further research would be needed to determine the scope of effects that they had on the societies affected by conflict. The existing analysis shows that dominant discourses overrode them by spreading inter-group fear and imposing the narrative of the ethnic conflict as «the truth». In such context, *ethnic group leaders imposed and were accepted by international and local communities as the only ones with narrative authority, marginalizing the counter-discourses.* In addition to that, the elites in the new post-Yugoslav countries made systematic efforts to *silence counter-discourses.* They were sanctioned in different ways for not serving the «patriotic duty» of spreading nationalism - they were regularly tagged as traitors, suffered threats, financial cuts, attempts of military mobilization, etc.

In addition to the initiatives coming from the civil society or media, alternative discourses in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina included community based type of resistance to ethnic fracturing and violence. In many villages, towns and cities local communities attempted to resist to the dominant narrative on the ethnic nature of the war. Nevertheless, this resistance was successful till the end of the war in only two major communities, the one of Gorski kotar in Croatia and the one of Tuzla in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Their experiences are documented and analysed in the following two Chapters.

Chapter 7: Ethnically mixed communities as a counter-discourse (I): case study from the region of Gorski kotar in Croatia

«Our Serb neighbours, most of them, stayed with us here; our destinies remained interconnected, without blooded hands, arson and conflict. The displaced persons, who came to our place “for a short time” from their regions, with plastic bags full of memories, and stayed forever, often looked with reservation at our different approach to the situation. For them we might have been the people with insufficient Croat-hood, with lack of motivation for the war. But today they recognize and tell us: you did what had be done to save us all». (Nada Glad, in Horvat, 2003, p. 151)

In this chapter I will analyse the discourses and practices that prevailed in the region of Gorski kotar in Croatia during wartime, focusing on the three key themes of this study, namely group identification processes, inter-group relations and governance. My analysis is based on the gathered pre-existing texts and on the interviews with nine citizens of that region conducted between 2014 and 2016.

As explained in Chapter 3, the discourses which are central for this study include institutional texts, political discourses, media discourses and textbooks, therefore these types of discourses are central to this chapter. The period in the focus of this chapter includes the initial months of the war in Croatia in the second half of 1991, when the overall tone was set, and the time of several key events occurred during the war, which in the case of Gorski kotar include the departure of Yugoslav National Army (YNA) from the town of Delnice in 1991, holding of the meeting of Croat and Serb communal leaders in September 1992 and the establishment of the Peace school in August 1994.

In the initial section of this chapter I will elaborate on several historical and social aspects relevant for the evolution of the community resistance to ethnic fracturing and other types of violence in Gorski kotar.

Administrative map of Gorski kotar, Croatia (Coprnicka hisa, 2017)



7.1 Gorski kotar in context: the region that connects people

Even the shortest texts on the Croatian region of Gorski kotar bring attention of the reader to its significant role of a junction of several roads connecting central Europe and northern Adriatic (Markovic, 2003). The monography *Gorski kotar* (1981, p. 7) presents the region as «a significant territory of contact and connection» between the Croatian coast and the interior. Situated in Western Croatia, on the border with Slovenia, this region extends over some 1270 square kilometres, covering approximately 2.2 per cent of the territory of the Republic of Croatia. The large proportion of the region, approximately 63 per cent, is covered by forests. The limits of the region of Gorski kotar are only partly defined. Drawing a parallel between these physical characteristics of Gorski kotar and the ways in which its inhabitants preserved peace during the 1991-1995 war, one could observe that *Gorski kotar is characterized by connectedness and inclusiveness.*

According to the 2001 census, Gorski kotar had around 27,000 inhabitants. Administratively, the region is part of the Primorsko-Goranska County of Croatia. The centre of the region is the town of Delnice. The nine municipalities of Gorski kotar include Brod Moravice, Ravna Gora, Mrkopalj, Skrad, Fuzine and Lokve (see map).

The geographical characteristics of Gorski kotar, including scarcity of fertile land and rough mountain climate with abundance of rain and snow, made this area less attractive for settling than the neighbouring Adriatic coast and other nearby locations. Furthermore, parts of this area were inhabited and de-habited on several occasions due to important historical developments. One of those was the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries, which caused the departure of large proportions of autochthonous population towards safer areas¹³. When safety levels increased in the 17th and 18th centuries, many of their descendants returned to Gorski kotar, bringing back a wealth of cultural influences, including the extraordinary linguistic variety maintained until present.

As elaborated in Chapter 4, in order to protect the population from the incursions of the Ottomans, from 16th century the authorities of Habsburg Monarchy start forming a special *cordon area* called *Vojna Krajina* or Military Frontier. *South-eastern parts of Gorski kotar, including the municipalities of Mrkopalj and Vrbovsko, made part of Vojna Krajina*, which strongly influenced their demographic structure. Fleeing the Ottoman territories or attracted by the privileges offered by the Habsburg authorities in exchange for their military services against Ottomans, a high number of Vlachs moved to the area of Military Frontier. Many of them remained in Gorski kotar, as its inhabitants of Orthodox religion. According to Markovic (2003, p. 30), «at the beginning of the 19th century they embraced the Serbian national feeling and since then stopped being called Vlachs».

¹³ Ottoman intrusions were not carried out by the ethnic Turks, but by the population called Vlachs, described in Chapter 3. They were mostly, although not exclusively, of Orthodox religion, which they adopted after the 1054 Great Schism, together with the Serbs. During the Ottoman expansion to Serbia, many Vlachs joined the Ottoman forces as members of their armed personnel, performing intrusions into different areas, including into parts of Gorski kotar.

The history and social development of Gorski kotar were strongly influenced by the construction of the roads. Three important roads that transformed Gorski kotar into a significant transit area were built in the 18th century, during the French rule. Furthermore, following the construction of the railway line between Zagreb and Rijeka, a significant number of people arrived to the area of Gorski kotar in search of employment. Horvat (2003) stresses the high levels of education of a large share of that population, observable among other in the high number of libraries that were operational in a very small geographical area. Additionally, Horvat notes that the incoming population brought the culture of social activities, making Gorski kotar a place where some of the first civil society organizations promoting cultural and other activities in Croatia were formed. He further points at the fact that the characteristics of the geographic space – particularly its very small habitable surface – did not allow for the separation of people along ethnic lines.

Although in Gorski kotar there are several villages with large majority of Croats or of Serbs, these villages situated in the same narrow geographic area. This might have contributed to the development of «an autochthonous mentality of Gorski kotar, impregnated by more or less strong influences of those groups. Taking into account the way it was formed, *the main common characteristic of that mentality includes tolerance towards a newcomer, accompanied by the tendency to adopt new ideas*» (Horvat, 2003, p. 18). All indicates that the features of the geographic space influenced the shaping of the social space in Gorski kotar and contributed to its people's tendency towards inclusiveness and tolerance.

The variety of origins of the inhabitants of Gorski kotar is clearly reflected in their *linguistic diversity*. There is no other place in Croatia where so many dialects and different accents co-exist on such a small territory. Without any difficulties in understanding each other, many people still keep their dialects and small linguistic diversities reflected in their speech. This diversity can be observed sometimes even in the smallest hamlets, where neighbours speak with different accents. In my view, this indicates that people of Gorski kotar do

not have a tendency to assimilate others but rather maintain and cherish their diversity, respecting and valuing their differences.

Noting that in the past several imaginary lines of defence were passing through Gorski kotar, Horvat (2003) points at some *negative impacts of the geostrategic importance of this area*. Due to its mountainous topography and limited accessibility, the region was found to be propitious for storing large amounts of weaponry and other war-related items. During Ottoman empire Gorski kotar was the border area of the Military Frontier, during WWII the line dividing Italy and Independent State of Croatia (ISC) was passing through its centre, while during the time of Yugoslavia the YNA deposited large amounts of artillery in the area of Delnice, which became a major threat to the local population in 1991.

The beginning of WWII brought the division of the territory of Gorski kotar between two notorious regimes of the Axis Powers. The western part of the region was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy under fascist rule, together with large part of the Croatian coast. The rest of the region of Gorski kotar got under the rule of the ISC. Based on its principles of racism and ethnic intolerance described in Chapter 4, the ISC regime disseminated terror and violence particularly against the population of Serbian ethnic belonging, triggering inter-ethnic resentments. The monography *Gorski kotar* (1981) indicates that during the first months of ISC rule in the municipality of Srpske Moravice and the neighbouring Serbian villages the Ustashas had arrested, imprisoned, expelled or killed several hundreds of persons. At the same time, the fascist Italy was supporting the aims and the actions of the Chetnik movement, which tried to establish Greater Serbia by perpetrating ethnic cleansing of Croats from several areas (Goldstein, 2013).

The National Liberation Movement (NLM) led by the Communist party, which was formed as an act of resistance to the Axis Powers, gained large support in Gorski kotar. The NLM and its members, the Partisans, were opposing ethnic divisions and promoting the idea of brotherhood and unity of Southern Slavs, as we have seen in Chapter 4. A number of armed clashes between Partisans and the Axis forces took place in the region of Gorski kotar,

resulting in high number of deaths and injuries, numerous displacements and massive destruction of the infrastructure. A large number of the inhabitants of Gorski kotar joined the NLM where, regardless of their ethnic origin, they struggled together for the same cause.

The aftermath of the WWII saw the reconstruction of the infrastructure and the development of the region, particularly through the wood industry. Gorski kotar turned into a peaceful and modest region in Yugoslavia, where ethnic diversity was respected and celebrated. It was mostly during the census, undertaken every 10 years on average, and then during the 1990 elections, that people were reminded of their ethnicity and requested to choose «a box» defining their own ethnic identity. Changing and sometimes confusing categories, described in Chapter 5, and the previously analysed malleability of group identities, led to the results as described by one of my respondents:

«There is a place named Tuk which is partially Orthodox. One side of Tuk, maybe some 20-30 per cent of the people, are Catholic, the rest are Orthodox. Some people declared as Serbs, others as Croats of Orthodox faith.» (Interviewee 1)

According to the 1991 census, the majority of Serbs in Gorski kotar lived in the Municipality of Vrbovsko, making 2594 out of the total number of 7527 of its inhabitants. Serbs also lived in other areas of south-eastern Gorski kotar. Although during 1990 the nationalist party Croatian Democratic Union (CDU) won the majority both in the Parliament and in most localities in Croatia, in Delnice and most other towns of Gorski kotar it was the League of Communists of Croatia – Party of Democratic Reform (LCC-PDR) that was elected. As a successor of Yugoslav Communist party, this League continued to promote inter-ethnic cooperation.

At the beginning of the war in Croatia the population of Gorski kotar was faced with *two major and to some extent interlinked immediate threats*. One was the *threat of ethnic divisions and growing inter-ethnic tensions* that were occurring in most places with heterogeneous population of Croats and Serbs. The other one was the *threat to the lives of all inhabitants due to the presence of extremely large quantities of weaponry and explosives belonging to YNA*.

With wisdom, good governance and constructive conflict management the authorities and other inhabitants of Gorski kotar managed to overcome those threats and preserved their major social capital – the peace. Their discourses and practices related to social identities played a very significant role in this success. They will be analysed in the forthcoming section.

7.2. “We, the people of Gorski kotar”: social identity discourses and their link to the perception on parties in conflict

7.2.1. On social identities in Gorski kotar

Literally all persons that I interviewed in Gorski kotar referred to themselves at some point of the interviewee as «we, the people of Gorski kotar» (*mi Gorani*). They were unanimous in claiming that there are some specific traits of the Gorski kotar social identity, to which they referred in positive terms and with pride. Some interviewees were prompted to talk about their social identity, but most mentioned it spontaneously as an important aspect of their life. The analysed data shows that the *belonging to the social group of «the people of Gorski kotar» has been a salient aspect of their group identity during wartime in Croatia, and remains such until today.*

«We are not homogeneous. We are neither for one side, nor for the other [laughter]. The region of Gorski kotar is not an aggressive region. We are relatively peace-loving». (Interviewee 1)

«What made the difference here? Look, the people of Gorski kotar are so peaceful». (Interviewee 6)

«Gorski kotar is special. It comes to my mind that this is because it is among the highest places in Croatia. It occurs to me that we are a bit closer to the sky and to the clouds which do not shoot at each other; the stars don't shoot at each other either». (Franjo Starcevic, in Nansen dialogue center Osijek, 2009)

With no intention of undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the Gorski kotar social identity, I will attempt to discern several of its characteristics

relevant for this study by applying the conceptual framework of Abdelal et al. (2009) presented in Chapter 3. In my analysis I found evidence that the content of social identity of Gorski kotar contributed to the preservation of peace in that region through the *attachment of in-groups to specific norms, relational comparisons, worldviews and social purposes which were opposing to inter-group violence*, and which were in clear collision with the brusque changes in the content of ethnic identities.

Referring to the social identity of Gorski kotar, Franjo Starcevic (2003) poetically talks about it as «the soul of Gorski kotar». Horvat (2003) links the traits of this «soul» to the specific geographic characteristics of Gorski kotar, particularly to the limited inhabitability of its space. He considers that the characteristics of the terrain did not allow for the physical separation of living space of the ethnic groups, which contributed to the cohabitation and developed into one of the main common characters of the population of Gorski kotar, which he calls «tolerance»:

«The stressful and decisive events that took place later make me believe that it was precisely that inherited component [tolerance] which had a decisive role in our approach to negotiations. At the beginning of negotiations, one needed to find enough strength to go and extend a hand. Little by little it became clear that human beings were sitting on both sides of the table». (Horvat, 2003, p. 18)

Tolerance, as referred to by Horvat (2003), entails several very important aspects of the content of social identity of Gorski kotar, comprising *inclusiveness, openness to dialogue and tendency to cooperate*. Inclusiveness as a constitutive norm is remarkable in most discourses and practices in Gorski kotar, becoming a particularly important identity trait in the context of conflict. Many link the inclusiveness characterizing the population of Gorski kotar to the fact that people were coming to and leaving the region at different moments throughout the history, mostly in search of work. Furthermore, just as the region of Gorski kotar does not have clearly defined geographic limits and some territories can be considered as “in” or “out” of the region, the same seems to be characterizing the approach of its inhabitants to in-groups and

out-groups of Gorski kotar identity group. The analysis of the discourses indicates that the only condition for being included in the Gorski kotar community or social identity group – and sub-communities of its towns and villages - is to be living on its territory in peace with other inhabitants. Common traditions, religion, origin and other traits do not seem to matter for becoming an in-group, and the social identity of Gorski kotar is also inclusive in the sense that it easily coexists with additional group identities – ethnic, religious or other – of the same person.

Interestingly, even the military personnel residing in the YNA barracks - officers and soldiers from other Yugoslav republics who in the dominant discourse were regularly referred to as «members of the enemy army» or simply «the enemy», here were called «our fellow citizens» or «inhabitants of our town»:

«In Delnice military barracks, like in many others, live honest people, *fellow citizens* and planners of a better future». (Radio Delnice, News, 16 September 2016)

«Yesterday, after contacts with the president of the Municipal Council, *lieutenant colonel Ljubomir Buljin, new inhabitant of our town and our military barracks*, received the representatives of the municipality of Delnice». (Radio Delnice, News, 17 September 1991)

Even during the tensest moments in 1991 the language of local radio station and of local authorities remained *highly inclusive*. Unlike dominant discourses, Radio Delnice and the town authorities refrained from using ethnic identity terminology (such as “Serbian aggressor”) for defining the enemy. The analysis of their discourses indicates that this inclusive approach, a reflection of the highly inclusive social identity, also had several strategic purposes. Firstly, it was *highlighting and instigating joint responsibility*. If one feels part of the social group – has common past, positive experience, children who play together – then his or her responsibility towards this social group is much higher than if one feels as an out-group. Secondly, by promoting their feeling of belonging of YNA personnel to the social group of inhabitants of Gorski kotar or fellow citizens, the inclusive discourse was *supporting their multiple*

identities and cross-cutting group loyalties. YNA personnel was facing severe loyalty tensions at the beginning of the war. By insisting on their belonging to the community of Gorski kotar as fellow citizens, the authorities were reducing the salience of two other types of social identities of YNA military personnel that were becoming salient and violence-supporting: their ethnic identity (they were mostly Serbs) and their identity as members of YNA (they swore to protect the integrity of Yugoslavia).

In terms of relational comparisons or defining the Gorski kotar inhabitants' group identity by what they are not, as illustrated by the quotes at the beginning of this sub-chapter the inhabitants of Gorski kotar often identified themselves as "*not homogeneous*", "*not aggressive*", "*not extremist*", characteristics that played an extremely important role during wartime. One of the constitutive norms that can be clearly derived from the analysis of their discourses and practices, is «*behaving in a civilized manner*». Horvat (2003), who was the head of Delnice Crisis Committee during wartime, uses the term «civilized» on several occasions while describing the actions of members of this Committee. When explaining their highly symbolic decision to write a letter of apology to the parents of the YNA soldier from Tuzla who was wounded by local nationalists, Horvat (2003, p. 307) states:

«We also had in mind the impression that this would give in Tuzla about *the level of civilization of our region* in the moments of a general breakdown».

When referring to the negotiations between Delnice Crisis Committee and the authorities of the YNA military barracks, Horvat (2003, p. 381) notes:

«[...] during this tumultuous time, burdened with numerous excesses, we have never crossed the *threshold of the civilized dialogue*, which helped us find the acceptable solutions».

The inclusiveness in the sense of *recognizing and embracing differences* is another aspect contained in Horvat's (2003) definition of «tolerance» as a characteristic of people of Gorski kotar. It further leads towards their strong sense of *interdependence* and the related high value attached to *dialogue and*

cooperation. This has been reflecting as a cognitive model of the inhabitants of Gorski kotar throughout my contacts with them as well as in their texts and actions. As observable from the generalized dominant discourses in Croatia focused on ethnic belonging, the cooperative attitude – «extending a hand» to the person of other ethnic group – was mostly perceived as a sign of cowardice and treason of own ethnic group even in areas with no armed violence. Such newly developed social norm was closing the communication channels and leading towards dehumanization of the ethnic outgroups, which then justified violence against them. Although they faced doubts and challenges related to their other social identity – the ethnic one - the leaders in Gorski kotar maintained the spirit of dialogue and cooperation which helped them overcome the threats of that moment.

The strong sense of interdependence brings to the social identity of inhabitants of Gorski kotar a character of *serenity, measure and rationality*, which was strongly differing from the emotionally loaded visceral discourses and actions of people with high salience of ethnic identity. I found that this sense of measure was closely linked to the *consideration of future consequences*, which became transparent from a number of discourses and actions. Wolf et al. (2009) indicate that the recognition of the future consequences of each side's actions supports cooperative behaviour, which usually results from long-range thinking.

Interviewee 1 from Gorski kotar, who was recruited to the Croatian army in 1991, recalls:

«We [the people of Gorski kotar] went to the frontline, but even there we showed no extremism [...] There were all sorts of things. Once we almost clashed among us. I was keeping guard and my people were driving and proposing that we go and burn some house. I said why, who knows whose house that is, maybe it is full of explosive so it will blow me away. They said: "but it is a Serb's house". I found that way of thinking stupid».

As we can see from his statement, instead of the irrational but highly common thinking which prevailed among many soldiers - «this is the house of

the enemy from the opposite ethnic group, let's burn it» - my interviewee's first reaction is: «what if this house is full of explosive? It could also harm *me*».

The consideration of future consequences as a key worldview is also observable from the testimony of an inhabitant of Gomirje, a village of Gorski kotar inhabited mostly by Serbs, quoted by Tatalovic (1996, p. 328):

«We knew that everything would be solved easily if no blood was shed. But when even a drop of blood is spilt, it is hard to get back to how it was before».

The consideration of future consequences was also promoted by the local media of Gorski kotar, particularly Radio Delnice, which was the media outlet with most impact on the local population. Here are two examples of this local radio news, continuously inviting to the consideration of long-term effects during the highly tense moments of negotiations between the local authorities and the military base of YNA in Delnice:

«Gentlemen the officers and soldiers of the Delnice military barracks, until now you did not sow the seeds of hatred, until now we have been finding words and cooperation – *let's not sow the wind because we will be blown away together by the storm* – in the name of your children and our safety – let's throw away the hatred and let's follow the voice of reason! It is your turn now, this calm place of Gorski Kotar and its future depend on your consciousness!» (Radio Delnice, News, 16 September 1991)

«Some facts are irrefutable: the wheel of change, however strong its goodness or evilness might be, continues turning. *We have to be aware of the consequences NOW. The history will judge us*» (Radio Delnice, News, 17 September 1991)

In addition to their common regional identity, the views, values and actions of the inhabitants of Gorski kotar were also influenced by other types of their social identities, such as their different ethnic belonging which gained major prominence in all Croatia prior to and during the war, or their professional group identities, including loyalty to the professional groups such as being

members of the army or police forces. Therefore, and in accordance with the findings of Citrin and Sears (2009) presented in Chapter 3, the social identities of the inhabitants of Gorski kotar need to be considered in their multiplicity, different levels of salience, as well as cross-cutting and sometimes mutually exclusive loyalty structures.

The analysed discourse of the local and regional authorities and media in Gorski kotar indicates that during wartime in Croatia they used far less references to the ethnic belonging in comparison with the discourse of the authorities and media at national level. In clear contrast with the dominant discourses abundant with ethnic terminology, the most used terms referring to or addressing the population in Gorski kotar were the terms *inhabitants (of specific town or village)*, *people/folks (of Gorski kotar)* and *citizens*.

When referring to the inhabitants of Serb ethnic belonging, the authorities and the media in Gorski kotar often used the terms «our Serbs» or «the Serbs of Gorski kotar», implying a distinction between them and the Serbs from other parts of Croatia or from Serbia. In these cases, a value judgement was often implicit, whereby «our» Serbs were attributed positive connotations belonging to all inhabitants of Gorski kotar (cooperative, civilized, non-violent), in contrast to «just» Serbs who were usually perceived in a more negative light and ascribed negative characteristics typical for the Croatian ethnic group views of the Serbs (non-cooperative, uncivilized, violent).

«Luckily, *our Serbs* here were thinking the same way [as us] when considering peace and war» (Franjo Starcevic in Manjine za manjine, p. 116)

When mentioning people of the other ethnic group, inhabitants of Gorski kotar often refer to them in *religious terms*, and instead of speaking of Croats and Serbs they refer to each other as Catholics and Orthodox:

«I had one or two Orthodox people with me on the frontline»
(Interviewee 1)

Making reference to violent acts or threat of violence by the “opposite” ethnic group, inhabitants of Gorski kotar occasionally reached out for terminology

from the past, calling the opponents by names with strong negative load – Ustashas and Chetniks. Although primarily related to the period prior to and during WWII, this terminology containing high emotional load was used also for the 1990 events when referring to atrocities, barbarianism, or fear of those. As an illustration, in a highly tense moment of final negotiations, before the military barracks were abandoned by the YNA, Horvat (2003, p.378) describes his views on one of the military officers:

«I really trust him and I don't hide it. He is a soldier from head to toe, but a rational soldier. *He disagrees with us in everything, but he is not a Chetnik*».

Instigating inter-ethnic fear by prompting negative collective memories was one of the key strategies of the nationalist elites, as seen in Chapter 5. To some extent the effects of this strategy reached Gorski kotar, too:

«There is this man who was born here in a village in Gorski kotar, but studied and stayed in Belgrade. In 1991, just before it all started, he sent his children on vacation from Belgrade to [name of the village]... and then he called his parents and asked them to *send his children back to him [to Belgrade] so Ustashas would not cut their throats*. His parents told him: what Ustashas, what are you talking about, there are no Ustashas here.... » (Interviewee 9)

Nevertheless, despite the turbulent moments lived in Gorski kotar during WWII, in the analyzed texts and interviews I found very few traces of negative feelings towards other ethnic groups linked to the collective memories. Only one of the interviewees had a negative experience, stating that his grandfather was killed by Chetniks. On the other hand, *references to positive common past experiences were abundant and valued*, and this is another trait of their regional social identity of which the inhabitants of Gorski kotar are proud:

«Extreme Serbian or Croatian politics never made any success here! We have learned to live not next to each other, but together». (Zeljko Mirkovic, mayor of Vrbovsko, in Marinkovic, 2011)

During the early 1990s *positive collective memories were intensively recalled by local and regional leadership to decrease tensions and avoid divisions along ethnic or other lines*. Positive joint past with the YNA as an institution was also remembered and cherished as a connector to this group:

«People of Gorski Kotar, all the folk of Delnice, lived until recently with the soldiers from entire Yugoslavia almost without differentiating them from our own sons. There was no holiday, no event or occasion that we didn't share. During community works, the hardworking hands of soldiers and officers have been creating benefits for the town and the villages. We have spent many New Year's Eves in the Army Hall, we have accumulated a lot of common experiences; here many have formed their families». (Radio Delnice, News, 17 September 1991)

References to ethnic identities can be found in several toponyms in Gorski kotar. A small town in Vrbovsko municipality, which name since 1996 is «simply» Moravice, has been carrying seven different names in the past, including the names Srpske Moravice (Serbian Moravice) and Hrvatske Moravice (Croatian Moravice) during different political regimes. In Marinkovic (2011) a history teacher from Moravice Novica Vucinic claims that all these changes were promoted by «the will of the politics», and the mayor of Vrbovsko confirms this by stating that «different emissaries were coming here trying to damage our harmony, but we didn't allow this to happen». Resistance to the ethnicization of discourses in Gorski kotar strongly influenced the perception on the parties in 1991-1995 conflict in that region, as will be discussed in the next section.

7.2.2. On parties in conflict in Gorski kotar

Positive collective memories of common past of Croats and Serbs, propensity to dialogue and cooperation, decent life in harmony with others as a common social purpose, these are some of the key characteristics of the social identity of people of Gorski kotar. In such context, the «logic» of ethnic conflict and the ethnic identity based definition of parties in conflict did not find

fertile ground in Gorski kotar, despite certain level of loyalty of the inhabitants to their respective ethnic groups.

Reflecting on the high complexity of the relational processes linked to the armed conflict in Croatia, Horvat (2003, p. 35) writes:

«In the environment of Gorski kotar, in the cohabitation of people and the nature, a sequence of vital events was taking place in the early nineties, characterized by the disintegration of one social system and the establishment of new human relationships, as well as by the realization of the idea of creation of national state. It was not the war against a classic aggressor, but a more comprehensive battle that was impregnating time and space, probing the moral relationships among people and changing the mental structures in their heads. Here the wars are not fought on some remote fronts, they enter into people's homes searching for space deep in the souls of the members of the households».

As observed by Horvat, one of the major threats of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and its social system was the *threat to values, norms and human relationships*, resulting in cultural violence – development of resentments, negative stereotypes, and similar. Aware of the risk of the three types of violence, and not only of the direct one, the authorities in Gorski kotar decided to take a specific approach to the problem. Radio Delnice made a *clear distinction between the national context and their regional approach*:

«It is clear to all that we are in the position of defenders of our home, our place, our homeland Croatia, defending it from the Army [referring to YNA]. This is the general global context and a reality. However, in our place, in Delnice, on daily basis, including last night and today, a goodwill message is being sent in a mutual communication Military Base – Municipality Crisis Cell. In our Military Base - we should say it loudly – live the people with whom until recently we have been sharing daily issues, meeting them at work, during walks, at cultural events, in school or kindergarten. We have our children». (Radio Delnice, News, 14 September 1991)

Using the expression «we should say it loudly», Radio Delnice news team points at the fact that recognizing the humanity of military personnel of YNA was not welcome in the dominant discourse. Indeed, it was becoming a trigger for ostracism in the process of de-humanization of the enemy, and the Radio took on that risk in full consciousness.

The discourses of the leadership and the media in Gorski kotar also indicate their *awareness of the fact that the dynamics of the armed conflict were outside of their influence*, the strings being pulled by the elites and, as they often said, by the extremists.

«Do not allow that all we have achieved so far gets smashed because of the insane interests of individuals who ran amok, whose aim is not life! [...] Fight against those WHO PUSHED US ONTO barricades» (Radio Delnice, News, 14 September 1991)

In this statement Radio Delnice clearly defined the *parties in the conflict* as perceived in Gorski kotar – the individuals with particular and insane interests versus the fellow-citizens desiring to live and believing in life. By calling to protest, resistance and fight against those who pushed people onto the barricades, the Radio is encouraging the listeners not to accept the argumentation of inter-ethnic war imposed by the dominant discourses.

However, many inhabitants from Gorski kotar – mostly Croats but also Serbs – participated in the armed conflict in other parts of Croatia. Horvat (2003) confirms that 99 per cent of the men who received the mobilization request actually joined the army and went to the battlefield, mostly as members of the 138th Gorski kotar brigade. They were often praised by the media and authorities for participating in the Homeland war. This confirms the *double logic on parties in conflict* that prevailed in Gorski kotar, as well as the *double loyalties to ethnic and regional identity groups*.

This double logic can be explained by the generalized perception that the armed resistance in many areas of Croatia was the only remaining choice. Several of the authorities of Gorski kotar indeed claimed that what was feasible in Gorski kotar was not any more feasible in other parts of Croatia, where the

armed conflict had already started. They were pointing at the need for *timely prevention of violence*, which was in the focus of their local actions. Aware that the elites at national levels were the ones deciding on the evolution of the conflict, they adopted the following strategy:

«This is the time of quick decisions (...) In short, until the solution is found, and the solution is in hands of the power, let's preserve *our* peace. This is the war of nerves, the time when many people serve the idea, and the idea has a suicidal context» (Radio Delnice, September 19, 1991)

In Gorski kotar the strategy was to keep the war out of their region, by «actively remaining in peace», as expressed by professor Starcevic, the leader of the community of Mrkopalj and one of the key figures of resistance to violence in Gorski kotar. This expression is indicating that regional peace in the time of war was not given or natural, but that specific efforts were needed to preserve it.

In summary, the analysis of the discourses and actions in Gorski kotar shows that its authorities and most inhabitants did not accept the «logic» of ethnic conflict but rather worked proactively to prevent the spread of such «logic» in their region; that they perceived YNA as an opponent whose specific interests (preservation of Yugoslavia) were opposing to their own, but as such they worked with YNA at local level as a partner in transforming their joint conflict by identifying ways of avoiding violence and finding common life-saving solutions; that the major threat as perceived by the authorities of Gorski kotar were neither any of the ethnic groups nor the YNA, but the violence itself in all its forms (direct, structural and cultural). The two parties in that conflict were uncivilized extremists prone to death and civilized rational people prone to life, the violence itself being their enemy that they tried to prevent from spreading in their region.

This discrepancy between regional understanding of the situation and dominant discourses did not remain unchallenged. Among other, many inhabitants of Gorski kotar were facing loyalty dilemmas explored below.

7.3. Is preserving peace turning us into traitors? Facing loyalty dualism and rejecting be(come)ing victims.

Research shows that in times of social crisis, people search for safety and sense within their social groups. The discourse analysis of the collected texts indicates that many actors and decision makers in Gorski kotar were experiencing *loyalty tensions related to the multiple groups belonging and groups' sometimes conflicting norms and goals*. In a war-torn country where the ethnic «logic» of armed conflict was successfully imposed and generalized through dominant discourse, the leaders and other inhabitants of Gorski Kotar were also feeling the need and a social pressure to support their own ethnic group. The challenge and the dilemma they experienced was related to the clash between several new norms and cognitive models developing in the framework of ethnic identity groups, and the norms and worldviews prevailing in their own social identity group of inhabitants of Gorski kotar, often matched by their personal beliefs and values.

This loyalty dilemma is clearly reflected in an interview (Manjine za manjine, 2010, pp. 116-117), in which professor Starcevic remembers:

«I thought to myself: you want peace in Gorski kotar between Serbs and Croats, while your compatriots are going to Lika to fight against the rebelled Serbs – is it a treason if one makes peace with Serbs?»

The quote reflects a dilemma related to different perceptions of parties in conflict and strategies for resolving the conflict. In the Croatian ethnic identity group worldview – and professor Starcevic was a Croat - the enemies were Serbs, and the conflict resolution strategy entailed defeating them using armed violence. However, in the Gorski kotar social identity worldview, and in accordance with Starcevic's personal moral convictions, the «enemy» was the violence itself and Serbs and Croats were to be partners in the non-violent struggle against that enemy.

Interestingly, Starcevic recognizes a very similar type of group loyalty dilemma among the Serbs in Gorski kotar:

«Luckily, our Serbs here were thinking the same way when considering peace and war: are they betraying the idea of defending Yugoslavia if they accept peace with Croats? In 1991 I drove to Jasenak [Serbian village] [...] They [the Serbs from that village] had the same dilemma like us: here we are “arranging for peace”, while “our” people are being killed somewhere else» (Manjine za manjine, 2010, p. 116)

The *recognition of this common dilemma reaffirms the human connectedness between Croats and Serbs in Gorski kotar*. It shows willingness to consider and understand the motivation of others, which is key to empathy and a tool of prevention of de-humanization of those others. Suddenly, *the tension created by the feeling of treason becomes a common problem to be solved through continuous dialogue and cooperation*. Starcevic continues:

«The next year we managed to have the Serbs [from Gorski kotar] liberated of that pressure of treason: how can they make peace arrangements while Serbs from Serbia are dying in combat. The same was happening to us in Mrkopalj. An extremely hard moment for me was when a 24 years old young man from Mrkopalj died on the battlefield in Dalmatian hinterland. I went to express my condolences to his parents. Can I speak of the idea of peace to the people whose son died for Croatia? But his parents, his father in particular, stressed the idea of peace above the idea of war: [he said] if we had managed to achieve peace, their son would not have died». (Manjine za manjine, 2010, pp. 116-117)

The moral dilemma was pursuing the inhabitants of Gorski kotar all throughout the war and even after it finished. However, the texts indicate that, when faced with such dilemma, the decision-makers in Gorski kotar were often *guided by own individual values* which helped them make decisions. In the moments of tension and possible chaos, Radio Delnice invited:

«Let's look deep into ourselves and around ourselves: we have many reasons to live and to die someday as human beings, not as victims» (Radio Delnice, News, 19 September 1991)

This *refusal to become victims* is yet another trait observable from the analysed texts of Gorski kotar inhabitants, and in clear contradiction with the generalized praising of victimhood among both ethnic groups in the rest of Croatia. While dominant discourses were abundant in lamentations about the historical and ongoing injustices, about own group past and present victimhood, inspiring the need for revenge, the messages conveyed in Gorski kotar discourse were not a lamentation but rather *voices of determination and hope that its inhabitants would not become victims*, that despite all the pressures and strings being pulled in the centres of power, they would remain the masters of their own destinies. This entailed a *strong sense of responsibility* requiring wise management of the situation, as well as governance inspiring trust among the population, which will be analysed in next section.

7.4. Good governance and constructive conflict management: preserving order and mitigating fear to prevent violence

A major paradigm shift in the governance methods and structures in Croatia occurred following the first democratic elections held in Croatia in 1990. After decades of one-party rule, the population of ex-Yugoslav republics had to «learn» democracy. In Croatia this process took place in the midst of war. This posed severe challenges both to the newly formed authorities, but also to the entire population, which was not used to democratic political debate or other processes and aspects of life under democratic rule.

In most of Croatian municipalities and towns it was Tudjman's CDU that won the elections. However, in most of Gorski kotar the majority of votes were given to the reformed communist party LCC-PDR. Tatalovic (1996) stresses that, although branches of political parties with strong national attributes – such as CDU and Serbian Democratic Party – were formed in Gorski kotar and recruited some of the municipal delegates elected within LCC-PDR group, many delegates remained loyal to LCC-PDR. Tatalovic further claims, and I agree with him, that this majority vote to the non-nationalist political option plaid

a significant role in the non-division along national (or ethnic) lines and the maintenance of trust in the region.

In addition to regular regional and local administrative authorities, municipal Crisis cells were formed as of 1990 as per the instructions of the Croatian government and made accountable for all the tasks related to the risks of war. The Crisis cells were closely cooperating with institutions such as Police stations, Civil Protection and other relevant bodies. Due to the large size of the municipality of Delnice, in addition to the central Crisis cell in Delnice, communal Crisis cells coordinated by the municipal cell were formed in 1991.

The role of the *Crisis cell of the Municipality of Delnice* proved particularly important due to the presence of Military Barracks of YNA with several hundred military officers and soldiers and three large military warehouses storing extremely large amounts of weaponry and ammunition. After declaration of independence of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the presence of YNA forces in those three countries entailed high risks and often led to clashes and victims. Part of the higher authorities of YNA, including many leaders of Military Barracks throughout the territory of former Yugoslavia, kept loyal to the social purpose of their professional social identity as defenders of integral Yugoslavia and firmly believed that they still could and should defend the unity of a dissolving country. Others among them were already siding with Milosevic and supporting his project of Greater Serbia. In addition to the Military Barracks, in Delnice there were huge arms and weaponry stores, and the possession of those arms and weaponry was of great interest of all parties involved in the war. If those warehouses were blown up, they would have razed to the ground not only the entire town of Delnice but also great part of the region. In their discourse, citizens of the region often compare this situation to the one of sitting on an atomic bomb.

The analysis of the discourses of members of Crisis cell and a close look into their decisions and actions, particularly during the highly tense year 1991, reveals several characteristics of *wise and constructive conflict transformation strategies*. Unlike in most places in Croatia, where local authorities and YNA leadership got entrenched on the opposite sides which often led to armed

clashes, in Gorski kotar they *saw each other as parties in conflict, but refused to solve that conflict by recurring to violence*. They established human relationships and cooperation despite their apparently opposing and mutually excluding goals. Based on the positive history of relations and mutual respect, they initiated intensive communication looking for the common ground and a solution that would be acceptable to all. Soon they realized that the strings of the war were being pulled in the centres of power, where saving lives was not a top priority. Horvat (2003, p. 40) writes:

«All of the sudden, *the security of the warehouses becomes our common concern and a joint task of both parties in conflict*. This was triggered by media reports on the increasing number of big military warehouses around Croatia being blown up, *regardless of the consequences and victims from both sides*, whereby each side accused the other [...]».

Taking into consideration the war context and the centralized nature of political and military powers, the level of autonomous critical thinking achieved by the Crisis cell and Delnice YNA leadership is striking. They *recognised and accepted mutual interdependence and established a common goal – avoiding victims* – which was not the key purpose in the dominant discourses. They also realized that the war was orchestrated elsewhere and that they needed to act together and in coordination in order not to become victims of the high level political and military decisions. *They decided to take their own destinies and the destinies of the inhabitants of their region into own hands*. In this process, they were challenged by a variety of actors, such as national media promoting the feelings of resentment and urgency, local extremists desiring to take over the power and impose a more nationalistic discourse, as well as their superiors in the political and military hierarchy.

The records and the interviews with the actors of this process indicate that the strategy adopted by the Crisis cell and YNA leadership in Delnice to deal with the highly tensed situation was the one summarized by the Commander of the Military Barracks in Delnice, who proposed:

«Well, you cheat a bit on your authorities and we will cheat a bit on ours... if we can preserve Gorski kotar and our lives from all that madness, let's

do it. Dead people don't need medals and awards» (quoted in Horvat, 2003, p. 168).

The common goal was established – avoiding a disaster and saving lives - and arrangements were made to reach that goal, often turning the blind eye to the instructions of the «central level» of both sides, which were proposing armed actions in order to take over or preserve the «treasure» stored in the warehouses - the weapons which were valued more than human lives.

Taking initiative and acknowledging own accountability was another specific characteristic of the leadership style of the Municipal Crisis cell, differing in that aspect from similar entities in other parts of the country. One of the very illustrative moments of that leadership style was the management of the tense situation when, just after they reached an agreement with the military barracks' leadership that they would not attack each other, a soldier serving his military service (native of Tuzla!) was shot at from outside of the barracks and injured. In most other places this event would either not be communicated publically or would be celebrated as a «damage incurred to the enemy». Delnice Crisis cell adopted a totally different approach – after the assessment of the incident, they wrote and read on air at the radio station a letter of apology to the parents of the wounded soldier, acknowledging own co-responsibility for the incident.

The study of the texts and actions undertaken by the Crisis cell shows their *continuous effort to reduce fear* and inspire the feeling of safety among the local population, both Croats and Serbs, as well as among military personnel. In this very illustrative case of the injured soldier, which could have triggered an armed conflict in the region, they undertook a series of steps contributing to the prevention of violence. Firstly, they conducted a joint assessment with the leadership of the Military barracks, making sure they speak with the same voice and avoid divisions. Then they strongly condemned the incident, showing leadership and authority, and made sure the soldier received medical assistance and was supported to reach his home. Furthermore, they organized a meeting with all political parties who were encouraged to also condemn the incident, *securing the necessary consensus of all parties at local level* which represented people of the two ethnic groups. Finally, they showed the highest

level of empathy and at the same time their responsibility for the security and safety of all people inhabiting in their municipality, by reading publically a letter of apology to the parents of the wounded soldier. The letter was read on the radio by the president of the Assembly of the Municipality of Delnice, stating among other: «Your son is alive, he is getting better and we apologize for the incident».

Horvat (2003, p. 306) describes the situation after the letter was read:

«Of course, the letter was most criticized in our “civilized” environment, once again the resignation of the head of the Municipality was requested due to the *apology to the enemy and to the parents of the enemy soldier*».

Indeed, this and other actions of the Crisis cell were often received with surprise and indignation by actors supporting nationalist policies and participating in the dominant discourses, as will be seen in section 6.9.

Despite violence prevention efforts at local level, several decisions of the central level authorities – firstly of YNA and then of Croatian national authorities – brought the war at the very doorstep of Gorski kotar. On October 3, 1991, there was an act of aggression by YNA from supra-regional level. Two transmitters were bombed in the area o Gorski kotar. Three persons were wounded, one died soon after the attack. This first armed attack increased the tensions in the area, including fear and impatience of the population, putting on trial the mutual trust gained between the local garrison and the municipal Crisis cell. However, Horvat (2003, p. 328) realized that this could have also strengthened in a way the links of the members of the Crisis cell with the local garrison personnel, which had not been involved in the decisions of the higher command of YNA:

«We were not to destroy our relationship of trust with Garrison and Corpus (in Rijeka) built with so much effort, because it was obvious that we were guaranteeing them more personal safety then their higher command did [...] With the attacks they [higher command] had placed local YNA in full dependence on us, as the fear that we would all be

sacrificed in the bombardment of military infrastructure was gaining space».

Once more, the consciousness of mutual interdependence and clarity of the joint goal at the local level were decisive in managing the risk of an outbreak of violence. The culmination of that risk took place on November 5, 1991, after the order was given by the Supreme Command of the Republic of Croatia together with the Ministry of Interior of Croatia to undertake an armed attack on the YNA weaponry warehouses in Delnice. As per the description provided by Crnkovic (2014), the highest authorities of Croatia decided to organize the attack in order to take over the weaponry and ammunition of YNA, which were lacking on different frontlines in Croatia, and the expectation of the general offensive of YNA throughout the country. The information on the plan of attack was not shared with the members of the Crisis cell, which is an indication of distrust among people who were, at least theoretically, on the same «ethnic» side. However, when the action of the attack started and got into an impasse, the leadership of the Crisis cell was called in to help with the negotiations.

Horvat (2003, p. 380) describes his disappointment with the way the Supreme Command decided to manage the situation:

«Are we really going to discard the capital created in the negotiations? [...] Are we really going to have the unprepared soldiers [of the forming Croatian army] without a single battle experience to attack the military barracks? Who are those soldiers? The citizens of Delnice and surroundings who got the uniforms a few days ago and attended only the basic training!».

The difference between Horvat's attitude and the attitude of national authorities in this matter – his strong concern for human lives versus their interest in getting the weaponry and ammunition regardless of the human cost in Gorski kotar area, presumably to protect citizens elsewhere in Croatia – stresses a clear difference in their values and goals. Even if they were excluded from the preparations, the leadership of the Crisis cells was asked to get involved when the strategy of the attack that was supposed to defeat YNA by inspiring fear did not give desired results. Once again, the key proved to be

in the pre-established trust and communication. On November 5, 1991, the agreement on the peaceful withdrawal of the YNA personnel from Delnice was reached and signed by Crisis cell and Military barracks representatives. On the same day the barracks and the warehouses of weaponry were abandoned by YNA and taken over by the Croatian authorities. The opponents from YNA were respected till the end - Horvat (2003, p. 388) confirms that «the Yugoslav flag was taken down and neatly folded». In most places it would have been burnt with triumphant fire.

Upon their return to Belgrade, the commander of the military barracks lieutenant colonel Ljubomir Buljin and his assistant lieutenant colonel Djuro Vitanovic were sentenced by the Military court to 12 years of prison each¹⁴. Their sentences confirmed that the warehouses contained the amounts of ammunition and explosives that could have destroyed large parts of Gorski kotar region if the conflict was managed less cautiously.

A few days after the departure of YNA personnel and soldiers, the area was attacked by YNA airplanes, in an attempt to destroy as much of the remaining weaponry and explosive as possible, but the attacks only caused minor material damage. Soon after a certain level of normality returned to the region; the schools reopened, numerous displaced persons and refugees found protection in the region while many of its long term inhabitants joined the 138th Brigade of the Croatian Army – Gorski kotar brigade – going to fight mostly in the neighbouring Lika region, which was not spared of armed conflict.

Good governance, conflict management and proactive violence prevention made part of the discourses and practices also in other areas of Gorski kotar at threat of violence, such as Vrbovsko and Mrkopalj. While for Delnice the

¹⁴ The text of their sentence delivered at the Military court in Belgrade on April 13, 1992, quoted by Horvat (2013, p. 287), testifies of the violent intentions of the highest YNA authorities. The sentence clearly indicates that lieutenant colonel Buljin received the order to *attack Delnice town from artillery and threaten with blowing up the weaponry warehouses should YNA get attacked*. Lieutenant colonels Buljin and Vitanovic were declared guilty for disobeying the orders and for having established contacts with representatives of the Crisis cell. They were sentenced for «leaving the military barracks without exhausting all the possibilities of defence, practically without any resistance, which had very negative consequences for the armed forces of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, because it entailed handing over to the enemy military formation more than 5 500 tons of ammunition and explosives [...]».

immediate threat was related to the presence of military barracks and weaponry warehouses, Vrbovsko and Mrkopalj as areas with mixed Serb and Croat population were at threat of worsening inter-ethnic relations influenced by dominant discourses of ethnic divisions. Many places in Croatia of similar ethnic heterogeneity had already witnessed an «overnight» relationship change: from good neighbours, mutual godfathers and close friends, influenced by generalized psychosis promoted by dominant discourses, people turned into enemies exclusively based on ethnic belonging. Those threats were imminent in Gorski kotar as well, particularly because both Serbs and Croats were being armed by «their» authorities in the growingly tense situation of mounting fear.

Evidence shows that during the second half of 1991 YNA was supplying arms to the Serb population in several villages of Gorski kotar. Arms were brought in by helicopters and trucks from the existing army barracks in the broader region. Military trainings and guards were organized in the Serb-inhabited villages. While there seems to be a consensus on the arming of the Serbs, there are – as in most other heterogeneous areas in Croatia - two different perceptions about the cause-effect processes in that regard. The Serb authorities and my interlocutors of Serb ethnic group explain that at a certain point they felt threatened by the Croatian ethnocentric discourse and actions, and therefore needed to be armed to be able to protect their villages in case of need. On the other hand, those adopting dominant discourse in Croatia consider that the «real» reason was to organize a rebellion against Croatian authorities in order to annex that area to the Greater Serbia. The two discourses are a result of different perceptions of reality, which also need to be understood in the context of manipulation with the fear as part of dominant discourses.

In the context of generalized fear, the authorities of Delnice, Vrbovsko and Mrkopalj showed exemplary conflict transformation capacities. They decreased the threat of direct violence by paying particular attention to the prevention of structural and cultural violence. In terms of *prevention of structural violence*, they refrained from a new practice which was getting

generalized in the ethnically divided country - dismissing the members of ethnic minority from their jobs. This practice, which was rapidly becoming a «new normal» in the rest of Croatia – both in the areas controlled by Croats and those controlled by the Serbs – did not take place in Gorski kotar. Both the Serbs and the Croats that I interviewed confirm that no one in Gorski kotar was dismissed from his or her job based on the ethnic origin. One of the interviewees gives the example of Serbs in managerial positions being placed lower in the hierarchy. He stresses that these were decisions taken in Zagreb, not locally, therefore exempting the local authorities from accountability for them:

«Some of those working in the state-owned companies were downgraded, I know of some two or three managers from the Railway Company who were placed on lower positions. But this came from Zagreb, it didn't affect the relations here. Wherever the local authorities were deciding, nobody was removed». (Interviewee 2)

Very importantly, the good practice of not dismissing employees on the basis of their ethnic origin was also applied in the Police forces. Records provided by Crnkovic (2014) prove that the staff of the Police station of Delnice remained ethnically mixed throughout the wartime in Croatia. This was not the case in most other places in Croatia, because of the increasing distrust and entrenching into the ethnic groups. In addition to providing job security and income to all the citizens, which certainly contributed to their feeling of safety, the practice of maintaining mixed work force contributed to the continuation of interethnic communication during the war, keeping the channels of dialogue open for common citizens as well as decision-makers and therefore also preventing the development of stereotypes and prejudice.

Another violent practice that was getting «normalized» in the rest of the country, practiced both by Croats and by Serbs in the areas under their control, was occupying people's properties or depriving them of equal opportunities to obtain housing, based on their ethnic identity. Local authorities and para-authorities around Croatia were orchestrating such decisions. They used power to redistribute properties in their own interest or simply tolerated such

practices. Once again this practice did not take place in Gorski kotar, which gave a feeling of safety to all inhabitants who knew their housing was guaranteed regardless of their ethnic identity. In general, the feeling of safety was promoted by *respecting the rule of law* and *keeping the public order*, which in many places in Croatia was replaced by a chaotic situation imputed to the war circumstances, while it was actually created to benefit the handful of the warlords. Although at some point the police as the key authority responsible for maintaining public order did turn the blind eye to some practices that were disturbing the public order (such as shooting by civilians towards the Military Barracks), in general my respondents confirmed that the forces of order had attempted to perform their duties without ethnic bias.

The prevention of structural violence, in terms of maintaining the structure of relationships that allows all people to feel in control over their lives, benefited from *genuine consultations and participation in decision-making* of both Croats and Serbs. While in the rest of the country the minority was often “cornered and silenced”, expected to be satisfied with the very fact that it was allowed to stay on the territory of the majority, in Gorski kotar a lot of attention was paid to ensure continuous dialogue and promote consensus of ethnic groups on key issues. Professor Franjo Starcevic was particularly active in those efforts, as will be elaborated in the subsequent sections. It was equally important to *maintain the consultations and decision-making within the regular channels*, to avoid para-decision making bodies. Evidence shows that opinion-making and decision-making was kept within clearly established administrative and political structures.

Among many other aspects of constructive conflict management, the analysis of the practices of Gorski kotar leadership shows the capacity to take into consideration the feelings of different actors (YNA soldiers, Serbs and Croats, displaced persons), including the motives of the «opposite side» in the conflict and to deal with them in a constructive, proactive and empathic way. *Recognizing the humanity of all actors* was very important in the prevention of the spread of stereotypes and prejudice, which was rampant in other parts of Croatia. The *cautious use of terminology*, whereas the population of the area

was referred to most often as citizens, or *Gorani* (inhabitants of Gorski kotar), rarely in ethnic terms and never in insulting or aggressive terms, strongly contributed to the prevention of cultural violence.

An example of a strategic and empathic approach that was used to prevent both direct and cultural violence was provided by one of my interviewees. He witnessed growing concerns of the leadership of Srpske Moravice, a small town with mostly Serb population, when in 1991 a decision was taken to open a Croatian police station in their place. Their concern was related to use of the (in)famous checkerboard that had many negative connotations for the Serbs because it was used by Ustashas in the past. The same checkerboard was now displayed on the premises and cloths of the policemen of Croatian police and there were concerns that this might awaken negative collective memories. A proposal was made for this insignia not be used in Srpske Moravice in order not to provoke commotion among the population, and in return the Serb local leadership would guarantee that no blockages would occur to the traffic in their area. The proposal was accepted and until the end of the war, my interviewee states, there was not a single day when the traffic in Srpske Moravice was blocked. *Acknowledging people's feelings and finding innovative solutions proved to be an effective way of preserving peace in Gorski kotar.*

In conclusion, with their wise governance and management of complex situations, the authorities in Gorski kotar were successful not only in preventing direct armed conflict, but in the prevention of all three mutually supportive types of violence: direct one (through negotiations with the YNA), structural one (no dismissals on basis of ethnic belonging, giving space to minority to express themselves on the most important issues) and cultural one (opening communication, showing empathy, preventing stereotypes). With such conflict management approach they laid the grounds for the lasting peace in Gorski kotar. To succeed on that path they had to overcome a number of emotional, mental and physical barriers, as we shall see in the next section.

7.5. Removing barriers on the roads and in minds and hearts: the power of empathy

Human relations are at great test during conflict. Major changes occur in the pre-existing relationships, as could be observed from a number of cases in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina where former friends and neighbours turned into enemies. This relatively sudden change is a result of a number of processes supported by dominant discourses in the former Yugoslavia. The increasing salience of ethnic identities, reappearance of WWII extremist insignia and prompted remembering of past violence, growing distrust and feeling of threat, these were among the factors that supported the *dehumanization or demonization of the out-groups* – members of the «enemy group».

Dominant discourses orchestrating the war in Croatia supported the process of dehumanization of enemy because, as indicated by Fisher and Kelman (2010, p. 69), «the diabolical enemy image embodies a view of the opponent as an evil, monster-like entity that is simply outside of one's moral universe», which justifies aggressive behaviour toward him. Under influence of dominant discourses, there was a great risk that similar processes, followed by similar atrocities, would happen in Gorski kotar, too.

However, a *precondition for completing a "successful" process of dehumanization* of the opponent is *the interruption of communication and ties with him*. In other parts of Croatia this was achieved through the interruption of physical contact – often following the disruption of traffic by placement of physical barriers on the roads, but also through homogenization of the living place or workplace after expelling the out-groups from their homes or work. Lack of communication among members of different ethnic groups then facilitated the development of mental barriers, supported by stereotypes and prejudice. New ethnic groups' norms developed, turning any dialogue with the members of the out-groups into a sign of treason and reason for ostracism.

Aware of such threat, and with strong confidence in dialogue as one of the societal beliefs characterizing the people of Gorski kotar, the authorities in the region embarked on a demanding journey of removing physical and mental

barriers to prevent violence. As the tensions were mounting, in mid-September 1991 the barriers of wood, metal and explosives were erected on a number of roads in Gorski kotar. Horvat (2003, 44-45) recalls the day when the Crisis cell received the information that YNA tanks might be heading towards Gorski kotar:

«We decided that we needed to protect ourselves in the direction of Jasenak, a group of villages with mainly Serb population. We had contradictory information, triggered by a death of one Chetnik in the minefield while he was trying to perform a diversion at the transmitter of Mirkovica nearby. There were stories about the concentration of the enemy in the Sports and recreational center Bjelolasica, and of possible attack over the mountain. We decided to cut all the forest roads that were connecting us and increase control. Said and done. But our intelligence was letting us know that the opposite side was putting up their barricades close to ours».

Here Horvat's discourse gets more belligerent, testifying of the culmination of tension and his strong feeling of responsibility for human lives which seemed to be threatened. At this moments Serbs were defined as a threat, and even as enemy, however he differentiated the Serbs from "a Chetnik" who attempted the diversion and with such act passed the threshold of violence. Interestingly, both "sides", at this moment clearly defined along ethnic lines, put up barricades – they were both afraid, seeking protection behind the blockades. My Serb interviewees confirmed that they were extremely anxious in those moments, feeling that they could get cut off the world, surrounded by Croats.

A turning point in this situation, which was clearly leading towards physical and mental separation of Croats and Serbs, occurred when Franjo Starcevic, a Croat and the head of the community of Mrkopalj, decided to cross the barricades to go talk to the leaders in the villages on the other side. Horvat (2003, p. 45) recalls own anxiety following such decision:

«Crossing the barricades from any side is putting your head at risk (...) *But the professor [Starcevic] trusts the neighbours.* It is impossible that the whirlwind of war in such short time turned peaceful people into

monsters of war. We warn him that the trip is risky, long and difficult, you have to cross the mountain on foot. "I am seventy years old and it will not be much harm, and at least you will know where you stand!" He is calm and smiley. It seems he enjoys our confusion».

This was only the first of many visits that professor Starcevic will pay to the Serb, and later on also to the Croat villages in the area. Acting as a convener, he initiated a series of exchanges that will allow for continuous constructive communication between Serb and Croat leaderships, who became partners in preserving the peace in Gorski kotar. This highly symbolic act of peace – extraordinary human effort that professor Starcevic made in order to go «listen to the other side» and «offer a hand» - had a strong positive impact on the Serb population on the other side of the mountain and inspired trust. In the video by Nansen dialogue center Osijek (2009) Djuro Trbovic, the leader of the community of Dreznica, recalls:

«The man sacrificed himself, he put his life at danger, he walked 27 kilometers from here to Jasenak»

In the same video, an inhabitant of Jasenak village emphasises:

«He came through the snow, there was one meter of snow, he came across the street, across the forest, he was coming to prove wrong all those who had bad intentions».

Progressively, Franjo Starcevic managed to influence police authorities, too. Crnkovic (2014, p.16) names Starcevic among the people who «contributed to maintenance of safety in the region» and remembers having accepted his suggestion to remove the barriers on the road Jasenak-Mrkopalj.

When considering the effects of these actions, it is important to keep in mind that in many places in Croatia which suffered tremendous human and other losses, the violence started with the barricades. Sense of threat, growing distrust, people entrenching on the two sides, a few bullets, first victim, increase of hostilities, additional military forces brought by both sides to support their group – this was a common scenario in such places. In Gorski kotar, the barricades were slowly dismantled, wood was taken from Jasenak

to Rijeka and sold, people from both ethnic groups kept going to their jobs and leadership started dismantling the idea of ethnic conflict and convening on the same side – on the side of life. One of my respondents emphasised the importance of sports and cultural events in the municipality of Vrbovsko, which resumed very quickly. The daily interaction of members of both groups prevented the evolution of stereotypes and prejudice, therefore not allowing for de-humanization of the ethnic out-groups to happen.

In opposition to dominant discourses which victimise in-groups but do not empathise with them, the discourses and practices in the region of Gorski kotar transmitted high levels of empathy with individual human beings in different circumstances. *The human, individual empathy in Gorski kotar was not replaced by the ideological extremism which sees Homeland, but does not necessarily see or value human lives on its territory.* This was confirmed in a number of situations, such as the empathy with the parents of the wounded YNA soldier, the empathy with displaced persons who sought refuge in Gorski kotar, as well as the recognition of and understanding for the fears and doubts of the ethnic out-groups. The empathy would not have been possible without continuous and open communication, which role is analysed in the next section.

7.6 The power of communication: preserving trust and cooperation by nurturing continuous and open communication of all actors

The closure of communication channels between groups that perceive each other as a threat is one of the most common pathways to violence. Lack of communication disables us from understanding the motivation of our opponents, eliminates trust, introduces fear and discourages us from looking for common ground and win-win solutions. It promotes the process of transformation of the opponent into a demonized enemy, in which violence becomes a «legitimate» tool of his annihilation. There is ample evidence that this process of closure of communication channels is one of the key causes of the sudden transformation of so many people who until 1990 were close friends into enemies ready to kill each other.

With the political and social developments in the former Yugoslavia and a strong push by dominant discourses towards setting firm boundaries of the ethnic groups, there was a high risk that this process would take place also in Gorski kotar, which would be opening the door to violence. *Two major potential division lines, based on social identity traits of the groups which were perceived by dominant discourse as mutually excluding, could be identified on the territory of Gorski kotar. Firstly, as the ethnic identity had become extremely salient, there was a risk of closure of people into their ethnic identity «shells»,* entailing the perception of Croats and Serbs as opponents and enemies, particularly if they embraced the dominant discourses of Croatian and Serbian leadership. Secondly, the *military-civilian divide* was likely to happen due to the fact that there was a strong presence of military personnel of YNA in Delnice. The majority of military leadership everywhere, including in Delnice, belonging to the Serb ethnic group, and the presence of large amounts of weaponry stored in the region that YNA was strongly interested in keeping and Croatian authorities equally interested in getting, increased the risks of potential deadly conflict between YNA and Croatian authorities at the local level. The key social purpose of members of YNA identity group being the preservation of Yugoslavia, the Croatian declaration of independence in October 1991 further made the goals of these two identity groups seem incompatible.

Keeping open the channels of communication with the alleged out-groups was often perceived negatively by the in-groups and followed by sanctions, such as ostracism. However, *at least three important channels of continuous communication were kept open and nurtured in Gorski kotar, which proved crucial for the prevention of violence.* They include the channel fostering communication between local leadership of the two major ethnic groups, Serbs and Croats; the channel of communication between Crisis cell of Delnice and the leadership of YNA military barrack in Delnice; and the channel of intense communication of Radio Delnice with the population of the region.

Firstly, as described in the previous sub-chapter, *the channel fostering communication among leadership of the two ethnic groups* was established by

Franjo Starcevic after crossing the physical and mental barriers that had started to develop. The series of encounters that Starcevic initiated in September 1991 culminated in a very special, for those times almost unimaginable meeting, a year later.

On September 16, 1992, while the war was ravaging in many places in Croatia spreading inter-ethnic divisions and increasing resentment between Serbs and Croats in the country, in the village of Vojni Tuk a highly important meeting of representatives of local communities, police authorities and other authorities of Gorski kotar took place. It was organized by the Crisis cell branch of the Community of Mrkopalj and hosted by professor Starcevic. Describing that meeting, Horvat (2003, p. 28) states:

«a truly exceptional meeting for the war circumstances was held, which inscribed perfectly into the general efforts to achieve the final goal with peace, in other words to maintain mutual trust between the communities with Croat and Serb population through joint meetings».

As the minutes of this meeting bring important insights into the Gorski kotar counter-discourse to the discourse of violence, their integral text is available in Appendix 2. The analysis of this document provides a view into the evolution of the inter-ethnic relations in the region and in Croatia in general. One year after the initial visit of professor Starcevic to Serb villages, the year characterized by tremendous loss of human lives, infrastructure and social capital in many parts of Croatia, the leaders of Gorski kotar concluded with grief that «it would have been psychologically easier for them to have made war than peace». This is a testimony of the rapidly worsening inter-ethnic relations in the rest of the country, where most people were already «entrenched» behind the walls of their ethnic identity groups. This is also a testament of the criticism and ostracism to which they were exposed as leaders from two «enemy» ethnic groups who were communicating among themselves. However, by September 1992, after a series of talks and despite ostracism they faced within their own ethnic groups, the leaders of the communities of Gorski kotar were resolute in their decision to find their own solution to the problem, and to do it by cooperating with each other.

As emphasised by Jabri (1996), and contrary to the common belief, in some circumstances it is easier to mobilize people for war than for peace, just like pointed out in the minutes of the Vojni Tuk meeting. This implicates that, *in times of crisis such as the one during break-up of Yugoslavia, peace does not persist naturally but systemic efforts need to be made to preserve it.* Continuous communication among leaders of Gorski kotar community made part of those efforts. Not only did they strategically decide to maintain communication channels open, but they also initiated planning development actions in order to improve lives of the population in that area by the rehabilitation of roads, opening of a ski centre, etc. This confirms once more that the social purpose of the Gorski kotar identity group was life, a good quality of life beyond any ideological reasoning, and that they perceived the 1991-1995 conflict as a struggle between life (communication, civilization, constructive efforts) and death (entrenching, violence, barbarianism, destructive efforts).

The second important *channel of communication* was the one *between the Crisis cell of Delnice and the command of the Military barracks in the same town.* As a member of Crisis cell, Horvat (2003, p. 40) describes the experience of their incessant communication:

«The absurdity of the war is probably soonest and most felt in the negotiations. The generally accepted purpose of the war is the victory of one of the parties in conflict. Negotiations bring both parties to the same table and as soon as you sit at that table, whether you want it or not, you accept the possibility of compromise [...] During long, day-and-night long meetings the war loses black and white tones and you start hearing more and more the voices shaded with specific, human colours. In parallel with the fear, felt by all of us, just better hidden by some than by others, we *start to discover many points in common* that define the human kind as a sociable being ready for all sorts of contacts, both in joy and in different forms of conflict».

Horvat and his colleagues strongly believed in the power of communication, which made them discover the human side of each participant in conflict and

define the common goal. At some point, their trust in communication was conflicting with the increasing demands from the capital for using the violent approach – an armed attack on the garrison – as a solution. The events of 5 November 1991, and the detailed description of the final negotiations by Horvat (2003), confirm that the level of trust reached during the mentioned day-and-night communications was a determinant factor for the decision of the YNA military commanders *not* to attack the town. They took such decision despite the pre-existing attack order received from central YNA authorities and despite the awareness of personal consequences that they would face for disobeying that order, translated later into 12 years prison sentence. Crnkovic (2014) confirms that the final negotiations with the command of Military barracks were entrusted to Horvat and his colleagues after the central level plans for the military attack of Croatian army on the garrison got embroiled. The power of communication played a crucial role in saving Delnice from massive destruction.

Radio Delnice with its informative, empathic and tireless communication with the citizens was the *third crucial channel of communication* that contributed to the preservation of peace in Gorski kotar. During wartime in Croatia Radio Delnice had several important roles, one of them was the role of *facilitator of communication between authorities and the population, as well as among the citizens*, the role that Horvat (2003) would characterize as psychotherapeutic. Open to all queries and empathic with each inhabitant, in clear contrast with the dominant media discourse, the discourse of Radio Delnice was unmistakably in the service of peace in Gorski kotar, as we shall see in the next section

7.7. Local media in the service of peace: the power of media discourse

In times of crisis and uncertainty information is key and has an enormous influence on the behaviour of groups and individuals. As observed in Chapter 5, most of the mainstream media both in Croatia and in Serbia promoted the discourse of ethnic conflict, including self-victimization of own ethnic group and de-humanization of out-groups. This contributed to the high levels of

acceptance of violence perceived as the only choice and to the legitimization of violence perceived as defence of own group interests and members. This approach strongly challenged the voices promoting non-violence anywhere in Croatia, including in Gorski kotar. Horvat (2003, p. 42) writes:

«Media news are “bombarding” us with the images of destruction, blood and suffering, the citizens are losing patience for the peace illusions. They require action».

The generalized psychosis triggered by the war imagery was fomenting the belief among Croats that the desirable solution – separation of the Homeland from Yugoslavia – required sacrifice of human lives, that it was the «price» of sovereignty and independence. Slowly, preserving lives started being perceived as a sign of cowardice and treason, and sacrificing lives as a symbol of heroism.

Horvat’s reference to the media refers primarily to the national television, which was the predominant source of information for most people in Croatia. In this regard, several interviewees indicated that ethnicity played an important role in the individual’s choice of TV channels. While most Croats were following Croatian national TV programme, many Serbs were also gathering information from Serbian TV. Interviewee 1 observed that «at the beginning of the war people in Tuk [the village in Gorski kotar with predominantly Serb population] massively started buying satellite dishes». This is a clear indicator of growing distrust in the sources of information, certainly fomented by dominant political discourses but also linked to the biased discourse of the national mainstream media, often hostile towards the ethnic minority groups.

In addition to the national TV, the inhabitants of Gorski kotar were using other media outlets, mainly daily newspapers and radio. Regionally, the most commonly read newspaper was *Novi list* published in Rijeka, which remained moderate in comparison with other major daily papers of national coverage.

The key source of real-time regional and local information for the inhabitants of Gorski kotar was Radio Delnice, the radio station with coverage in all Gorski kotar and in the neighbouring regions. Close cooperation of the municipal

Crisis cell and Radio Delnice was established soon after the Crisis cell was formed. Authentic transcripts of several pieces of daily news and other information transmitted by Radio Delnice were made available to me for this study. This allowed me to get a direct and deep insight into the discourse of their wartime radio programme. The analysis of this discourse shows extraordinary levels of responsibility for the transmitted messages, in terms of linguistic care, meticulous use of non-violent terminology, timely and accurate informing coupled with the highest level of attention paid to the appropriate tone and content. The analysis points towards numerous contributions of radio Delnice to the social practices of non-violence in Gorski kotar region, some of which are described below.

The station was *keeping the citizens informed at all times and trying to decrease the levels of their uncertainty*. The content was delivered in an honest, open and emphatic way. Unlike in most national media where it was exacerbating fear, anger and resent, on Radio Delnice the messaging was encouraging the citizens to remain calm and rational. This was supported by detailed informing on the reasoning of local authorities and their actions aiming to protect the local population. This type of language was conveying the message that local authorities were in control of the situation, fomenting the feeling of order and safety:

«The Crisis cell of the municipality as well as the local crisis cells *have prepared the maximum of human force to make the situation bearable*. In a given moment each one of us knows their duty and their place». (Radio Delnice, News, 14 September 1991)

The content of Radio Delnice news stood out for its highly reflective nature. Unlike most national and local radio stations which were informing in a dry, technocratic way – with news mostly reduced to numbers of deaths and injuries, details on places and nature of destruction complemented by blame against the enemy – Radio Delnice was *fomenting reflection and empathy with all inhabitants of Gorski kotar*. It was informing without blaming, not allowing for simplistic side-taking, promoting critical thinking while expressing the view that the war which was underway in many areas of Croatia does not need to

become the war of the people in Gorski kotar, because it was ideated and orchestrated elsewhere.

Although it was made clear that the YNA barracks and their massive stores of weapons and ammunition were representing a huge threat for the lives of all inhabitants, human face of soldiers and military personnel and empathy with them were also promoted:

«These are really the most difficult moments for them, the soldiers, who are soldiers out of conviction and until recently were defending the people, and the soldiers here and probably in many other areas also became insecure because the idea of the Army, its ideology and its function, has been spoiled by many of their superiors with blood of innocent victims». (Radio Delnice, News, 14 September 1991).

Without contradicting it openly, the discourse of radio Delnice was often challenging the dominant discourse by *promoting critical thinking and proposing ideas out of the box*. In that effort, Radio Delnice and the Crisis cell established close cooperation. Here is an example of out of the box thinking of the local leadership, and clear counter-discourse to the dominant discourse of violence:

«Today is the third day of the application of the order of the Ministry of National Defence and the Government of Croatia, which *literally states* that in all areas with military barracks *actions of blocking the movement and withdrawal of communal services to members of YNA should be applied*. Such act, *allegedly*, would represent a synchronized and coordinated action of the inhabitants towards the army which in many parts of the homeland is undertaking unwanted actions. Delnice and the inhabitants of Delnice have always acted peacefully and in friendship, in cooperation with the army, at all levels. Motivated by such practice, the Crisis cell of the municipality of Delnice *decided to implement the order of the Ministry and the Government in a cooperative, peaceful way, together with the officers of Delnice military barracks, because until now no reason was given to act differently*» (Radio Delnice, News, 16 September 1991)

In this paragraph one can observe a clear clash between dry, bureaucratic and exclusive language of the national authorities, and the more cooperative discourse and approach of the local authorities. The expression «literally states» underlines this difference, while the term «allegedly» implies some doubt in the argument stated by national authorities.

Indeed, in all Croatia the national authorities issued an order to local governments to block the military barracks, due to the great threat that they were presenting for the population. The military offensives of YNA started taking place in almost all Croatia. According to Goldstein (2013, p. 443) «it was expected that the Croatian resistance could last only between 10 and 20 days, and this was confirmed by the analysis produced by NATO experts. The aim [of the YNA] was to cut Croatia into five parts [...] Yugoslav navy blocked all the ports of Croatia, and the air forces and artillery heavily attacked the towns of Croatia».

In this context of massive violence perpetuated by YNA in other parts of Croatia, the local authorities in Delnice opted for a different approach, which is a testimony of their supreme trust in human communication and strong belief that every problem can be solved through dialogue. They decided to *agree* with the army officials on limiting their movements and withdrawing services to the army barracks! Once again, this proves that the local leadership perceived the problem as a common problem of the people in the local military barracks and the local population, imposed from outside. By stating that they would deal with this problem in a peaceful way «because until now no reason was given to act differently», the local leadership sent a signal that they might consider other means in case the army officials would resort to violence.

The empathy was fomented by Radio Delnice not only with local population and the military personnel, but also with the displaced persons who were arriving to Gorski kotar from war affected areas:

«Vicinity of war, which resounds through the arrival of displaced persons whom we meet with bundles of donated cloths, at school, on the street. In their eyes we read fear, disbelief, and suffering. They lost the words home, safety, house doorstep, Sunday going to the church.

And we make sure that they are not lonely or concerned. That they get basic shoes and cloths. To compensate for the stolen warmth of their villages which are in war». (Radio Delnice, News, 14 September 1991)

Transparency and empathy were also shown in the moments of highest tension, which could have easily ignited a larger violent conflict. The same evening after the agreement on mutual non-violence between local authorities and the leadership of military barracks was reached, a soldier of YNA was wounded by local extremists while on guard. This is how the event was described by Radio Delnice:

The soldier Safet Zukic was wounded last night around 20:25 at the guard position at the military building VE-2.(...)

It happened moments after the members of the Crisis cells of the local communities of municipality of Delnice finished the joint meeting: *as human beings, they were happy about the declared, although not yet fully defined and clear reconciliation.* They parted with a joint conclusion that *the peace, as the one Delnice had, should be preserved and cherished with continuous joint contributions (...)*

The president of the Crisis cell engineer Josip Horvat, the head of the Police station Anton Crnkovic and his assistant Ivica Briski, went to the command of Delnice garrison for a meeting and an investigation on the last night events. *The report that they produced together* was transmitted by the representative of Delnice garrison (...)

The last night event was also a matter of discussion during the joint meeting of the president of the Crisis cell of municipality of Delnice, engineer Josip Horvat, with representatives of political parties. They all *dissociated themselves from this attack on the man, whichever side he belongs to.* In this case the *victim of abuse was a soldier who, without any guilt, suffers the consequences of a bewildered time.* (Radio Delnice, News, 23 September 1991)

Empathy shown with the wounded soldier, who was defined as an innocent victim of a bewildered time, once again confirmed that in the discourse of the

local news the violent conflict was not between Croats and Serbs, neither between YNA personal and local inhabitants, but between people who made the time «bewildered» and those who wanted to live in a civilized time. The reference to the «reconciliation agreement» between local crisis cell and military barracks command indicates that there was uncertainty about its formal contents, but that both parties had full clarity on the common goal: to continue enjoying peace, «as the one Delnice had», which showed that they were aware of Denice being a «special case» and as such having to search for own and often innovative solutions.

The fact that after the incident the local authorities and the army officials came out with a joint report confirms their *decision to speak with the same voice as a strategy for preserving calm, preventing divisions and avoiding mutual accusations that could have easily led to violence*. Another very eloquent step undertaken by the local authorities was the meeting with the local political parties - which were having clear ethnic identity prefix, therefore could have instigated ethnic division on the basis of this incident - in order to reach a consensus, get everyone on board and secure support in calming down the population. As hoped, the political parties reconfirmed the legitimacy and the leadership of the crisis cell by calling their membership to follow their decisions. *Inclusiveness, shared responsibility and consensus seeking* proved to be demanding, but highly effective strategies in Gorski kotar.

Another important trait that can be observed in the local radio communication is the call to humanity, to our individual values as human beings. Promoting empathy and responsibility of each member of community based on the values of human life was contributing to the process of *fomenting common group identity* of all people living on the territory of Gorski kotar, sharing the same problem - threat of violence, and having a common social purpose – preservation of life. In the local radio discourse references to ethnic identities of the local population were very rare and the terms used when referring to the population were mostly: inhabitants, citizens and people (of Delnice, of the municipality of Delnice, of Gorski kotar, etc.). Mostly geographic and not ethnic terms were used to delimitate the group identity. In six pieces

of Radio Delnice news analysed in detail not a single time were the terms Croats or Serbs used to describe the population of the area. This, in my view, was one of the crucial contributions of the local radio to the non-violence in Gorski kotar: through its inclusive discourse and focus on common interests it was preventing the division along ethnic lines strongly stimulated by dominant discourses in Croatia and Serbia¹⁵.

The tolerant and empathic Radio Delnice was often perceived as insufficiently patriotic and as such it was subjected to continuous external pressure, mostly from the local opponents. Already in late 1990s the local CDU started insisting on the change of the name of the radio into – *Croatian* Radio Delnice. The request was addressed all the way up to President Tudjman, however the station kept its original name. Financial pressures through the reduction of financial allocations followed, but till the end of the war this station managed to continue crafting its programme in its unique, non-violent style.

The respectful communication from Radio Delnice helped in maintaining the sense of dignity of the YNA military personnel in town, strongly contributing to violence prevention. This was noticed by the military commander, who told to the director of the Radio (in Horvat, 2003, p.168):

«Every day at 4 pm I turn on the News. So far I haven't heard you using the hate speech, at no point have you spat on us. I like that. You know, the media will create the war, that damn propaganda...»

Even during and after the departure of the YNA officers and soldiers on November 5, 1991, the tone of the radio remained prudent, communicating without resent or hatred, just with great relief as the danger was over. The members of YNA were not humiliated or called in ethnic, hostile or

¹⁵ Reflecting on the wartime media challenges, Nada Glad, the wartime director of Radio Delnice, remembers (in Horvat, 2003, pp. 150-151): «State television and radio, as well as most of the press in Croatia, already then spoke the language of the street where many rabble-rousers were strongly condemning the events without choosing their words. The speech is full of intolerant tones. In this clatter of new and old, it is not good to send on air the new words with the touch of absurdity. They should be replaced with other, softer words, with those words that bring back faith into life after all this [...] The media should not harness trendy patriotic nagging. The radio should not become the machine for inducing the feeling of ethnic or any other intolerance [...] It was not easy to resist the style of expression that was getting imposed by stronger media, and also used at the nearby gatherings».

disrespectful terms even after their departure. The news referred to them in a more neutral tone, not any more as «fellow co-citizens» but simply as «they»:

«Dear listeners, today is November 5, 1991. Today is our great, the most important day [...] Today you have been asked to move to your shelters for the first time, today in Delnice there was a decisive moment in which it was necessary to end the agony of mutual promises that we would remain unharmed, undestroyed, alive – despite the fact that around us people are in war, people die, people disappear... Today, a few moments ago, they left. They left forever. Our Delnice, our land is now only ours. It was preserved from destruction. This is why today, dear, dearest listeners, is the day that should be remembered» (Radio Delnice, News, 5 November 1991)

7.8. Peace discourse as a social practice: in the midst of war in Croatia, the inhabitants of Gorski kotar start a Peace School

In 1994, three years after the first life was lost in Croatia in the war that different people would call by different names, the dominant discourses of violence seemed to have instigated all three types of violence – direct, structural and cultural one. The major part of the society in Croatia was by then divided along ethnic lines, and the process of mutual de-humanization of ethnic groups and development of stereotypes was ongoing.

The territory of Croatia was also largely divided along ethnic lines: almost one fourth of it was occupied by Serbs (Croat terminology) / liberated (Serb terminology) and making part of Republika Srpska Krajina, the self-proclaimed and never internationally recognized entity aspiring to be annexed to Serbia. Almost all citizens of Croatian ethnic group were expelled from that territory after having suffered tremendous hardship, destruction and killing. The borders between Croat-controlled and Serb-controlled territories were being secured by the United Nations Protection Forces (UNPROFOR), which were ensuring the implementation of the ceasefire. The highly tense situation and ethnic divisions were further exacerbated by the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina,

where the group identities' situation was even more complex and direct violence even more widespread.

In such context, when the population in Croatia was strongly polarized along ethnic lines, while the authorities and the inhabitants of Gorski kotar managed to maintain a fragile peace continuously challenged by the exclusionary and violent discourse of higher authorities and the media, in 1994 professor Franjo Starcevic and his colleague Josip Butkovic came up with an unusual initiative. They gathered a group of children from the surrounding villages and several towns in Croatia, secured space in the primary school in Mrkopalj, connected with workshops' facilitators in a number of areas, mobilized local families to host the children and – opened a Peace School.

The purpose of this School, as noted in the 1994 Bulletin of the Primary School in Mrkopalj, was «to assist children – boys and girls – to start and persevere living in mutual cooperation, respect and understanding; to create a world without hatred and war and to transform the existing borders of national and misunderstood religious belonging into the points of encounter of general human togetherness» (Bulletin Board Club, 1994, p. 3)

The first week-long session of the Peace School was organized in August 1994 and gathered 46 participants from Gorski kotar, Rijeka and Zagreb, of Croat, Serb and Muslim ethnic origin, including children displaced from other parts of Croatia due to the war. Involving participants from different parts of Croatia, the School's peace discourse started spreading its influence beyond the region of Gorski kotar.

The organization of the Peace School was preceded by Starcevic's walks and visits to several villages inhabited by Serbs. In the video produced by Nansen dialogue center Osijek (2009), Milan Kosanovic, a Serb from Jasenak, recalls that his decision to send his daughter to attend Peace School in August 1994 was closely linked to the pre-established relation with professor Starcevic:

«Here is the logic. If I trust you, then my child... there is nothing more one could invest in some goodness or in some honour and fairness than to entrust you their own child».

The relations of mutual trust among adults and children of both ethnic groups were strengthened and intensified through this experience – the organization and implementation of the activities of Peace School required their cooperation, joint decision-making and confidence. As children have been also systematically exposed to dominant discourses of divisions, many adults among the organizers were concerned about the way their children would feel and behave in an ethnically mixed environment. An interviewee who assisted in organizing the participation of children from war affected areas shared with me her concerns, particularly because she knew how often the discourse of their parents was loaded with rage and ethnic stereotypes. However, she said that during her participation in the Peace School sessions, they didn't experience a single challenge related to interethnic communication. Josip Butkovic, the co-organizer of the Peace School, confirms this in the video of Nansen dialogue center Osijek (2009):

«From what I recall from my experience, children did not have this kind of problem [ethnic issues]. Children had love problems [laughter], you know, children started loving each other. That is normal when you are in the eighth grade».

However, in the same video Sanja Kosanovic, who was a child participant of the Peace School, does recall concerns other than the love-related ones:

«The very idea of the arms and somebody doing harm to others by using arms is a horrible thing when you are a child, but there is also a guilt feeling that you have as a child for belonging to a different national group. You are carrying a heavy burden of something that you don't understand, you don't see why it would be your fault».

In the context of the ongoing war in Croatia and neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina, the idea of the Peace School was truly revolutionary and as such

not without opposition. Recalling the initiative of the Peace School, one of my respondents from Mrkopalj area shared with me:

«I was very sceptical about this idea at the beginning. Why did he [Franjo Starcevic] have to bring all these children? You see, in all villages there are some hooligans who will get drunk and do something. The other one will fight back, you know, one will mention his Croat, or his Serb mother, the other one will hit him, and then someone will make a big incident out of it. We were simply scared that something could happen and that someone could use it against us» (Interviewee 1)

The organizers of the School were aware of the risks, but also of the multiple benefits of the Peace School, which directly challenged the dominant discourse of ethnic divisions. The programme initiated in 1994 continued extending the scope of its activities – including arts and crafts, sports, ecology, non-violent conflict resolution conferences and seminars, handicraft workshops and many other activities. As the organizers confirm, at the very start they were not teaching students about peace in theory, they were simply letting the youth do things together. In this process many barriers were removed and a number of different actors were involved in contributing to peace. Interestingly, one of those actors was - the Croatian army. Professor Starcevic (Manjine za manjine, 2010, p. 117) explains:

«Croatian ministries were not supportive in terms of peacebuilding. During the initial stages of Peace school we didn't yet have the support of Europe or Soros, at that first time we didn't have a single penny so I followed the advice of someone who told me to ask for help of the Croatian army. So I wrote to them asking if they could feed the participants of the Peace School, and they referred me to Delnice. There, in half hour they told me just let us know when you start and for how many children. Regardless of the number of children they would bring us food from the Croatian army barracks and they would come to pick up the dishes. So in the ministries they saw us as *Serbophiles*, and at the same time the Croatian army was feeding us».

Over time the School expanded its geographic presence and influence: initiated in Mrkopalj, the activities of the School spread to Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Slovenia, and also involved initiatives and persons from Switzerland and Austria. Initially relying on funds raised from individuals, the Peace School gradually got funding also from Council of Europe, Open Society Institute and other organizations.

For many years this School remained the place of encounter and positive joint experiences of children from different ethnic groups, ranging from local villages to neighbouring countries. As an innovative social practice, the Peace School was one of the key sources of the Gorski Kotar counter-discourse opposing the dominant discourses of violence.

7.9. Counter-discourse to counter-discourse equals - dominant discourse? Comparative analysis of several aspects of Gorski kotar discourse of non-violence and its counter-discourse at a local level

The discourses and practices of non-violence that developed in Gorski kotar in the 1990s faced resistance and criticism from the people who believed that the «issue» should have been dealt with differently. The local authorities, who made the discourses and practices of non-violence prevail at the local level, *were criticised for lack of firm hand, lack of patriotism, for being «red» – meaning communists and pro-Yugoslav.* As readiness to kill or die for the Homeland became the main social expectation and the enemy was defined in ethnic terms, communicating with the Serbs, negotiating with the YNA and proposing non-violent solutions was considered anti-patriotic. This means that, while the counter-discourse to the dominant discourse of violence became the main discourse in the region of Gorski kotar, it was also faced with specific counter-discourses.

Taking into account the war circumstances, the widespread violence suffered by the population in Croatia and the influence of dominant discourses of violence, the criticism of non-violent discourses and practices at that moment was expected and to a certain extent understandable. However, it is interesting to note that the wartime discussions related to different perceptions

of wartime events continue up to date, more than 20 years after the armed conflict in Croatia finished.

The concept of the «peace in Gorski kotar during the war in Croatia» has been challenged from the very moment the term «*oasis of peace*» was first used by the President of the Assembly of the Municipality of Delnice in 1991. The concept got particularly problematized in the local and regional public space since the publication of Horvat's book «*Oasis of peace*» in 2003. In an attempt to demonstrate that there was actually war, and not peace, in Gorski kotar in the 1990s, the head of the police station in Delnice of that time Anton Crnkovic published in 2014 a book of an apparently oxymoronic title: *War in the oasis of peace*. Through a detailed account of police activities in 1991, in his book Crnkovic tried to provide evidence that the Municipality of Delnice was in war and that it was successfully liberated, opposing the discourse of Horvat who claims that the local authorities had managed to preserve peace. The comparative analysis of the discourses used by Crnkovic and by Horvat provides an excellent insight into the differences between the discourse of violence and its counter-discourse of non-violence at local level.

In many aspects Crnkovic's text reveals author's in-group favouritism for ethnic Croats, replicating a number of characteristics of the national dominant discourse in 1990s. A phenomenon off mirror images (Fisher and Kelman, 2011), whereby the parties in conflict tend to develop parallel images of self and other, except with the sign reversed, can be observed, with the same actions judged as bad if committed by members of Serb ethnic group, and judged as good or acceptable if committed by ethnic Croats. For instance, when inhabitants of Serb villages cut the trees and block the roads, Crnkovic refers to this as «trunk revolution», using a pejorative term that ethnic Croats invented for this kind of action when performed by Serbs, reflecting an act of barbarianism. A few days later a decision was taken by the Croatian authorities «to block all roads that were leading towards the territory where Serb population supporting YNA and Greater Serbia aiming aggression on the Republic of Croatia» (Crnkovic, 2014, p. 53). Although consisting of the same acts – cutting the trees and placing them on the road to prevent circulation –

this is now considered as a legitimate action of protection from potential harm, and not as a «trunk revolution».

As Head of Police Station, the author also shows bias in the description of the illegal acts, depending on the ethnic belonging of the actors. For instance, he describes with a lot of permissiveness and a certain level of complicity the incidents involving the inhabitants who were damaging WWII monuments, which were related to the creation of Yugoslavia and the brotherhood and unity discourse that was strongly challenged by the Croatian nationalist discourse. Crnkovic tries to justify the actors with the emotions of newly acquired freedom in democracy:

«In fact, since the multiparty elections, there was some anxiety among the inhabitants. They *started breathing with full lungs* so some of them permitted themselves things which were not habitual and, *we could say*, were not allowed. At the very beginning it was destroying or damaging the monuments related to the Second World War» (Crnkovic, 2014, p.15)

Experiencing tension of loyalties to the social norms of two of his social identity groups - Croats as his ethnic group and police as his professional identity group - Crnkovic testifies of the relatively professional behaviour of the police, which was confirmed by a number of my interviewees, both Croats and Serbs. The police, states Crnkovic (2014, p. 15) had to react: «In accordance with our regular authorities and duties, the police had to investigate, find and process those who were putting the explosive under the monuments. And it did so, *even if it was not always simple and easy*». This was not the case in many places in Croatia, where the police started «tolerating» all sorts of crimes committed by own ethnic group, or where parallel structures of control were formed, the formal police losing any influence. The mostly professional work of the police in Gorski kotar actually contributed to the feeling of order and safety, and consequently to the prevention of violence in Gorski kotar.

However, *as the tensions were mounting in the region, many discourses and practices were becoming biased and exclusive*. The definition of the threat, related to the social purposes and perceptions of the in-group out-group relations, is what makes the clearest difference between the discourses of

Crnkovic and Horvat. In Horvat's perception, all inhabitants of Gorski kotar made part of the same social group, whose social purpose or final aim in the 1990s context was saving human lives and relationships. The realization of this goal was threatened by the violence, which was considered as the enemy. On the other hand, Crnkovic adopted the dominant discourse whereby the social group was defined as ethnic Croats, whose final aim was to establish own state at any price, and the threat to that goal were the Serbs, including the YNA run by the Serbs. Such worldviews are translated in a number of aspects of Crnkovic's discourse.

When the civilian shooting towards the Croatian police patrol occurs, the actors are tagged by Crnkovic as terrorists. However, when the shooting by civilians towards the military barracks of YNA occurs, the actors are portrayed in positive terms. In clear conflict with his role of Head of Police, Crnkovic expresses approval and praises the actors of such (illegal) action – shooting toward military barracks - for their role in increasing the fear of the already tense military forces. This double standard can be explained by Crnkovic's Croat ethnic identity and the role of ethnic identification in justifying aggression. As explained by Brewer (2011) high identifiers perceive in-group aggression against an out-group as more justified and are more likely to feel satisfaction rather than guilt in response to such aggression. Justification of such actions includes attributions to external circumstances or blaming the out-group for bringing it on themselves, downplaying the severity of the harm and dehumanization of the out-group.

The de-humanization of the out-groups in the dominant discourse, including in the discourse used by Crnkovic, is often reflected in the terminology used to describe the enemy. The term «terrorists» was very commonly used for that purpose, and it was often extended to incorporate all Serbs, without distinguishing between the local Serb population, the members of YNA of Serb origin and the Serbs from Serbia who came to fight for Milosevic's plan of Greater Serbia. Perceived as terrorists, the enemy is dehumanized and at no point there seems to be any genuine effort to understand the motivation of his behaviour and even less to search for win-win solutions. This is one of the key

differences from the discourse of non-violence promoted by Horvat, whereby the opponent was perceived as a respected partner in the search for common ground and solutions acceptable to all.

After receiving the order to co-organize the attack on the YNA premises and stores of weapons in Delnice, Crnkovic (2014, p.78) had mixed feelings: the feeling of fear due to awareness of the scope of destructive power of the stored weaponry is superseded by satisfaction «because due to my *predispositions*, I belonged to the group in the Municipal Crisis cell that has been proposing even earlier to proceed with an attack and take-over of the military infrastructure». After the shooting and handover of one of the stores of the weapons from YNA to the Croatian authorities, Crnkovic (2014, p. 101) describes the scene in the following terms:

«I was looking at the spot of the clash. The faces of my Special Forces policemen don't say anything. They are serious and joyful, they seem proud and sad at the same time. No, I think it is the pride that reflects most. Of course it does. For the first time in their young lives they participated in war, for the first time *bullets buzzed around them, the guns went off, for the first time they had the opportunity to offer their young lives to their beloved homeland*».

This statement illustrates well the key difference between the discourse of Horvat and the one of Crnkovic. Horvat and his team did everything to prevent any outbreak of violence and were horrified by war, while the dominant discourse in Croatia represented here by Crnkovic glorified and romanticized the war as an opportunity to die for the Homeland, making the war not only legitimate, but a desirable way of solving the problem. This difference is still at the origin of a 20 years long debate about the merits and the patriotism during 1990s in Gorski kotar, opposing discourses of war and discourses promoting non-violence at local level, which key characteristics will be summarized in the concluding part of this chapter.

7.10 Oasis of peace in Gorski kotar: conclusions

In this chapter I explored the wartime discourses and practices of the community of Gorski kotar in the context of its resistance to inter-ethnic fracturing during 1991-1995 violent conflict in Croatia. The analysis of the gathered data confirms the existence of a structured and well-defined counter-discourse to the discourse of violence in this region. The analysis of this counter-discourse in relation to the three key themes of this study - namely group identification processes, inter-group relations and governance – revealed the key aspects of that counter-discourse which are summarized here.

With reference to *group identification processes*, the analysis indicates that during 1990s the population of Gorski kotar maintained multiple social identities, in which their regional identity continued playing a significant role and enjoying salience. Like in all other places of Croatia, ethnic identities of Croat and Serb inhabitants also gained prominence in Gorski kotar, but did not achieve exclusivity or supersede other social identities. The study of the content of the Gorski kotar social identity points at specific traits that were key for the resistance to violent discourses and preservation of peace in the region. These comprise cherishing diversity, inclusiveness and openness to dialogue, tendency to cooperate, awareness of human interdependence, deep respect for human life, consideration of future consequences and moderation, among others. These aspects of Gorski kotar social identity were in clear contrast with the new traits of ethnic identities which developed in the pre-war and war context. This is why on a number of occasions, authorities and common people of Gorski kotar faced loyalty tensions related to the conflicting norms, relational comparisons, goals and worldviews of their multiple identities.

However, with reference to *inter-group relations*, maintaining multiple social identities incited them to develop their own definition of the problem and of the parties in conflict in Gorski kotar, different to the ones developed within dominant ethnic-identity focused discourses. The generalized definition of parties in conflict in ethnic terms was not adopted in Gorski kotar. On the contrary, the authorities, local media and other key actors were proactively

promoting positive collective memories and constructive inter-ethnic relations to prevent any of the three types of identity-based violence which were rapidly spreading in the rest of Croatia. The leadership of the two ethnic groups in the region, as well as the leadership of YNA and local authorities, adopted and fostered cooperative inter-group relations and jointly sought for solutions to the common problem clearly defined as threat of violence in the region, with the common goal consequently defined as saving lives of all inhabitants of Gorski kotar.

The alternative definition of threat, parties in conflict and desired goal resulted in the selection of different conflict management strategies and tools by the regional and local authorities and other actors promoting peace in Gorski kotar. The existence of a group of inter-linked actors who developed high levels of mutual trust also proved key. In Gorski kotar these included local authorities at different levels, members of crisis cells, regional Radio Delnice and YNA leadership in Delnice, among other.

Numerous characteristics of *good governance* were identified in the analysis as crucial for preserving positive inter-ethnic and other inter-group relationships and maintaining peace. These include the local authorities taking full accountability for the situation in the region, making continuous efforts to reduce fears of all groups and individuals, fostering communication at all levels and ensuring genuine consultations with all key actors while recognizing them as human beings with needs and feelings, preventing breaches in the rule of law and adopting innovative approaches in dealing with the problems, among other.

Although the resistance to ethnic fracturing and violence proved successful in Gorski kotar, discourse analysis reveals that the key actors in this region did not believe that their approach could influence the overall political elites and systems in Croatia towards wiser, peaceful solutions of the broader 1991-1995 conflict. While their focus was on saving their own region from the politics of war, to some extent they also adopted the view that armed resistance in other places in Croatia was inevitable, particularly in those places which were already affected by violence.

Even if its influence on wartime event in the rest of Croatia remained limited, the counter-discourse which developed in Gorski kotar strongly challenged dominant discourses of war in the country. This can be perceived from the criticism and opposition that it faced from nationalist actors and the fierce debate about wartime events, processes and merits in Gorski kotar which continues until now.

Challenging dominant discourses of war and preserving communal peace and inter-ethnic cooperation in Gorski kotar was a highly demanding task. Horvat (2003, p. 36) writes:

«Leading war by peaceful means was not easy at all. We had to *find the way to the most noble spiritual and general human values and wishes of common people*. Inhabitants of Gorski kotar were chasing away the ghost of war far from their region»

This confirms Bar-Tal's claim (2011, pp. 15-16) that it is much easier to mobilize society members for violent conflicts than for peace. Bar-Tal explains that this is because the instinct for survival in times of threat is strong and very basic, and the negative information about potential harms has more weight than positive information about peace opportunities. Also, hope is needed to override fear, and while fear is activated automatically, hope relies on thinking and requires various intellectual skills. As could be observed in this chapter, leadership and inhabitants of the region of Gorski kotar made extraordinary efforts to identify and seize peace opportunities and maintain hope in the common, interdependent and non-violent future of Croats and Serbs in Gorski kotar. The exemplary results of those efforts, which turned Gorski kotar into an *oasis of peace*, are best summarized by Nada Glad in the opening quote of this chapter.

The mapping of inter-ethnic wartime experiences in the neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina revealed the existence of another *oasis of peace* in the city of Tuzla, which is explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 8: Ethnically mixed communities as a counter-discourse (II): case study from the city of Tuzla in Bosnia-Herzegovina

After the Orthodox church in Tuzla was hit in the bombing by Serbian armed forces, Tuzlan authorities embarked immediately on its reparation. One of the city officials explains the astonishment of a German Parliamentarian on his visit to Tuzla after seeing the reparation of the Orthodox church during wartime:

«"Who is restoring this?!", he asked me. "The municipality", I said, "this is not their church, it's the church of our citizens". Then he was curious to find out who were the workers up on the church. "Let's ask them!" I said. And there they were... up there... a Serb, and a Croat, and a Muslim... "I can't understand this", he commented» (Interviewee 11)

In this chapter I will analyse the discourses and practices that prevailed in the city of Tuzla during wartime, focusing on the same three key themes and four types of discourses as in the previous chapters. My analysis is based on the gathered pre-existing texts and on the interviews with eleven citizens of the city conducted between 2014 and 2016. The period in the focus of the analysis includes the initial months of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in spring 1992 when the tone was set, and the time of critical events occurred during the war, which in the case of Tuzla include the departure of numerous citizens of Serb ethnic group and the clash between Yugoslav National Army and local military forces in May 1992, and the massacre of youth in the city centre in May 1992.

After providing a brief overview of the most important historical discourses and aspect of life in Tuzla relevant for the evolution of its discourses and practices of peace, I will closely look into the social identity discourses in the city, the inter-group relations among its citizens of Bosniak/Muslim, Croat and Serb ethnic group and the governance structures that contributed to

maintaining communal peace in the city. I will also elaborate on two critical moments mentioned above, which exposed Tuzlan inter-ethnic harmony to high risk. I will analyse the role of the media in wartime Tuzla, as well as the role of selected civil society organizations and religious leaders who contributed to constructive inter-group relations in the city during wartime. At the end of this chapter, I will analyse the key challenges that Tuzlan discourse of peace was exposed to and summarize the key elements that made Tuzla an *oasis of peace* during the 1991-1995 war.

The city of Tuzla counts with a unique experience of preserved inter-ethnic peace and cooperation throughout the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. As observed by Armakolas (2011, p. 231) «the vast academic literature on Yugoslav collapse and the Bosnian war pays very little attention to wartime Tuzla. Tuzla politics is usually portrayed as “exceptional”, a “paradox” that is simply discounted because it is assigned to the presumed unique characteristics of the city. As a result no elaborate investigation of Tuzla has been attempted and no lessons from its politics have been drawn».

Building on this observation, and taking into account a definition of paradox as a principle that appears logically unacceptable or seemingly contradictory to common sense, it is important to note that Tuzla was perceived as «paradox» because it did not follow the «logic» of ethnic radicalization and fracturing, the «new logic» that spread fast in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Several other cities and towns, including the capital Sarajevo, tried to resist this «ethnic logic of violence», but nationalist forces were successful in breaking down their resistance. It is only Tuzla’s multi-ethnicity that survived the entire period of wartime, and this is what makes its experience exceptional. Analysing its discourses and practices, in this chapter I will attempt to discern the key factors that contributed to the success of Tuzla’s resistance to ethnic fracturing and violence, which turned this city into an *oasis of (communal) peace*. Firstly, I will elaborate on several aspects of the history and society of Tuzla which are key for understanding the evolution of its discourse of peace.

Map of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010)
with highlighted position of the city of Tuzla



8.1. Tuzla in context: the city of salt and diversity

To grasp the evolution of Tuzlan community and its peculiar approach to the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is crucial to understand several aspects of its past which contributed to the positive inter-group relations and the evolution of Tuzlan counter-discourse to the discourse of war during 1991-1995.

In the former Yugoslavia Tuzla had been widely known as an industrial and mining city in the north-eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina, with long anti-fascist tradition and large working class. Tuzla's salt bags were sold in the markets throughout Yugoslavia, making the city recognizable for its salt mines. Salt has marked the history of Tuzla¹⁶. The industrial production of salt was started in

¹⁶ «Throughout its existence and in the languages of all travellers, cartographers, historiographers and conquerors, the name of the city has been related to the salt. The river Jala, running through Tuzla,

the 19th century, attracting people from different parts of the region into Tuzla, consequently fomenting another one of the city's key traits – its diversity.

At the beginning of the 20th century more than ten languages were spoken in Tuzla, including Serbo-Croatian, German, Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Slovak, Italian, Spanish, Slovenian, Rusyn and other languages (Bajric, 2000). As a result of migrations, the city benefited from an extraordinary variety and inter-group tolerance of its inhabitants. Recalling her life in Tuzla between the two world wars, Mujbegovic (2016, p. 301) writes:

«Languages, religions nations, minorities, foreigners – settlers with their surnames, forenames and languages, all this was happily mixed on our salty land, as a national and social mix (...) People were living in different ways, but they were mainly understanding each other»

The inter-group tolerance characterizing Tuzla was challenged in several historical moments. It was severely threatened for the first time during WWII. In 1941 the entire Bosnia-Herzegovina, including Tuzla, got under governance of the quisling regime of the Independent State of Croatia (ISC). While it was openly persecuting Serbs and Jews, the pro-Nazi leadership of ISC had a different approach towards the Muslims. In an effort to win their support and collaboration, the Ustasha regime was describing Muslims as «Croats of Islamic faith», therefore including some 700.000 Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina into the corpus of the Croatian nation. Moreover, in the Ustasha propaganda discourse Muslims were portrayed as the «flower of Croatian nation» and Bosnia as «the heart of Croatia». Although several eminent

carries the name which originates in the Greek word Jalos, meaning salt. Throughout its history the city was named: Castron de Salenes, the city of salt pans (Greek), Salenes (Greek), Ad Salinas (Latin), Soli (south Slavic), Memlehatejn (Arabic), Memleha-i-Zir (Persian), Tuz (Turkish)... until it got its current name Tuzla, meaning salt pan in Turkish» (Grad Tuzla, 2016). The salt mines are remnants of the Pannonia Sea, which was spreading in this area more than ten million years ago. The organized production of salt in Tuzla was initiated during the Ottoman era and became the main source of income in the city. In the 15th century on the main square of Tuzla – today called Soni trg, meaning, predictably, the Square of Salt – there were 80 large pans where the salty water extracted from the well was cooked.

Muslim leaders joined the Ustasha regime and despite the fact that many Muslims considered ISC as a better option when compared to the Serbian regime, most Muslims were reserved and soon horrified by the Ustasha terror over the Serbs (Goldstein, 2013). Furthermore, Muslims were often victims of reprisals of the Serbs who were forming militias to defend themselves against the terror of ISC.

As described in Chapter 4, Muslim leaders' disapproval of the atrocities committed by the Ustasha regime against the Serbs was publically expressed in a series of resolutions addressed to the Ustasha leadership. One of those resolutions was sent from Tuzla on December 11, 1941, signed by 22 eminent citizens of Tuzla of Muslim faith. In their letter to the supreme leader of ISC they complained about major security problems and violence¹⁷. With this resolution, Muslim leaders were calling upon an extremist government to install order and punish those who were terrorizing Serbs, which was a behaviour not only accepted, but also strongly promoted by the ISC. By this resolution Muslim leaders warned that as long as part of the population was terrorized nobody was safe, as violence against Serbs was resulting in their counter-violence against all non-Serbs. They invoked the *concepts of legality and accountability and proved strong awareness of inter-dependence*, deep understanding that peace is only possible if the needs and rights of all people, regardless of their ethnicity or other group identities, are safeguarded. These concepts would guide the behaviour of Tuzla's leadership also half a century later, during the 1991-1995 war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as we shall see in the rest of this chapter.

An even more tangible evidence of inter-group solidarity and support during ISC was recorded on the Orthodox Christmas Eve on January 6, 1942. Having found out that Ustasha forces had planned to undertake a massive killing of

¹⁷ Here is an excerpt of the Tuzlan resolution: «It appears that all the violence was provoked by the incidents against Serbs committed by *irresponsible elements*, but unfortunately those incidents against them keep happening also now, which causes revenge. Our Muslim population inspired by the spirit of Islamic culture and ethics, *condemns all violence* [...] If the disorder can't be controlled in a purely military way, why not undertake also in parallel some political measures for calming down the chaos by *punishing the persons guilty for illegal acts*, which preceded the disorder, and calling them to *accountability* and public punishment» (Hamzic, 2012, p. 117).

Serbs in Tuzla during that night, Muslim mufti effendi Kurt requested an urgent meeting with the German commander of the city and insisted on this plan to be revoked. In follow up to this, a delegation of Muslims led by effendi Kurt travelled to the headquarters of ISC in Zagreb, where they requested from the Minister of interior and the author of «racial laws» Andrija Artukovic to stop harassing innocent Serbs. No massive slaughters of Serbs in Tuzla area were documented after that. When Effendi Kurt died many years later, in sign of deep respect for him an Orthodox priest held a speech at his funeral attended by 10.000 people. Priest Jovanovic also asked for an unusual honour to descend into the grave before the body of effendi Kurt and receive it there. This was another example of *mutual support and respect of the religious communities in Tuzla*, which helped build the inter-group trust and respect that would be of great importance for the behaviours of individuals and groups in Tuzla during 1991-1995 war.

As of 1942 many citizens of Tuzla joined the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia or Communist Party of Yugoslavia, the nascent force which embraced the idea of brotherhood and unity of all ethnic groups. The partisan struggle against fascism would result in Tuzla becoming one of the largest so called liberated territories firstly in 1943, and then in 1944. Under control of Tito's communist party, «the final liberation of Tuzla was of great importance for the continuation of struggle against occupation. Tuzla became a centre of a large free territory. The liberation of Tuzla positively affected the massive growth of the Movement of National Liberation» (Sakic, 2003, p. 60). Tuzla's antifascist tradition, strongly based on anti-nationalism, remained as one of the key traits in the social identity of most citizens of the town, and its continuity would be seen during the break-up of Yugoslavia.

When the war broke out in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Tuzla counted with some 131.000 inhabitants. As per the 1991 census more than 50 per cent of them were Muslims, some 17 per cent were Serbs and another 17 per cent Croats. Some 11 per cent of citizens of Tuzla declared as Yugoslavs, and more than 4 per cent belonged to other groups listed in the census. It is also important to note that prior to the war there was a large number of officials and soldiers of

Yugoslav National Army (YNA) residing in Tuzla, as well as a massive military infrastructure including one of the major military airports, four military barracks and seven warehouses of ammunitions, all inside or in the vicinity of the city.

During the elections held in Bosnia-Herzegovina on November 18, 1990, the first multiparty elections after the WWII, the citizens of Tuzla gave a majority vote to the alliance of former communist party and other non-nationalist parties. During the pre-war political crisis, lasting from the November 1990 elections until the outbreak of armed hostilities in Bosnia-Herzegovina in April 1992, as well as throughout the wartime period lasting from 1992 until 1995, during which Tuzla was exposed to severe hardship including shelling, hunger and massive influx of displaced persons, the local government and the great majority of the citizens did not succumb to intensive and continuous nationalist pressures promoting inter-ethnic violence. Instead, they remained a bastion of inter-ethnic tolerance and cooperation, challenging the discourse of the so called ethnic war in the country. As the community of Tuzla inverted the «problem» of ethnic heterogeneity in Bosnia-Herzegovina into a solution at the local level, paraphrasing Campbell (1998) we could say that they *counter-problematized the problem of Bosnia-Herzegovina*. In that effort, they strongly relied on their citizens' social identity, which will be analysed in the next section.

8.2. Tuzla and its citizens: the citizens' option as a social identity discourse and a counter-problematization of the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina

The analysis of dominant discourses, as well as of the key political developments in the early 1990s, shows that with the breakdown of Yugoslavia many inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina, even more than those in other republics, were faced with a challenge of social identification and representation. Substituting the discourse of brotherhood and unity, in the process of a disintegrating state and under the influence of the nationalist elites, ethnic identity and nationalism became the main sources of legitimation, representation and social identification of the majority of the population. As a

consequence, those inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina whose social identities were not characterized by high salience of ethnic or national feeling found themselves in a limbo, without representatives to champion their own priorities and values. The field of representation was appropriated by nationalists.

Although there is a widespread belief that nationalist political parties were in mutual confrontation prior to and during the dissolution of Yugoslavia, there is sufficient evidence contradicting such a conviction. As described by Kurspahic (2003, p. 95), in Bosnia-Herzegovina «the three nationalist parties – united in their determination to win at any cost and worried that Bosnians might vote for Markovic's Alliance of Reformist Forces or the Social-Democratic Party of reformed communists – went so far as to encourage voters to vote for any one of the ethnic parties in order to generate a winning coalition against their major opponents». In other words, salience of ethnic identity and division along ethnic lines was a common interest of *all* nationalist parties, while the ethnic coexistence was a threat to their goals.

This phenomenon was particularly prominent among Serb and Croat nationalists in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but gradually also became the strategy of the Muslim leadership. Campbell (1998) confirms that, although the official Bosnian position (referring to the Bosnian Muslim elites) has been the one of defending non-nationalist and multi-ethnic position, there have been strong political undercurrents dissenting from that position. «By and large, those undercurrents have come not from a constituency that wished to pursue a Muslim nationalism prior to the war but, rather, from those who have argued since the outbreak of war that the success of chauvinism made a defence of multiculturalism untenable» (Campbell, 1998, p. 111). This is clearly observable in the evolution of the discourse of the supreme leader of Bosnian Muslims Alija Izetbegovic, as elaborated in Chapter 5.

By instigating fear of other ethnic groups and promoting salience of ethnic identity, in the 1990 elections the nationalist parties succeeded in gaining trust of the large majority of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina and won in 107 out of 109 municipalities of the country, initiating an intensive and hardly reversible process of ethnic fracturing. Tuzla was the only city where non-

nationalists succeeded in winning the elections and formed the local government. The Alliance of Reformist Forces entered into coalition with the Communist Party and a small Democratic party. Together they formed a solid majority of 67 in the 100-member Assembly. The representative of the Reformists Selim Beslagic was elected mayor of the city, formally titled President of the Municipal Assembly. Together with his colleagues in the Municipality of Tuzla, throughout his mandate in pre-war, war and post-war times, mayor Beslagic was promoting the *citizens' option* as a counter-discourse to the discourse of ethnic rivalry and conflict. In the next section I will analyse the characteristics of citizens' option social identity discourse and contrast them with the key aspects of the renewed ethnic identity discourse.

8.2.1. Citizens' identity versus ethnic group identity: the growing incompatibility

As demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5, collective identities can take many forms – they can include or exclude different traits, such as religion, language or class, but also differ in their content, i.e. in constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons and worldviews. Political leaders and other authorities are in a position to influence the shaping of those identities, which are often being «re-defined» in times of crisis. As elaborated in Chapter 5, nationalist leaders and other nationalist influencers in the former Yugoslavia promoted group identities based on ethnic exclusivity, with strong focus on religion, portraying own ethnic group as a victim of others by stressing negative past experiences, praising readiness to kill or die for ensuring control of own group over specific territory, among other aspects. With the salience of these characteristics, ethnic identities significantly changed in their content.

The group identities promoted by the advocates of citizens' option relied on the constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons and worldviews significantly differing from and often incompatible with the ones newly promoted by the ethnic identity enthusiasts. In addition to Mayor Beslagic and his team at the Municipality of Tuzla, the key actors in the promotion of this alternative to nationalist identities and politics in Tuzla included the daily paper *Front Slobode*, Radio and Television of Tuzla, several

religious leaders and civil society organizations such as the Forum of Citizens of Tuzla, among others

In his public announcement made on 19th April 1992 mayor Beslagic offered the following description of citizens' option:

«The outcome of the first multiparty parliamentary elections confirmed the “citizens' option” (the political view that *government in Bosnia should serve the interests of all citizens regardless of their ethnic or religious background*)» (Beslagic, 1998, p. 18).

He further expanded on this definition of citizens' option by underlining some of its key attributes, in a public announcement of 12th May 1992:

«Our political goal is the citizens' option. This means political, legal and social *equality of all citizens* regardless of their religious, ethnic and political affiliations. We divide and evaluate people according to their *abilities* and the *contribution* they make by their work, and not according to their religion, ethnicity and the like» (Beslagic, 1998, p. 23).

In terms of constitutive norms of the social identity promoted by citizens' option, the above quote of Mayor Beslagic points at: *inclusiveness* of members of all religious, ethnic and political options, *common territory and government*, promotion of *equality* and of the *contribution* of citizens to the common well-being. The analysis of public announcements of Mayor Beslagic issued throughout the war indicates that he was carefully crafting his discourse to support the practices of citizens' option. For instance, he was regularly opening his addresses using the terms «Citizens of Tuzla!», sometimes preceded by the adjectives Respected, Dear, or similar. This type of address was in direct opposition to the ethnicity-focused language of nationalist leaders. For instance, Croatian president Tudjman used to open his addresses with the term «Dear Croats», sometimes followed by «dear citizens of Croatia», showing that the state belonged more to the former than to the later.

Furthermore, in his discourse Mayor Beslagic and the supporters of citizens' option mostly refrained from the use of religious terminology, unlike the nationalist leaders such as Tudjman or Izetbegovic. Alija Izetbegovic, whose

use of religious terms got more explicit in the later stages of his wartime discourse, often used the terminology pertaining to Islam. For instance, in his address at the session of the city council of Party of Democratic Action, he greeted the participants in the following terms: «Dear brothers and sisters, dear friends, Essalamualejkum, Bismilahir-rahmanir-rahim» (Izetbegovic, 1995, p. 31).

Nationalist social identities in Bosnia-Herzegovina were strongly characterized by the superposition of ones' own group goals over the goals of other ethnic groups. Not only were the goals of other groups considered secondary or illegitimate, but often there was a belief that those other groups had to be annihilated in order for the goals of own group to be achieved. In such context, inter-ethnic coexistence was perceived as a threat and bottleneck in the realization of own group goal, and lives of the out-groups, and even of the in-groups, had to be sacrificed for the ultimate goal – own ethnic state or territory. However, *advocates of citizens' option did not consider the multi-ethnicity as a threat, but rather as the greatest value and the main aspect of their social identity which was under attack and had to be defended*. Where most leaders, including the international community, saw a problem, Tuzla's leadership and most citizens saw a source of strength and a social identity trait which was not negotiable. Equality and inter-ethnic cooperation were considered as key values among citizens of Tuzla who, unlike many others, were highly aware of their *interdependence*.

«We are deeply aware of the fact that our society cannot be good for Muslims if it isn't good for Serbs, Croats and others who live here. Conversely, it cannot be good for Serbs and Croats if it isn't good for Muslims» (Beslagic, 1998, p. 24)

The above mindfulness of mutual interdependence is strongly diverging from the dominant discourses of nationalist identities, which propose that the precondition of the well-being of own ethnic group is the expulsion or subjugation of other, usually minority group.

Most citizens of Tuzla strongly cherished their common social identity based on shared space and the constitutive norms and relational comparisons in

which ethnicity did not enjoy salience. In fact, the analysis of the conducted interviews shows that my respondents were referring to the *religious belonging rather than the ethnic belonging* as one of the distinguishing identity aspects among the co-citizens of Tuzla. An interviewee who worked in the media stated that they paid a lot of attention to avoid the terms Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks, replacing them with the terms Orthodox, Catholics and Muslims, when referring to the citizens of Tuzla. By «*reducing*» *their differences from ethnicity to religion only*, the promoters of citizens' identity established a different balance between commonalities and differences among inhabitants of Tuzla. Vera Mujbegovic (2016, p. 285) testifies that this was also the common discourse in the first decades of the 20th century, which reconfirms that ethnic or national identities were not coming from the grassroots level.

In terms of the prevailing worldviews as an aspect of social identity, while nationalist leaders and ethnicity-based groups often insisted on the negative aspects of past inter-group relationships, in Tuzla *references to the positive common past were frequently highlighted* to challenge nationalist discourses and practices, to strengthen inter-group relationships and to inspire hope. Such positive references were commonly present in the reflections of my respondents:

«Somehow we managed to avoid all the wars. There is a legend that blood and salt do not go together. This was the case during WWII, and also now (...) Tuzla was saved, maybe indeed because we were “operated” from nationalism, because we were like that, we were multi-ethnic» (Interviewee 12)

Similar positive references to the past were often emphasised in the political and media discourse in Tuzla to support the prevention of ethnicity-based violence which was ravaging in the rest of Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Front Slobode* transmits the appeal of Rada Gavrić Nujić, citizen of Tuzla of Serb (Orthodox) origin, employee of Radio Sarajevo. In the article titled «We are indebted to the Muslims», recalling the well-known episode of the past when a Muslim religious leader prevented the massacre of Serbs in Tuzla, she states:

«I am appealing to all Serbs not to use violence against the Muslims, not to hurt their religious, national and other feelings and dignity. I say this as a citizen of Tuzla of Serb nationality, aware that we are highly indebted to the Muslims for what they did for us during WWII» (*Front Slobode*, 1992b)

In a public announcement of June 9, 1992, following a break into the Orthodox bishop's palace, the mayor of the city reminds of that same positive experience from the past by stating:

«May I remind you that our city kept itself free of nationalism during the WWII. The Mayor then was Hadzi Hasanaga Pasic, and the Mufti a man by the name of Kurt. Together with the citizens of Tuzla they refused to permit genocide against the Serbs and did not allow the Orthodox church and the bishop's palace to be burned down[...] This is Tuzla, and in Tuzla we will not allow any vandalism or barbaric behaviour» (Beslagic, 1998, pp. 39-40)

Building on the positive past, the Mayor sends a clear message that himself and his administration were following the same path as their predecessors, and that they would not allow anything to happen now that would later be a cause for shame. *Shame as a sense of accountability to the community and awareness of possible long-term consequences* are two important characteristics of the civic social identity of Tuzla, pointing at strong recognition of inter-dependence and traditional values. Relational comparisons are clearly translated in the above claims of *non-vandalism* and *non-barbarianism*, pointing at the values of civilization, decency and order.

While the nationalist identities were characterized by strong irrational orientation of passion and readiness to die or kill for own group, Tuzla's civic social identity was inclined towards *rational behaviour which cherishes human life*. In this context, an important aspect of Tuzla social identity was *empathy with the civilian victims of the conflict*, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. This empathy is documented in frequent public announcements expressing solidarity with citizens of different attacked areas (Mostar, Zvornik) and through the care for numerous internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Throughout the wartime Tuzla has been receiving a large number of IDPs from the surrounding areas, reaching some 70.000 persons by the end of 1993 (Armakolas, 2017). Their arrival significantly changed the structure of the population of Tuzla, as they were mostly rural population, with higher influence of religion and lower educational levels. As victims of violence committed mostly by ethnic Serbs, they were more inclined towards SDA-promoted Muslim nationalist discourse. Nevertheless, the solidarity with victims of armed violence was never contested and there is vast evidence of Tuzla's families offering a roof and a helping hand to displaced families.

The civic social identity discourse was *strongly Tuzla-centric*, and *relying on the positive self-image*, as it was building on the values and traditions rooted in Tuzla of which most citizens were proud. At the same time, this discourse was reflecting high levels of *Bosnian patriotism* in its deepest sense. Contrary to those elites and international community who believed that Bosnia-Herzegovina could exist fragmented by ethnic majority and minority principle, the authorities and citizens of Tuzla defended the view that this would lead to ghettoization and that such Bosnia-Herzegovina would lose its essence. In fact, as it was this very essence that was under attack, it had to be saved for Bosnia-Herzegovina to be saved:

«It was not a civil war, it was an aggression, a desire to divide Bosnia [...] After all, Bosnia has been existing for thousands of years, and it is us, the humans, who die» (Interviewee 11)

This kind of rational offered an alternative approach to the violent conflict in the country, based on an alternative view of the problem or, using Campbell's (1998, p. xi) terminology, «the problematization of the problematizations that reduced Bosnia to a problem». This alternative approach will be analysed in the next section.

8.2.2. Citizens' option as a counter-problematization of armed conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina

From the start of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina divisions along ethnic lines were considered as necessary and desirable not only by nationalist leaders, but also by most of the international community. As «the problem of Bosnia-Herzegovina» was generally perceived (or successfully presented) as an inter-ethnic conflict, and the violence understood mostly as a matter of ancient hatreds among different ethnic groups, the only «logical» solution was seen in separating those ethnic groups by fracturing the territory and sacrificing the multi-ethnicity of the society for the bare survival of the people. The community of Tuzla opposed such approach from the very beginning of the war. Among most citizens of Tuzla there was strong awareness that *nationalism and national divisions were contributors to violence, and unity was perceived as a source of strength and a solution*, and not vice-versa as promoted by dominant discourses.

This is why the citizens and the authorities got alarmed already in early 1992 when the ethnic divides started taking place within the Police forces of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Conscious that ethnic divisions would not bring the desired peace, but would rather exacerbate the problem and cause an irreversible process of entrenching in ethnic groups, members of the Tuzla police decided to oppose such change, and received support from city authorities, citizens and the local media alike. The *Front Slobode* article titled «The police forces for an indivisible service», reporting on the public protest of the members of Tuzla police forces against ethnic divisions, stated:

«Citizens of Tuzla showed solidarity with all the colleagues [members of Tuzla police forces] who want to remain united and professional, and who had taken a decision that they would detach from the Ministry of Interior of Bosnia-Herzegovina and act in accordance with the needs and capacities of the Municipality of Tuzla and other interested municipalities should there be (and there already are) nationalist divisions in the police forces of Bosnia-Herzegovina (*Front Slobode*, 1992a).

The awareness that splitting the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina along ethnic lines would result in more violence was so high, and the determination of the authorities and citizens not to allow such scenario in their own city so

strong, that members of police forces of Tuzla were even ready to detach from their central level command in Sarajevo. In the same vein, on 30 March 1992, in light of the international negotiations which were discussing the ethnic divisions of the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the authorities of Tuzla adopted a «Declaration on the status of the municipality of Tuzla». Strongly contested by the nationalist elites, the Declaration previewed the possibility of Tuzla's leadership *declaring an extraterritorial status of the city* in case the country would get fractured along ethnic lines. This, just as the warning of Tuzla's police forces that they might disobey the instructions from the central level, was perceived by the nationalist elites as a sign of «autonomist spirit» against the integrity of the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although accused of separatist intentions, Tuzla's authorities proved to be among the very few defenders of the true sovereignty of Bosnia-Herzegovina, with authentic and not only declaratory care for its multi-ethnic nature.

Clearly in Tuzla *parties in conflict were not defined in ethnic terms*, but the conflict was rather perceived as the *struggle between those trying to divide the population and promote ethnic and other inequalities versus those trying to live in peace and remain united and equal*. In such context, among the majority of inhabitants the local group identity (people defining themselves as “citizen of Tuzla”) gained more salience than the ethnic group identity. As an important symbol of such identification, in 1992 the public safety forces in Tuzla rejected to wear the emblem of lily, which was introduced from the central state level but was perceived by many as the emblem representing only the Muslims. The authorities of Tuzla decided that, instead of the emblem of lily, the public safety forces in town would wear the emblem of the city of Tuzla, stressing their accountability to and inclusiveness of all ethnic groups. Armakolas (2017, p. 106) claims that «even at risk of losing some of the Muslim patriots, this measure helped the Tuzla police and territorial forces not to divide along ethnic lines».

Challenging the existing dominant discourses of ethnic conflict, in Tuzla different actors offered a number of *alternative descriptions of parties in conflict*. In FF of April 28, 1992, speaking of the parties in conflict the editor of

the newspaper proposed a dichotomy *human against inhuman*. In its announcement to the citizens of Tuzla of May 22, 1993, the Crisis cell of the Municipality of Tuzla describes the violence and the parties in conflict in the following terms:

«Our city has been aggressed. Grenades that were fired from the enemy positions in Pozarnica attacked all the citizens of Tuzla, their homes and their values. *Our persistent effort to keep the peace was attacked! A horrific gunshot was fired into the liberty aspirations, our citizens' orientation, our harmonious life together (...)* Our joint strength and the determination of all of us are a powerful arm that aggressor does not have. Our unity and readiness to fully fledged resistance to aggressor are the power against which the enemy has no response» (*Front Slobode* 1992d).

As elaborated above, in the worldviews of the civic social identity the very idea of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a multi-ethnic state was under attack. In the article titled «The killing of Bosnia» (*Front Slobode* 1992c), the author distinguished two sources of aggression against the country - the internal and the external one. *Nationalism was identified as a source of internal aggression, the «opponent» which had to be contested*. The author of this text confirms another worldview characteristic for the civic social identity – «there will be no winner in the ongoing war, we have all lost too much». Unlike in the nationalist and ethnic identity discourses where war is considered as “sacred”, “just” or at least acceptable in order to achieve own group’s goals, *in civic social identity discourse war was considered solely as a human disaster*. Fatmir Alispahic, one of the founders of the Forum of Tuzla Citizens (FTC), explains:

«War, even the defensive one, is the time of evil. It is only *our roots that can lead us towards the good*. This is why, in the context of the general B-H picture, we need to revitalize the values that make Tuzla European city, in order to be useful to ourselves and others as a firm and moral mobilization force. Because *only if we remain what we had always been we will have the strength to mentally and physically overcome the nothingness of the aggressor*» (*Front Slobode*, 1993)

The different understanding of the parties in conflict also influenced the *discourse used by the authorities and most inhabitants of Tuzla related to the enemy*. Discourse analysis shows that, when referring to the enemy, the authorities, my respondents as well as many other citizens of Tuzla were cautious not to draw on ethnic or religious terms in order not to contribute to the «ethnicizing» of the conflict.

«I have never equated the one who was targeting me from the mountain with an Orthodox person living in Tuzla. I had colleagues at my [workplace] who were Orthodox. So I couldn't say that they were all the same, or that they were all Chetniks. How could I say that when [name and surname]¹⁸ sits so many years with me at the same desk?! When he lives through the same shelling as I do?!» (Interviewee 12)

The daily experience of multi-ethnicity was reaffirming the belief of citizens of Tuzla that the Bosnian conflict was not an inter-ethnic one. Just like in the above example, the authorities and my respondents often referred to the enemy as *Chetniks*. Campbell (1998, p.1) observed the same phenomenon while speaking to another citizen of Tuzla and concluded that «she did so rather self-consciously[...] It was, she said, so that *a distinction could be made between Serbs as a whole and those who waged war against Tuzla*. "It is just like the distinction you draw between Germans and Nazis", Amira observed».

The content of the term Chetniks which was used to define the enemy also clearly points at the relational comparisons of the group identified as "citizens of Tuzla", integrating all what citizens of Tuzla considered themselves not to be: barbarian, violent and nationalist. In extension to this, the mayor of Tuzla often used the terms "fascists" and "fascism" as the enemy, which clearly points at the political and ideological nature of the conflict, rather than the ethnic one.

The counter-problematization of the «problem of Bosnia-Herzegovina» also entailed a *different conceptualization of the solutions proposed by advocates of citizens' option*. What international community saw as a solution, Tuzla's

¹⁸ Some elements of the quote were omitted to protect the identity of the interviewee.

citizens saw as the road to an even bigger problem. This is why, in his letter addressed to Bill Clinton, the then President of USA, in January 1993 mayor Beslagic pleaded:

«Please do not allow the completely mistaken European concept of the division of Bosnia-Herzegovina along ethnic lines to be implemented. This would lead to [...] lasting, still bloodier conflict» (Beslagic, 1998, p.81).

While in the dominant discourse, including in the international community and academia, the «problem» of Bosnia-Herzegovina was observed as violence among ethnic groups caused by ancient inter-ethnic hatreds, and consequently the «solution» imagined in terms of division of ethnic groups into «ethnically consistent» territories, the citizens of Tuzla in their discourses and practices challenged such generalized understanding and identified nationalism or prioritization of own ethnic group interests as a source of violence, that could only be overcome by maintaining the traditional values of Tuzlan society such as unity and inter-ethnic cooperation. In other words, what was considered as a source of the problem in the dominant discourse was defended as the main value and the solution to the problem as defined in the counter-discourse of Tuzla, and proved in its wartime experience.

Fracturing along ethnic lines would mean the victory of nationalism, which indeed happened in most of the B-H. Aware of the power and influence of the dominant discourses that were instigating mistrust and division among members of society from different ethnic groups, the city authorities kept reminding the citizens that «constructive inter-ethnic and inter-personal relations in our city are the best possible guarantee of peace and prosperity in the future» (Beslagic, 1998, p. 24). Through their consistent efforts to provide good governance at local level and secure the rule of law in extremely challenging circumstances, as will be presented in the next section, the town authorities gave a critical contribution to the communal peace in Tuzla.

8.3. Good governance: inspiring trust, preserving the rule of law and prioritizing the safety of all citizens

8.3.1. Continuous and authentic communication with citizens and other actors as a source of confidence in the local leadership

The review of a set of records documenting the communication of local authorities with the community in Tuzla, through written and spoken public announcements and interviews with the city leadership in the local media, complemented by the information gathered from my respondents, points at several characteristics of this communication which contributed to the communal peace and the prevention of ethnic divisions. The *regularity and authenticity of that communication* and *high levels of empathy with the citizens* are amongst the most notable of those characteristics.

The analysis indicates that the city authorities were informing the local population often and in detail about all relevant developments.

«We took a strategic decision that Radio Tuzla would be operating 24/7. They were the eyes and the ears of the citizens and political structures. We kept issuing public announcements all the time» (Interviewee 11).

The *exhaustive regular communication with citizens was preventing or mitigating rumours and panic*, which could have led to inter-ethnic suspicion and accusations. In their tone, public announcements of local authorities were empathetic with the citizens who were exposed to the wartime hardship. Nevertheless, they were also very firm in clarifying that no violations of the rule of law would be tolerated in the city despite the extraordinary circumstances. In several public announcements the mayor openly asked the citizens to have confidence in the Municipal Presidency. At the same time, he was very candidly explaining to the citizens the limitations that local authorities had in wartime circumstances, being *very cautious not to give any false promises which would jeopardize the trust of citizens into city authorities*. The full commitment and dedication of the city authorities to ensure the maximum possible level of safety of all citizens transpires from all communications, with

guarantees that «our citizens will not be abandoned to chance or disorganized self-defence» (Beslagic, 1998, p. 15).

Open communication with the citizens entailed the readiness of the municipal authorities to hear about and address the daily problems of the citizens. Twice a week the mayor himself was receiving citizens in his office, and there were radio and TV programmes channelling direct communication between local authorities and the population. In addition to fostering cooperation and trust, through this approach the local authorities were addressing rumours, false information and attempts of manipulation by several media outlets at local, national and international level. The authorities made *systematic efforts of officially denouncing and rectifying the untrue information* because they were aware of the damage that it could create, including panic and inter-ethnic mistrust. For instance, a public announcement of 17 April 1992 stated:

«In the unusually fierce propaganda war being waged in the Tuzla area in recent days a particularly vicious and politically damaging rumour has been circulated. According to this dangerous rumour the Tuzla Police Forces are about to be divided with serious consequences to follow (...) All the members of our police force are committed and resolved, if need be at the cost of their lives, to defend, alongside our other citizens, their city, their homes and the community values of all Tuzla's inhabitants, Muslims, Serbs, Croats and members of other ethnic groups that live here» (Beslagic, 1998, p. 16).

In protecting the city and its inhabitants, the city authorities, particularly the Municipal Crisis Committee, was regularly issuing instructions and orders to the citizens, such as prohibiting entry and departure from the city without permission, issuing the obligation to go to work, prohibiting selling or exchanging properties, etc. The language of these instructions was firm and clear, the decisions were well articulated and explained in detail, giving the impression that limitations to the rights and freedoms are enforced for well-founded reasons and for the benefit of all.

With great efforts the local authorities managed to keep the communal peace in the city. However, they could not prevent the continuous attacks on the city launched by the aggressor from the mountains surrounding Tuzla. In their attempts to save the city from aggression, and in line with their firm trust in the rule of law, *the city authorities frequently appealed to the relevant international actors with mandate to intervene*, such as UN Security Council, Secretary General of NATO and others, imploring for help. The mayor and his team managed to put Tuzla on the map of international actors and got recognition from European Parliament, Council of Europe and other actors. They also frequently communicated with the international press agencies about the situation in the city. The analysis of the communication with UN gathered from Beslagic (1998) shows the evolution of the tone of the town authorities in their messages throughout the war: from respectful and imploring at the beginning («in the name of all peace loving people in the name of all the children, in the name of future generations, we implore you to help us»), towards distressed («time is running out») and desperately appealing to their sense of responsibility («you have a historic responsibility on your shoulders»), until it finally became overtly rough, blaming and cynical, after so many failed attempts to convince the international authorities to stop the aggression against Tuzla citizens («we want to alert both you [UN Secretary General] and the international public to the fact that your activities to date in B-H have met with total failure!», «UNPROFOR officer, it seems, cannot see or hear. We appeal to you to remove these blind, deaf and dumb monitors of Bosnian war crimes»; «you too will be guilty for the suffering and death of these old people, women and children»).

Regular, genuine but wisely crafted communication with the citizens was one of the key strategies of the local authorities which allowed them to maintain communal peace and order in the city and nurture the hope of its citizens in a better future, as shall be elaborated below.

8.3.2. Firm belief in the rule of law and equality of all citizens. Distinguishing between aggressor and civilians, prioritizing safety and maintaining hope that justice will prevail

In Bosnia-Herzegovina generalized violence left almost no area without population transfers. Over 80 per cent of non-Serb population was expelled from areas under Serb military control. The creation of parallel structures of governance and para-military forces, almost always based on ethnic identity, was a common trigger of disorder which led to inter-ethnic mistrust and violence. Aware of this risk, the authorities in Tuzla made efforts at the very beginning of the war to prevent divisions along ethnic lines in the forces of order such as police and army, and to streamline the appearance of paramilitary forces.

This was only possible due to the *very close cooperation between civilian, police and military authorities in the city*. It also required highly strategic and *balanced approach to the opponents* such as YNA or promoters of nationalism. Although there is evidence that in some instances the authorities were informally bypassing or isolating some of their members who were tempted by nationalist politics, the perception of joint decision-making was preserved and insisted upon. In general, all local authorities in Tuzla were balanced and moderate, avoiding radicalism in their approaches, not confronting directly with YNA or nationalists as their main opponents but wisely negotiating with them. One of the key characteristics of their behaviour was *strict adherence to the rule of law*. As observed by Armakolas (2017), respecting the law in wartime circumstances was particularly challenging and often more difficult than breaking the law; however, it was also dismantling in advance any arguments from Serbian (or any other) nationalist groups that would justify their rebellion. In addition to that, the observance of the rule of law fomented trust of the citizens, and vice-versa.

Despite chaotic times in Bosnia-Herzegovina, evidence shows that Tuzla authorities had a clear idea on how to prevent violence in the city. In a public announcement of April 19, 1992, the city authorities listed the following as *«factors constituting the basis for maintaining peace and security of our*

citizens: traditional inter-ethnic harmony; good relationships between neighbours; mutual trust and togetherness; unity amongst members of the Municipal Parliament and Presidency; and unity of the police and security forces» (Beslagic, 1998, p. 17-18).

The above unity was sometimes challenged by differences in the views on how to solve the wartime problems, such as the accommodation of large numbers of IDPs in the city. In most parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia many IDPs would be placed into the houses or apartments temporarily vacated by members of the “enemy” ethnic group. There is also broad evidence that in both countries numerous civilians, usually from minority ethnic groups, were forcibly evicted from their homes, which were then occupied by members of the majority ethnic group, mostly those related to political structures or armed forces. This was a common practice even in the areas which were not directly affected by war, such as Zagreb or Split. But in this important aspect, too, Tuzla was an exception. Despite all the wartime challenges and a large number of IDPs, *rule of law in Tuzla included guaranteeing the right to private property equally to all citizens*. My respondents confirmed that no one was forced to leave their property and the apartments which were vacated for longer period were properly sealed by local authorities.

In wartime Tuzla, unlike in most other places in Bosnia-Herzegovina, rule of law was promoted in discourse and ensured in practice. This is why «in Tuzla there was no organized crime, paramilitary or outlawed police forces which would terrorize the population by using the war circumstances as an excuse» (Armakolas, 2017, p. 56). In my view this was a key pillar for preserving inter-ethnic trust and cooperation. However, applying the law and treating all citizens equally in wartime circumstances was often challenged and perceived or portrayed as betrayal of own ethnic group.

One of the locally most well-known examples of equality in the protection of property is related to the break-in into the Orthodox bishop’s palace in 1992. The public announcement issued on this even on June 9, 1992, stated:

«Unfortunately, although we have excellent control over the city, a *shameful act* took place during the night. Persons unknown broke into

the palace of the Orthodox bishop (...) I promise to the citizens of Tuzla that we will do our utmost to *bring these burglars and vandals to justice*. This is Tuzla and *in Tuzla we will not allow any vandalism or barbaric behaviour*. We will punish anyone who tries to *disgrace the city* by his actions» (Beslagic, 1998, pp. 39-40).

With such discourse the leadership of the city sent several important messages. Firstly, the message that nobody would be allowed to break the law, even against ethnic Serbs or Serb property, despite the fact that Serbian armed forces were attacking the city; than that vandalism was unacceptable and it would be punished; and finally that citizens were equal in their right to private property and city authorities could be held accountability for ensuring that right. This attitude was strongly differing from the approach adopted in most other places, where the “exceptional circumstances” of war were being used for as an excuse for tolerating vandalism and often exploited for elites’ own financial and political interests.

As can be discerned from the example above, in their discourses and practices *the authorities were making sure that no equivalence was made between Serbian armed forces which were attacking the city and the ethnic Serb civilian population in the city, in order to prevent the generalization of ethnicity-based “Serbian guilt”*. Another example of such clear distinction is the action of the city authorities presented in the opening quote of this chapter.

Despite critical circumstances, the analysis of the discourse of local authorities reveals *hope in the better future*, which would bring *peace and also justice for all perpetrators of war crimes*. Hope, the feeling that helps overcome fear, was supported by historical memory. Expressions including «the history and the people will punish them», «the time of the inhuman is still here, but the dawn of the human will come again» or «war crimes don’t grow old», gathered from the media and public statements, illustrate the hope that, once again, Tuzla would survive hard times with dignity and pride.

Overall, with wise and strategic management of the city, in very difficult circumstances the local authorities managed to preserve positive inter-ethnic

relations and keep the life going on despite all odds, as described in the next section.

8.3.3. *«Life must go on» – combatting aggression by living a «normal» life*

In the period 1992-1995 the inhabitants of Tuzla were exposed to extreme hardship. Random shelling was their daily reality and a strategy used by the aggressor to disseminate fear. Hospital, residential areas, industrial installations and many other facilities were hit by bombs and many citizens were wounded or killed. Thousands of IDPs were pouring into the city after having their villages and towns occupied. In 1993, Tuzla was cut-off from the world and faced severe shortage of food. My respondents recall days without eating, but also a strong solidarity among people sharing whatever was available. Despite all this hardship, great efforts were made to preserve the «normal» functioning of the city, including not only survival but also educational, cultural and other activities. As the «old Tuzlan way» of life was under attack, the only way of defending it was by living this type of life. Interviewee 12 quotes mayor Beslagic who used to say: «Life must go on. They didn't stop it. If we stop it, then all is lost».

Respondents recall that schools were reopened whenever possible or else teaching over the radio was organized. Factories, restaurants and cafes were open despite all risks, which also helped sustain the economy and supply products and services. In 1994 the city authorities went so far as to organize the so called wartime Olympics:

«We had Olympic Games in 1994, imagine! It was requested, my late husband requested to call the commandant from Srpska Republic.... To call the other side to stop shooting so people from Srpska Republic could also participate in the Olympics! » (Interviewee 13)

The “normal” life relied on the daily interaction of citizens of Tuzla of different ethnic groups, who were resisting ethnic divisions taking place in the rest of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the wartime circumstances their mutual trust was often challenged by the events taking place outside of Tuzla, but sometimes also by

the developments in the city, particularly those which took place during May 1992 and which will be analysed below.

8.4. Inter-ethnic trust on trial: the departure of Serbs and the clash of Brcanska Malta

Maintaining and nurturing inter-ethnic trust and cooperation in the wartime Bosnia-Herzegovina was an extremely demanding task. While the authorities in Tuzla were promoting non-nationalist politics and solutions and trying to preserve the multi-ethnic character of the city, two events which occurred at the very beginning of the war, in May 1992, strongly challenged the inter-ethnic trust in Tuzla, leaving deep scars on the tissue of its society. These include the unexpected and silent departure of a significant number of ethnic Serbs from Tuzla, followed by the violent clash between YNA and Tuzla's armed forces during the withdrawal of YNA from the city.

According to the 1990 census, some 22.000 citizens of Serb (or Orthodox) origin lived in Tuzla before the war, constituting some 17 per cent of the total population of the city. During the first half of May 1992, large part of that population silently left the city, most often without informing colleagues and friends, and in some cases also without letting know their own family members. This caused perplexity of the rest of the population and severely challenged the previous positive inter-ethnic relations:

«It was so disappointing to see how many people left by May 15 towards Bijeljina, Belgrade, in that direction... I understand fear, I really do understand fear... Who am I to judge someone who left out of fear?! [...] But I cannot forgive. I have two friends with whom I had been growing up, I cannot forgive them. I told them this, of course. [I told them:] Why didn't you tell me on 14 May that we had to seek refuge? I would have sought refuge, too, maybe. I also have a family, and I could have gone out of Bosnia. This is something that remained... very ugly among us... it left a very ugly taste in our mouths» (Interviewee 12, of Muslim origin)

Similar views and emotions were shared by other citizens who stayed in Tuzla, who considered this mass departure as a *betrayal*. One interviewee shared the experience of a colleague who simply disappeared from his workplace in the middle of the day, and another one reported on the case of a Serb women who departed with two daughters without letting know her husband, a Muslim, who was at work when they left.

Faced with this situation and attempting to address it, in a public announcement of May 12, 1992, the mayor stated:

«In the last few days we have observed in Tuzla considerable unrest amongst the citizens with a Serbian ethnic background. We wish to emphasize that there is no particular reason why the Serbs should be more worried than any other ethnic group. We are all, unfortunately, endangered, Muslims, Serbs and Croats. We are under threat as people, as citizens regardless of our ethnic background» (Beslagic, 1998, p. 23)

In this statement the mayor underlines once again *the equity of all citizens in all matters*, including in the existing threat. In line with the policy of the city authorities not to promise anything that they could not fulfil, his message is not optimistic with regard to the overall security situation, but it is reassuring the Serbs that they would not be discriminated or targeted as ethnic group.

Armakolas (2017) reports that according to the available data some 65 per cent of Tuzla's Serbs left the city in May 1992. Reflecting on the dynamics of this departure, he further notes that «this meant that Serbian Democratic Party (SDP) managed to spread its influence onto many citizens who did not vote for SDP during 1990 election» (Armakolas, 2017, pp. 94-95). I agree with Armakolas that the key reasons for the mass departure of Serbs should be sought in the nationalist campaigns aiming to spread inter-ethnic fear. In addition to the one of SPS, I believe that the influence of radical pro-Muslim voices, which would later find their stronghold in the newspaper Dragon of Bosnia, discussed in more detail in the following sub-chapter, must be taken into account. Despite egalitarian discourse of the city authorities, at a specific point in time citizens of Serb ethnic group were perceived or suspected as potential allies of the Serb forces attacking other areas of the country. In such

context they felt more threatened than others and were tempted to seek refuge in their ethnic identity group, just like the majority of the population of B-H in the rest of the country. The discourse analysis shows that the experience of their mass departure from Tuzla – about which many citizens from all ethnic groups still feel very uncomfortable to discuss – was, and still is, characterized by *resentment and shame*. However, it did not lead to an overall ethnic fracturing in the city and the positive inter-ethnic relationships as a trait of citizens' social identity prevailed among the majority of the population of Tuzla.

Soon after the mass departure of Serbs another incident put the inter-ethnic peace in Tuzla at high risk. The withdrawal of YNA from Tuzla had been negotiated between YNA leadership and the city authorities for several weeks. Like in most other places in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia with presence of YNA troops, those negotiations were characterized by high levels of tension. A telephone conversation between Mayor Beslagic and the leader of YNA in Tuzla Tomislav Pracer clearly illustrates this tension. In this conversation Pracer suggested to Beslagic to «declare some kind of autonomy and state that they [Tuzla authorities] wished to live in Yugoslavia». Strongly agitated, Beslagic responds that this was out of question and pronounces the sentence that would become well known locally: «I have no other country apart from Bosnia and Herzegovina». Aware of their disagreement, the interlocutors come to an ominous conclusion: «than it's war» (Beslagic, 1998, p.25).

Indeed, armed violence broke out in Tuzla on May 15, 1992. During the agreed withdrawal of YNA forces from the city, a sudden exchange of fire between YNA and local armed forces occurred in the neighbourhood named Brcanska Malta, lasting for several hours and resulting in dozens of deaths, mostly of young YNA conscripts enrolled in their military service in Tuzla. The entire clash was video-documented by the TV station FS3, which headquarter was in the vicinity of the place of incident, and the video is still available online.

Several different and in many aspects mutually opposing narratives developed and persist around the incident on Brckanska Malta, which is still largely debated in the city. The difference in the narratives is reflected, among other, in the terminology that different groups use to refer to the incident. In

Tuzla it is most often referred to as *a battle on Brcanska Malta*, while in Srpska Republic (SR) and in Serbia it is called *an attack on the YNA* (Armakolas, 2017). Analysing the available data, I could identify a narrative line used in SR and in Serbia, where this incident is seen as a crime committed against Serbs, which was planned in advance by Tuzla authorities. Although the victims belonged to a number of different Yugoslav nationalities, in Serbia and RS this incident was primarily perceived as an attack against the Serbs. The discourse of Tuzlan authorities on this incident is more complex and has at least two narrative lines, which are often combined by the same interlocutor. One line is claiming that Tuzlan authorities never planned such development and were only interested in the peaceful departure of YNA, which was interrupted when YNA opened a fire. Another narrative is praising this event as the first and great victory of the defenders of Tuzla, during which they seized critically needed arms.

Armakolas (2017, pp. 95-96) concludes that «while the number of deaths is debated until today, the number of killed on both sides clearly indicates that the YNA forces were either unarmed or unprepared for the exchange of fire, or both». Just like the massive departure of Serbs, this event also threatened to jeopardize the inter-ethnic relationships in the city. It caused strong emotions from all sides and was perceived differently by different ethnic and political groups, which was exacerbated by the still existing lack of clarity around some of the dynamics of the incident. Although this traumatic event left a deep mark on the society in Tuzla, it did not lead to inter-ethnic hostility in the city. Tuzlan multi-ethnic society survived also this trial, due to intensive efforts of several actors, including a great part of the local media.

8.5. Wartime media in Tuzla: non-nationalist and nationalist discourses in a public debate

The analysis of dominant discourses in the post-Yugoslav countries presented in Chapter 5 points at the highly important role that national and local media played in supporting and strengthening nationalist discourses and actions, strongly contributing to inter-ethnic fears and resentments while

supporting divisions along ethnic lines. There is also ample evidence that media outlets which were proposing alternatives to ethnic divisions and objecting to widespread violence were marginalized or silenced.

In Tuzla the media setting was significantly different. Citizens' option defending the multi-ethnic character of the city, promoting inter-ethnic cooperation and non-nationalist solutions, was strongly supported by and working closely with a number of local media outlets, including TV Tuzla, Radio Tuzla and the daily paper *Front Slobode* (Front of Freedom, FF). While Radio and TV Tuzla were directly supervised by the city authorities, FF was more independent and on several occasions contested the interference of the authorities into its media liberties and staffing policies. However, FF and local authorities shared most of their worldviews, particularly in advocating for multi-ethnic Tuzla, and were complimentary in the amplification of civic voices in the city.

On the other hand, discourses of ethnic divisions which were dominating among nationalist elites also had influential voices locally in Tuzla, particularly in the paper *Zmaj od Bosne* (Dragon of Bosnia, DoB). Furthermore, other national or international outlets consumed by the citizens of Tuzla influenced their views on identity, safety and other key themes. For the purpose of this research, I reviewed and analysed selected texts from FF and DoB published during the initial stages of the war (1992 – beginning 1993), as well as those published during some of the critical moments in the wartime life of Tuzla society. I also listened to a set of wartime recordings of Radio Tuzla and sought views of my interviewees on the role of media in Tuzla during the war.

A respondent who was a media worker during war shared with me an observation that was expressed also by several other respondents with high salience of civic social identity. They referred to the high levels of awareness of media workers in Tuzla about own responsibility for inter-ethnic relationships in the city in the given circumstances:

«We had this huge responsibility for the spoken word, because we knew [that] if we panic and transmit any news in panic, than the entire city will start panicking. We had fantastic cooperation with Selim [Beslagic], who

was at our service 24/7(...) All the time we were encouraging people to stay here, saying that we need each other and that we should not split. We even did something that in war seemed ridiculous, some type of educational programmes called “Togetherness”» (Interviewee 12)

Closely linked to the city authorities, Radio and TV Tuzla supported the regular contact of Tuzla’s leadership with the citizens and contributed in such way to their mutual trust. Diffusing frequent public announcement, transmitting daily interviews with key persons from local authorities and keeping the citizens informed of the developments in the city, they helped reassure the population in extremely stressful times. Furthermore, local authorities often used their media partners to denounce the false information transmitted by the media supporting dominant discourses in the country and abroad, which was clearly aiming at spreading inter-ethnic fear and hatred. For instance, in their public announcement of 3rd June 1992, the city authorities denounced a series of lies from Serbian media:

«Another atrocious lie heard in Belgrade offered the information that the bodies of murdered Serbs were floating down the Jala river. In fact the water of the Jala is so shallow that not even a body of a kitten could float down it (...) TV Belgrade has broadcasted and twice repeated a monstrous lie that exploded like a bomb here in Tuzla. According to the allegation published by Milosevic’s TV station, five thousand Serb were being held in a concentration camp at the football stadium “Tusanj” (...) Anybody who wishes to do so can go to the stadium and confirm that there is nothing there apart from the stands and the grass!» (Beslagic, 1998, pp. 37-38).

In addition to Radio and TV Tuzla, the daily paper Front of Freedom was consistent in promoting the values of inter-ethnic harmony, equality and coexistence. Formed in 1943, in the midst of WWII, this paper was one of the media outlets with the longest tradition in B-H and a symbol of antifascism. In the wartime period its circulation was varying significantly, often depending on the availability of paper and financial resources. FF’s journalists remember that, due to lack of printing paper, several issues were printed on the paper normally used for paper bags. Promoting non-violent solutions to the B-H

problem, FF considered that «Nationalism is like a cancer» and that in B-H «there were only two nations, only two sides – the human and the inhuman» (*Front Slobode* 1992e). Other key contributions of FF include listening to and replicating the voices and concerns of the citizens and regularly transmitting the public announcements of the city authorities. Furthermore, FF was warning about the dangers of propaganda war and denouncing misinformation and media outlets promoting nationalist radicalism, particularly the local paper *Dragon of Bosnia* (DoB).

DoB was formed in Tuzla in September 1992, with strong support from Izetbegovic's Party of Democratic Action (PDA) headquarters in Sarajevo. At its peak, it reached the circulation of 10.000 samples. Unlike FF which was promoting equality of all ethnic groups, DoB was openly prioritizing Muslims as the majority population over all the others. It was particularly hostile towards the Serbs in Tuzla. In line with the dominant pro-Muslim discourse, the authors of DoB considered that the citizens' option promotion of inter-ethnic harmony and cooperation was an anachronism of those who were not able to overcome the death of Yugoslavia and who were trying to «disregard the national issue and believed in some sort of "Bosnia without nations"» (Jahic, 1992b). Replicating the dominant discourse, DoB suggested that the "anachronistic" equity approach should be replaced by the majority/minority power relations because the domination of the majority was the natural order of things.

In light of the growing Serb and Croat nationalism, DoB considered that the only «logical» or «reasonable» solution was promoting Muslim nationalism as a counter-balance. One of the key tasks that DoB embraced in that context was instigating the salience of ethnic identity among young Muslims in Tuzla, as a precondition for the domination of Muslim majority in the city. The paper made numerous attempts to activate the rage of the Muslims by transmitting a message that they were the only ones who believed in Yugoslavia, at the expense of their own ethnic group interests, while the «communist pseudo-egalitarianism» was a simple cover for Serbian hegemony. The paper suggested to the Muslims to embrace their ethnic identity as a naturally salient group identity of every person, and insisted on the importance of religion. In

the Article «Doslo doba da se zmaj proba» (Time has come to try the Dragon), Adnan Jahic, one of the founders of this paper, defines the key aim of DoB in the following terms:

«In the educational sense the primary aim of Dragon of Bosnia is to awaken the nationally apathetic and by the Partisan spirit still blinded majority of Muslims in Tuzla, and to direct them towards the historical and political reality and the urgent demands of the actual times burdened by the war» (Jahic, 1992a)

Promoting radical Muslim nationalist agenda, DoB journalists were heavily criticizing all those who were not on their ideological side: the city authorities, particularly mayor Beslagic, a Muslim who refused to join PDA, but also the members of UN forces, who were offensively called “rats”. Croatian pro-Ustasha leaders were, however, praised as friends of Muslims and allies against the Serbs.

The analysis of DoB articles reveals numerous examples of hate speech against citizens of Serb ethnic group and open instigation to violence against them. Unlike citizens' opinion which was clearly distinguishing civilians from those undertaking a military aggression, DoB blamed *all* Serbs for the widespread violence in B-H, stating that «they all actively or passively participate in the aggression» and even claiming that «they have barbaric genes» and that «they are a nation in which most people are scam». The extremism of this paper culminated in two articles which sparked heavy debates in the city. On February 4, 1993, in the article «Farewell to lullabies» its author Vedad Spahic strongly offended numerous citizens who were children from mixed marriages (couples originating from different ethnic groups), calling them “mješanci” (bastards, term usually used for dogs) who were privileged mediocrities in Yugoslavia. Another article, dating from April 1, 1993, directly invited to inter-ethnic violence, as it encouraged «each Muslim to have his own Serb whom to kill». Although there is no quantitative data on the influence of DoB in Tuzla, it is evident that its openly racist hate speech contributed to the feeling of unsafety and departure of many citizens of Serb ethnic group from the city.

The local authorities reacted to DoB for the first time, and very tepidly, after the article «Farewell to lullabies» was published. They reprimanded both DoB and FF for their «public quarrelling» which was a threat to the «political security» of the city. The permissiveness of local authorities towards the hate speech of DoB, that was severely jeopardizing the highly sensitive inter-ethnic relationships, keeps puzzling most of my respondents. Still, this approach of the city authorities can be explained by their attempts to avoid direct confrontation with the paper that enjoyed strong support from national level PDA, which could open the space for further radicalization.

In conclusion, despite the presence of Muslim nationalist media embodied in the paper Dragon of Bosnia, in Tuzla there was a prevalence of non-nationalist media supporting inter-ethnic harmony and cooperation. Unlike in many other localities of Bosnia-Herzegovina (and even more so in Croatia and Serbia), in Tuzla non-nationalist media outlets promoting a counter-discourse to the dominant discourses of violence were not silenced or marginalized, but were working hand in hand with the local authorities and significantly contributed to the promotion and strengthening of the constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons and worldviews characteristic for the civic social identity. In that endeavour, local authorities and the media were joined by a number of important groups or individuals from the civil society of Tuzla, whose roles are examined in the next section.

8.6. Community in the service of peace: civil society, religious leaders and other members of Tuzlan society supporting inter-ethnic cooperation

8.6.1. Key actors in the civil society and religious communities contributing to positive inter-ethnic relationships

The lack of civic activism in the former Yugoslavia coupled with the prevalence of non-critical voices in the media are often identified by among the key factors that enabled the rapid shift from socialist to nationalist ideologies in several of the former Yugoslav republics. Like elsewhere in the country, in Tuzla before the war there was little civic activism. However, several initiatives

developed in the new 1990s circumstances, and two among them had a particularly important role in the defence of the multi-ethnic society and the pervasiveness of non-nationalist worldviews among the population.

As an association of prominent citizens supporting non-nationalist solutions, named Forum Gradjana Tuzle (Forum of Tuzla Citizens, FTC) was formed on February 28, 1993. The Declaration adopted at its initial session stresses out:

«The citizens of Tuzla gathered at this founding sessions of the Forum of Tuzla Citizens have a message for all those who are deciding about the destiny of Bosnia-Herzegovina, to stop speculating about some ethnic division of our homeland. Today, just like in the time of peace, the citizens of Tuzla demonstrate by own example that a free life worthy of human being is possible only in an undivided territory, with full respect for dignity of every citizen, regardless of his national or religious belonging» (Forum Gradjana Tuzle, 2017)

As can be observed from the above excerpt of its Declaration, FTC was promoting non-nationalist solutions to the problem in B-H. In Tuzla it gained wide support and status, as a large number of prominent intellectuals and professionals from different areas, as well as influential managers of Tuzlan companies, joined the Forum. As such, FTC was inspiring a large number of young citizens of Tuzla:

«I remember the meetings of the Forum... those who spoke, these were the people I have always admired. There was a great atmosphere and... somehow... I realized there that my thinking was correct, my ideas were reaffirmed there» (Interviewee 14)

As an organization gathering over 15.000 members, more than 10 per cent of the population of the city, FTC provided a very strong communitarian support to the politics of equity and non-nationalism in the city. Armakolas (2011) considers that the moment when the non-nationalist activists decided to formally unite under the umbrella of FTC was a turning point in the opposition to radical nationalist forces in Tuzla.

Another highly important moment in that regard was the establishment of the Tuzlan office of Serb Civic Council (SCC). The formal establishment of this organization of Bosnian Serbs in Tuzla took place in March 1994, with the aim of ensuring equity and unity with other nations in a sovereign and integral Bosnia-Herzegovina. Through this platform the Serbs in Tuzla had the opportunity to clearly distance themselves from the nationalist politics and take away the arguments of many non-Serbs that all the Serbs are actually, actively or passively, supporting the violent politics of Milosevic. Although its membership was based on ethnic belonging, in the wartime circumstances SCC played an important role in contributing to the preservation of the multi-ethnic fabric of Tuzlan society. As explained by Armakolas (2017, p. 143) «it was an honest attempt to make a clear difference between the citizens loyal to Bosnia-Herzegovina and the extreme nationalists within their own nation». The large support that SCC enjoyed among citizens of Serb ethnic belonging in Tuzla certainly helped prevent the development of inter-ethnic mistrust and fear.

The inter-ethnic trust and cooperation were further reinforced by discourses and actions of specific religious leaders. In the 1990s the religious belonging was gaining salience as one of the very few distinguishing traits among Bosnian nations. Elsewhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina, just like in Croatia, there are numerous examples of religious leaders who were contributing to radicalism and dominant nationalist discourses, and fewer examples of the opposite practices. However, in Tuzla religious radicalism did not become widespread. On the contrary, several texts and interviews indicate that Muslim religious leaders in Tuzla were mostly moderate (with the exception of two persons), and the leader of the Catholic community, Franciscan Petar Matanovic, is particularly remembered for good by numerous inhabitants. During times of food scarcity and hunger he was generously distributing food – humanitarian aid provided by the Catholic relief agency Caritas - to needy inhabitants of Tuzla regardless of their religious belonging.

«He was like a father to me. He would give us a bit of all that he had, and Caritas had the store of the convent pretty full. He was a man to whom

you could always turn, a very broad-minded man» (Interviewee 12, of Muslim origin)

In addition to giving the example of inter-ethnic solidarity by distributing food to all citizens in need, this remarkable friar played a crucial mediation role in March 1993, following an incident which could have severely damaged the inter-ethnic relations in the city. During their return from an official trip to Zagreb, a ten member delegation from Tuzla including the mufti of Tuzla Husein Kavazovic and the head of PDA for Tuzla region Salih Kulenovic was arrested and imprisoned by members of Croatian Defence Council (CDC), the military force of Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina which at that point was in conflict with the Army of B-H. The plan of the CDC leadership was to exchange these high authorities for all or many of the approximately 450 Croatian soldiers who were imprisoned by B-H Army close to the town of Konjic. The news that the head of their Muslim community was arrested and imprisoned spread fast in Tuzla and was received with indignation and rage, putting the fragile inter-ethnic peace at risk.

«They believed that by having the mufti they had a huge capital, because *back than people were not perceived as individuals, but as means to achieve a specific goal* [...] One day mayor Beslagic came and told me that they had to provide me with police escort because there was a problem – some extremist groups were planning to abduct me and exchange me for the mufti. If that happened, it would have been a huge problem in Tuzla region» (Petar Matanovic, in Obrenovic, 2015)

Friar Matanovic started advocating for the release of the mufti and other members of the abducted Tuzla delegation, contacting people on both sides and serving as a mediator. Despite all risks, he was transported by helicopter to Konjic, where he visited mufti Kavazovic and spent eight days negotiating his release.

In the society of B-H that was being ripped along ethnic lines, Matanovic's care for his peer in the Muslim community prompted some negative reactions, some nicknamed him «Alija's spy» or «Alija's friar». However, the large majority of citizens felt inspired by friar Matanovic, who remains remembered

in the community as an example of high moral values which cut across all religions. Despite all hardship and the opportunities that he had to take refuge in a safer place, he did not leave Tuzla but remained in the city sharing the destiny of its population, which is an act that Tuzlan population highly respects.

8.6.2. «*Staying for Tuzla*»: remaining in the attacked city as an ultimate sign of loyalty to its community

Despite radical differences in their norms, social purposes, relational comparisons and worldviews, both nationalists and non-nationalists in Tuzla concurred in their negative attitude towards those inhabitants who left the city during the war. However, the nature of this negative attitude differed between the two groups. While the nationalists were criticizing those who left on the basis of their ethnic identity (as they were mainly Serbs), the supporters of the civic social identity discourse considered that staying was a pre-condition for saving the multi-ethnic character of the city.

While the nationalist social identity was characterized by the readiness to *kill* for the homeland, and the nationalist media categorized by their readiness to *lie* for the homeland, *the way that citizens supporting non-nationalist options if Tuzla showed and perceived their outmost loyalty to the city and its community is by – staying in the city despite all risks and extreme hardship.* The constitutive norm of the civic social identity required remaining in Tuzla against all odds, although most citizens had safer places where they could have been temporarily accommodated.

«I was in Split [Croatia] in 1993, trying to find transport to take me back to Tuzla. I was panicking, I felt this urgency of going back, people at home were starving [...] I can't explain that, I simply had to go back as quickly as possible» (Interviewee 14)

The analysis of discourses and practices of civic social identity indicates that it is by their physical presence in the city that those citizens were defending the value of multi-ethnicity and the tradition of joint life. This is also the reason why many of them were so strongly traumatized by the departure of numerous

Serbs in May 1992. In a public announcement related to the departure of Serbs, Beslagic (1998, p. 23) stated that «every temporary or permanent exodus of our citizens further undermines this inter-ethnic trust». Therefore, remaining in the city, even while it was faced with bombing, scarcity and hunger, was crucial for preserving its very essence – the multi-ethnic fabric. This can also explain why those citizens who left the city or sent their families to safer areas were often exposed to criticism.

Despite its non-violent approach to the solution of the problem in B-H, in the worldview of many citizens with high salience of civic social identity *the defence of the multi-ethnic space seems to have become more important than own life*. This worldview was guided by the awareness that, if multi-ethnic space was not saved, it could never be restored in the future. One of my respondents who was a media worker during war recalls the occasion in 1993 when she was invited for a meeting to Zagreb by a prominent international correspondent:

«According to me, that meeting was invented so she [prominent international correspondent]¹⁹ would get us out for five days to take a breath... and to make space for those who wanted to leave to actually do so. We were sitting on Ban Jelacic square [in Zagreb] and drinking coffee when I told her I was going back [to Tuzla]. She said: “[name of respondent], this is a great chance for you to get out. You got out, now you should move on”. And I said: “Oh no, no, for me THIS is patriotism”. She said it was for primitive people. “Maybe it is”, I answered»
(Interviewee 12)

By staying in the attacked city and preserving its tradition of equal valuing of all citizens regardless of their ethnic belonging, the inhabitants of Tuzla disarmed the nationalist claims about the inevitable need for ethnic divisions within Bosnia-Herzegovina. The efforts of the citizens to preserve the tradition of inter-ethnic (co)existence and trust were put on trial in many critical instants,

¹⁹ Name omitted to protect the identity of the interviewee.

the most tragic one being the massacre of young civilians in the centre of the city on 25th May 1995.

8.7. Outcry of defiance to radicalism and nationalism: the joint burial of the victims of the Kapija massacre in 1995

For three full years, from May 1992 to May 1995, the citizens of Tuzla had been exposed to extreme hardship and life-threatening conditions, including countless bombings of the city from the surrounding hills, shortage of food, water, electricity and other basic services, coupled with the arrival and care for tens of thousands of IDPs. They have also been witnessing mounting inter-ethnic violence in the rest of the country and the ethnic fracturing of the territory of B-H supported by the international community. Nevertheless, most inhabitants of Tuzla remained firm in maintaining their norms and values related to civic social identity, which included equality and cooperation of citizens regardless of their ethnic origin.

On 25 May 1995, after more than three years of war, Tuzla lived the most tragic moment in its history. An artillery shell launched from the position of Serb forces in the neighbouring mountains hit the central pedestrian area of the city, killing 71 and wounding 124 civilians, mostly young people of different ethnic origin. A wave of consternation and despair unfolded in the Tuzlan community. Outraged by their persistent inaction against the continuous attacks of Serb forces on the civilian population, the Mayor of Tuzla wrote to the UN Security Council:

«Please don't expect me to use polite, diplomatic, insincere language in this moment of tragedy, the greatest tragedy in our 1043 year history. Tonight parents are gathering up the pieces of their children from the pavements of Tuzla. They thought these children had a future»

«The people of Tuzla have nothing more to say to you [...] The fact that you watched passively the murder of innocent people, although you have both the legal authority and the military resources to stop these crimes,

is nothing but barbaric diplomacy and makes you accomplices of this crime against humanity» (Beslagic, 1998, pp. 156-158)

In the worst moments of despair, when many were expecting that the multi-ethnic fabric of Tuzla's society would finally tear apart under ethnicity-based accusations for the mass murder, the parents and the local authorities decided to undertake an unexpected and extraordinary act of togetherness, an outcry of defiance to nationalists and radicals of all sides – they decided to bury the victims in a common burial site, regardless of their different religious belonging. Armakolas (2012, p. 3) writes that «in this they defied the official Islamic institutions and Mustafa Ceric, the highest authority of the Islamic Community in Bosnia who spoke against the “sinful” joint burying of victims of different religions. They also opposed radical nationalist politicians and intellectuals who objected to this “unification” of the killed youth and who with aggressive verbal attacks, condemned the local authorities and the parents who accepted the joint burial site».

Disobeying the order of his higher Islamic authorities, Imam Muhamed Lugavic, a highly respected Islamic leader in Tuzla, decided to co-lead the ceremony of the joint burial of youth. In order to avoid the high risk of new attacks, it was agreed that the joint funeral would not be publically announced but would be held discretely, in full silence and at dawn. Nevertheless, around 4 a.m. on the day of the burial the inhabitants of Tuzla started pouring towards Slana Banja memorial. More than three thousand citizens came to pay their last respects to their murdered youth, together, joined by the representatives of all three religious authorities.

«Once again, Tuzla raised above everything else... it reunified those children, they are together again» (Interviewee 12)

The communal response to the massacre demonstrates the unbreakable determination of the inhabitants of Tuzla to preserve and cherish the inter-ethnic peace at all cost. The memorial complex of Slana Banja, as well as the monument at Kapija, the spot where Tuzlan youth were killed, remain as the enduring symbols of that determination. In his speech given at the commemoration of the massacre, the mayor implored: «Living must go on

even when it costs lives. In the thousand-year chain of Tuzlan history we are the link that has been hardest hit and we are the link that must not break. Life must go on at any cost» (Beslagic, 1998, p. 162).

Reminding the passers-by of that determination to live, and to live together, the verse of Bosnian poet Mak Dizdar resounds from the Kapija monument:

Here we don't live just to live

Here we don't live just to die

Here we die

So that we can live

8.8. «Now tell me... whose side are you really on?» – challenging Tuzlan non-nationalist discourses and practices

In its approach to the «problem» of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the community of Tuzla was unique in the country. Its discourses and, even more importantly, its practices of inter-ethnic egalitarianism and cooperation strongly challenged dominant discourses which were promoting ethnic divisions and inequity in practice if not in theory as a solution to the violent conflict in B-H. As it was putting at risk the interests of the nationalist elites, Tuzlan non-nationalist discourse was denigrated by a number of local and external actors. They often concurred in the narratives which were used to question the multi-ethnic experience of Tuzla and portray it in negative light.

Firstly, *Tuzla was often labelled by its opponents as «communist» or «red»*. This had negative implications in the context of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, which was often presented in the dominant discourses as a defeat of communism, while nationalism was promoted and supported as a counter-balance to Tito's legacy of communism. Although most of the new nationalist elites had been highly positioned functionaries of communist party during Yugoslavia, in Bosnia-Herzegovina and even more so in Croatia they managed to shift the discourse and portray communist times in Yugoslavia as dark times of oppression. In such context, being labelled as red or communist had negative connotations. Tuzla's imam Lugavic, who agreed to participate

in the joint funeral of the youth from different ethnic groups killed in 1995, was often labelled «red imam», and similar reproaches were made against the catholic leader in the city, friar Matanic, as well as against the members of Tuzlan leftist leadership.

One could argue that Tuzla's citizens indeed shared a number of values and norms – such as equality and cooperation of different ethnic groups – with the former communists' discourse. However, in the context of dissolution of Yugoslavia and birth of nation-states, these values and norms brought against them the *accusations of anachronism, of inability to accept that the geopolitical situation has changed*, often labelled by the pejorative term *Yugonostalgia*. In these new circumstances, when division of territory was pursued by nationalists from all sides, the inter-ethnic tolerance became undesirable. DoB speaks of the «pathologic insisting on own tolerance and citizenship, which made Tuzla an exception from all other areas of B-H». Denouncing such attitude as «communist pseudo-egalitarianism», DoB expressed its hope that «Tuzla is not destined to be crucified on the crucifix of brotherhood and unity» and advocated for «restitution of pre-communist relationships, when it was known what belongs to whom and how much belongs to whom» (Jahic, 1993).

The accusations of Yugonostalgia implied the *lack of salience of ethnic or national identity*. My respondents coincide in the view that other people from B-H, elites and common folk alike, found the behaviour of citizens of Tuzla *bizarre and suspicious* and that they were often perceived as *traitors of own ethnic groups*. Unable to imagine non-nationalist representation and positive inter-ethnic relationships in the war-torn B-H, other inhabitants of the country were indirectly or directly questioning the citizens of Tuzla about *the side they were really on*. DoB reproached to the leadership of Tuzla the «quasi-intellectualistic neglect of the national feeling and believing in some “Bosnia without nations”» (Jahic, 1992b), while Beslagic as a Muslim was reproached for not joining PDA, which was considered «the only legitimate representative of the Muslim nation» (Jahic, 1993).

Indeed, despite all efforts and increasing influence in all areas inhabited by Muslims, PDA never managed to gain significant support in Tuzla, which was

particularly annoying for its leader, president Izetbegovic. In their criticism of civic group identity in Tuzla, DoB and PDA were joined by part of the Islamic authorities in the city. By taking away the «exclusive» right of the nationalists to represent the people in Bosnia-Herzegovina, non-nationalist leadership of Tuzla was also disturbing their territorial aspirations.

«We faced resistance from the top political structures of our country, much more than resistance in Tuzla... Because, let's not fool ourselves, there were not only ideas about Greater Serbia or Greater Croatia, there was also the idea of Bosnia-Herzegovina, not as Greater but as a Muslim state in which, believe me, I would not live even for a second» (Interviewee 12, of Muslim origin)

In their efforts to preserve multi-ethnic community of Tula, throughout the wartime the authorities of the city were faced with different types of accusations. From the beginning of the war they were being *accused of "autonomist tendencies"*, which Mayor Beslagic publically denied on a number of occasions, including in his reactions to the international media reporting. Those accusations, grounded in the rejection of the Tuzlan authorities to accept the divisions along ethnic lines, were aiming at discrediting local authorities, imputing to them lack of Bosnian patriotism and lack of loyalty to the central government.

Disagreements and power struggles on the line Tuzla – Sarajevo can be tracked in the correspondence between Mayor Beslagic and the Presidency, particularly President Izetbegovic himself. Their continuous frictions escalated in February 1995, following an attempt of a group of members of the Army of B-H to forcibly evict several Serb and Croat families from their apartments in Tuzla in order to accommodate several families of refugees and Bosniak soldiers coming from other areas. Due to their systematic enforcement of the inviolability of private property and firm attachment to the equality of all citizens before the law, the authorities of Tuzla managed to prevent similar incidents throughout the wartime, which strongly contributed to their legitimacy among all ethnic groups as well as to the citizens' feeling of safety. In this specific case the soldiers claimed that they had Izetbegovic's permission to evict the

mentioned families. To clarify this Mayor Beslagic wrote an internal letter to Izetbegovic. To Beslagic's surprise, Izetbegovic responded in an open letter publically read on TV, seizing the opportunity to openly challenge the mayor of Tuzla and accuse him of being insufficiently sensitive to the needs of (Bosniak) soldiers and their families. This allowed Izetbegovic to publically show his own prioritization of Bosniak soldiers and their families over the citizens of Tuzla of other ethnic groups. In his address to mayor Beslagic, Izetbegovic requested him to find solutions for the families of soldiers that had nowhere to live and finished his letter with the following terrifying words:

«I don't need to remind you that people will make their own justice if they don't get it from the authorities(...) Other solutions may conform to the letter of the law, but they will not dispense justice» (Izetbegovic in Beslagic, 1998, p. 155).

Setting the dividing line between law and justice, Izetbegovic sent a public message that, as president of B-H, he did not consider that the laws of the country needed to be strictly respected. We such message he sent a positive sign of approval to those who wanted to take justice into their own hands. Nevertheless, such anarchy or parallel structures of authority never developed in Tuzla, unlike in most other places in the country. The legitimacy of local authorities was challenged by some groups in the local community (bottom up) and by the central level (top down), and nationalist voices were present at both levels. However, the main source of their legitimacy was in the strong and massive support of the local community, with whom they have been maintaining very close relationship, based on local civic identity and common values.

Although the "Tuzlan way" of governance and behaviour, reflecting Burton's (1990) concept of prevention of conflict by addressing its root causes, got well known in Bosnia-Herzegovina and received some international recognition, it did not get transferred to other local communities nor it influenced the overall perception of what Critical Discourse Analysis names «possible and appropriate course of action» in B-H. The influence of Tuzla's counter-discourse on the discourses and practices beyond Tuzla remained limited, and

the likely key reason for such development is summarized by one of my respondents:

«We wanted to be a model, but they didn't let us (...) Because we were, actually, a counter-model to their model!» (Interviewee 13)

Nevertheless, as summarized in the final section of this chapter, with its successful experience Tuzla served and still serves as a powerful counter-discourse to the discourses of violence in the three key thematic areas of this study.

8.9. Oasis of peace the Tuzlan way: conclusions

As the only city in Bosnia-Herzegovina in which inter-ethnic peace and cooperation were preserved till the end of the war, and still persist, Tuzla is truly unique. The analysis of its discourses and practices related to group identification as one of the three key themes of this study indicates that the *strongly salient civic group identity and the sense of belonging and accountability to the community of citizens of Tuzla prevented the exclusive prominence of ethnic identity of most citizens*, who persisted in defending the multi-ethnic character of the city and promoting norms and worldviews not characteristic for the «new» ethnic group identities in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This supported the perseverance of constructive *inter-group relationships*. Although they were challenged on many occasions, they remained positive due to the strong sense of interdependence and firm belief that without its multi-ethnic character Tuzla would lose its very essence. Many of my respondents told me that they saw preserving inter-ethnic trust and cooperation as «something normal». A respondent who was among the key leaders of the city during wartime told me with a big smile:

«When so many people ask me how we managed to keep people together, why we didn't kill each other, I am tempted to tell them: don't ask me, go and ask all the others why they *did* kill each other. We did what the people [*narod*] asked for, the others didn't» (Interviewee 11)

Unfortunately, in the 1990s the interethnic violence became «the new normal», making Tuzla an exception. Although occasional ethnicity-based incidents in Tuzla did happen, they never became systemic. This was largely due to the *good governance* provided by the local authorities. Their strong nexus with and sense of accountability to the citizens whose safety and well-being were clearly made a priority, close cooperation with all key actors, loyalty to the city and determination not to let it get «disgraced» by inter-ethnic violence, promotion of positive inter-ethnic past experiences and enforcement of the rule of law, among other, were of critical importance for the success of Tuzlan resistance to violence. *A strong alignment between non-nationalist inclusive discourses of the local authorities and their actions* can be easily tracked from the analysis presented in this chapter. The commitment of non-nationalist local media, civil society and some religious leaders, are among other key factors that contributed to the preservation of the inter-ethnic trust in Tuzla.

If the experience of Tuzla is still perceived as a «paradox» (Armakolas, 2011), as a «suspicious exception» to the realities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, this is because its experience disrupts, challenges and delegitimizes the dominant discourses on the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina as an inter-ethnic conflict. Moreover, *Tuzlan community dared to switch sides of the alleged problem and solution, by promoting inter-ethnic trust and not fear during the war and by opposing to the «solution» of ethnic fracturing and warning that it would bring additional, even bigger problems.* Despite the generalized idea about the existence of ancient inter-ethnic resentments and hatreds in Bosnia-Herzegovina, different knowledge and truth were shaped by Tuzla's experience. Constructive social interactions among members of different ethnic groups were promoted as the powerful tool against inequality and violence. The tone for this type of norms and behaviours was set already prior to the war and remained firm and decisive even in the moments of greatest wartime challenges.

As different discourses each point to different courses of action as possible and appropriate, Tuzlan discourse was a clear threat to dominant discourses

of ethnic divisions. Namely, inter-ethnic cooperation strongly interfered with the course of action desired by the nationalist elites and undermined their role of «saviours» of own ethnic groups. This is why Tuzlan experience had been and continues to be challenged and marginalized. «Tuzlan way» was undermined by dominant discourses at different levels, which prevented it from gaining more power and establishing as a «solid and stable representation of the world» (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002) or an alternative social world beyond the city community. The power of nationalist discourses, which had «indirect mind control» (van Dijk, 2008) or almost exclusive influence over the knowledge, opinions and attitudes of the population in the country, was too high and supported by the way the solution to B-H problem was imagined by the international community.

Problematizing such discourses, which are prevailing among national and international political elites but also in most of the academia, Tuzlan experience is blurring the typical boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and showcasing a type of group identification and solidarity different to the ethnic one. As such, it might have been condemned to «directed forgetting», just like many other experiences and narratives disconcerting the dominant discourses, was if not for the continuity of its discourse and practices of inter-ethnic cooperation also after the war, coupled with the efforts of a handful of people to document, analyse and disseminate its experience. This study is an attempt to contribute to those efforts with narratives from two *oases of peace*, which are synthesized and compared in the closing chapter of this study.

Chapter 9: Comparative analysis, conclusions and research implications

«All the conditions for the beginning of armed conflict [in Gorski kotar] were there – except the will of the majority of its citizens, Croats and Serbs» (Tatalovic, 1996, p. 327)

This study is an enquiry about community resistance to war in general, and to ethnic fracturing in particular, during the 1991-1995 violent conflict of dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. Rooting this thesis in the conceptual framework integrating social constructionism, social psychology and peace and conflict studies, and using discourse analysis as a method of choice, in the core body of this work I explored the evolution of several discourses and practices from the past (Chapter 4) which influenced the evolution of discourses relevant for this study. Some supported the evolution of dominant discourses of violence, which contributed to the preparation, eruption and mobilization for violence, including ethnic fracturing in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The characteristics and dynamics of those dominant discourses of violence were explored in Chapter 5. Building on the others, which supported the evolution of discourses of peace, Chapter 6 elaborated on some of the key alternative discourses in the former Yugoslavia, which challenged dominant discourses and promoted non-violent solutions. As a specific type of counter-discourse to war, the case studies of two communities that resisted ethnic divisions and violence and preserved ethnic coexistence during the war were presented in Chapters 7 and 8, answering the secondary question of the research: how did the resistance in those communities evolve, prevail and persist during the entire wartime period.

In this final Chapter 9 I will undertake a comparative analysis of the two case studies, assessing their commonalities and differences, and contrasting them with dominant discourses of violence. This will enable me to address the primary research question of the research: in what ways did these two ethnically mixed communities in the former Yugoslavia present a challenge to

dominant discourses of war during the 1991-1995 violent conflict? I will elaborate on the parallels that I identified in their discourses and practices around the three key themes that guided me throughout the core body of this research, namely group identification processes, inter-group relations and governance.

I will then recapitulate those findings to summarize why the communities of Gorski kotar and Tuzla were genuine *oases of peace* during 1991-1995 conflict and briefly look into the post-war realities of those communities. Finally, I will identify possible directions for future research which emerge from this study.

9.1. Challenging dominant discourses of violence: a comparative overview of the two case studies

When they wrote a letter of apology to the parents of a wounded soldier from Tuzla, Josip Horvat and his colleagues from Gorski kotar could not yet know that Tuzla would become their «sister *oasis of peace*», one of the very few places in Bosnia-Herzegovina that would remain ethnically mixed and resist the narrative of inter-ethnic war, just like Gorski kotar in Croatia. However, these two communities were to develop an astonishing set of commonalities in «chasing away the ghost of war» (Horvat, 2003, p. 36) from their areas. Ten key commonalities in dealing with the threat of violence are presented in the section below. They are grouped around the three key themes of the study and contrasted with the dominant discourses of violence which prevailed in other areas of the two countries.

9.1.1. Group identification processes: challenging the dominant discourse on ethnic identity as the only relevant group identity, and its increasingly exclusive and hostile content

In drawing conclusions on the group identification processes related to the pre-war and war periods in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is important to recall the motivational theories of social identification and the function of group membership in reducing uncertainty and achieving meaning and clarity in social context. The evidence summarized by Brewer (2011) showed that in the

contexts of high cognitive uncertainty the function of group membership and identities is to provide self-definition and guidance for behaviour in otherwise ambiguous social situations.

Pre-war and war times in the former Yugoslavia were clearly the times of highest uncertainty for the country's inhabitants: social, political and economic systems were falling apart in the midst of rising violence, and the future was unclear. Although the Yugoslav society was characterized by high heterogeneity and the malleability of its group identities, the pre-war context was used by the political elites to promote salience and exclusivity of ethnic or national identity. Moreover, in the new circumstances ethnic identities became more closed, more focused on religion as a distinguishing factor, and started praising killing or dying for one's own group interests as one of the main values.

As observed by Campbell (1998) violence had a constitutive role in identity politics during breakdown of Yugoslavia. It was used for the constitution of political communities and homogeneous political realities desired by the elites. Aiming at ensuring the association between people and territory along ethnic / national lines, the elites imposed the dominant discourses of *ethnic / national belonging as the only group identity (that matters)*, artificially and forcibly reducing the complexity of social identities on the territory of the former Yugoslavia to one dimension. They combined this discourse with portraying *ethnic heterogeneity as a threat to one's own ethnic group survival and interests*, as inter-group differences got institutionalized and ideologically legitimated (Jabri, 1996). These simplistic and exclusive discourses on ethnic / national identities by the political leaders positioning themselves as saviours in an increasingly threatening context explain why most citizens sought protection, self-definition and guidance within own ethnic groups and adopted violence towards ethnic out-groups as a new norm.

This process was successfully prevented in both *oases of peace* by several means, observed in the two case studies and summarized below.

Heterogeneous and multiple group identities were promoted as a value and as a strategy against violence

With a demographic structure characterized by mostly work related migrations, in both *oases of peace* the heterogeneity of group identities was protected and preserved prior to and during wartime, and highly valued. As stressed with pride by interviewee 11 «we have always been very diverse [...] After WWII there were 74 national groups living in Tuzla!».

While in the rest of the two countries multiple group identities were sacrificed at the altar of ethnic identities, in the two oases of peace they were promoted not only as a value, but also as a strategy of protection against the mounting violence. This is, among other, why Radio Delnice was regularly pointing out that the military personnel of Yugoslav National Army in their town were also «fellow citizens», while their commander was also «the new inhabitant of our town» (Radio Delnice, News, 16 and 17 September). This is equally one of the key reasons why the identification of individuals as *citizens* was strongly promoted in Tuzla, supplementing the ethnic group identity. This approach is clearly reflected in the April 19, 1992, public announcement by the local government of Tuzla, which listed «traditional *inter-ethnic* harmony, good relationships between *neighbours* and mutual trust and togetherness» as three of the most important «factors constituting the basis for maintaining peace and security of our *citizens*» (Beslagic, 1998, pp. 17-18).

Rather than looking for minor differences, members of the communities of Gorski kotar and Tuzla were highlighting those identity aspects and values that they shared. In both communities I observed that references to ethnic differences were often reduced to differences of religion, as my interlocutors would refer to their *Catholic* or *Orthodox* neighbour, friend or colleague much more often than using the terms Croat or Serb.

Strong identification of inhabitants with local community and with the concept of citizenship

Although, under the influence of the broader context, ethnic identification did gain some salience in the two *oases of peace*, it did not supersede other types

of group identities, as was the case in other areas of the two countries. My research identified two of those other types which might have played a critical role in the prevention of ethnic fracturing and violence.

Firstly, I noticed a strong sense of belonging to and identification with the local, territorially-defined community, the community of the region of Gorski kotar and of the city of Tuzla, with a related set of constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons and worldviews characterizing those communities. The analysis of the content of social identities of the inhabitants of Gorski kotar and Tuzla points at several common characteristics of that content in both communities, such as inclusiveness, embracing and cherishing diversity, strong awareness of human inter-dependence and valuing common past, among others. In my interviews in both *oases of peace* the respondents regularly showed strong attachment to and high level of pride for being members of those two specific non-violent local communities, as reflected in numerous quotes, such as «we [the citizens of Tuzla] are “operated” from nationalism» (Interviewee 11) or «[we], the people of Gorski kotar, are so peaceful» (Interviewee 6).

Secondly, strong attachment to the concept and practices of citizenship was observed in both oases of peace, entailing equality of all individual citizens in rights and responsibilities, as well as values such as rationality and serenity, as opposed to irrational tribalism promoted by nationalist leaders. While these concepts were entailed in the comprehensive political programme of *citizens' option* in the case of Tuzla, in Gorski kotar they were reflected in the common references to fellow citizens (Radio Delnice, 1991) as well as in the calls for behaving *in the civilized manner*, not crossing the threshold of *civilized dialogue*, keeping the level of *civilization* of our region (Horvat, 2003), etc.

The outcomes of the two cases studies indicate that multiple and non-violent group identification processes in the communities of Gorski kotar and Tuzla, in combination with their trust in the local governments, reduced uncertainty and supported the satisfaction of needs for self-esteem, belonging and safety of their citizens, without them having to resort to the protection of exclusive national groups and their nationalist leaders.

9.1.2. Inter-group relations: challenging dominant discourses on the ethnic nature of conflict, on the inevitability of inter-ethnic violence and the ethnic fracturing as a solution; redefining parties in conflict and offering alternative solutions to the conflict

The increase in the salience of ethnic identities prior to and during the violent conflict in the former Yugoslavia was coupled with the characterization of that war as an ethnic conflict. This characterization, promoted by dominant discourses and generalized internationally, was based on the assumption that the territory of the Balkans was inhabited by fixed and homogeneous ethnic groups who have been hostile towards each other for many centuries, growing inter-ethnic resentments and hatred which, sooner or later, had to result in war. This is how the notion of inevitability of violence was promoted, and ethnic fracturing followed by the creation of nation states or nation state-like territories presented as the only viable solution.

As clearly demonstrated in Chapter 4, this rationale promoted by dominant discourses was largely inadequate, as it was based on several false premises. Firstly, the ethnic groups on the territory of the Balkans were not homogeneous, and secondly, despite several episodes of identity-based violence, they enjoyed a long history of multi-ethnic cooperation without evidence of ancient inter-ethnic hatreds. Nevertheless, dominant discourses succeeded in promoting the idea that ethnic groups, namely Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs, were parties in conflict or enemies in the 1991-1995 war. This understanding was not shared in the two *oases of peace*.

In my analysis I demonstrated that the above way of posing the problem of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia was highly problematic, and that it conditioned even more problematic solutions, including ethnic fracturing as part of the desired solution. Luckily, the communities of the two *oases of peace* problematized the way the problem had been posed and rejected the claims being made by the political elites about ethnic conflict.

The two communities ideated and promoted alternative definition of parties in conflict

In their discourses and practices, the communities of Gorski kotar and Tuzla made a critical difference between armed aggressors and civilian members of ethnic groups. This is illustrated by Interviewee 12, who said: «I have never equated the one who was targeting me from the mountain with an Orthodox person living in Tuzla».

Furthermore, the analysis of the discourses from the two *oases of peace* demonstrates that their inhabitants considered the entire community of their region / city as a community under threat of violence, and saw nationalism of any ethnic group as a contributor to violence, as their “enemy”. Therefore, their alternative definitions of parties in conflict included concepts such as *those living in peace* versus *those promoting violence*, *rationality* versus *irrationality*, *those who ran amok and pursued individual interests* versus *common people*, *tribalism* versus *civilization*, and so forth. Challenging the discourse on inter-ethnic intolerance, Horvat from Gorski kotar (2003, p. 21) summarized this alternative approach in a simple statement: «Our only intolerance was towards the war».

Positive inter-ethnic experiences from the past were proactively recalled

While dominant discourses of war were consistently recalling negative inter-group experiences from the past, in the two *oases of peace* the authorities and the media challenged those dominant discourses by being eloquent on the abundant positive inter-group past experiences. While strengthening the common group identity of those communities, narratives of mutual support of ethnic groups in the past were also used to prevent fear from the *ethnic others* instigated by dominant discourses, as well as to inspire hope that positive inter-group relations and unity of the citizens would prevail once more just like on many other occasions in the past.

There was high level of awareness of human inter-dependence

The cross-case comparison further indicates that both communities showed *high levels of awareness of inter-dependence of human beings and groups*. This is clearly reflected in the statement of the mayor of Tuzla (Beslagic, 1998, p. 24):

«We are deeply aware of the fact that our society cannot be good for Muslims if it isn't good for Serbs, Croats and others who live here. Conversely, it cannot be good for Serbs and Croats if it isn't good for Muslims».

It is equally visible in the statement of a Serb from Gorski kotar (Tatalovic, 1996, p. 328):

«We knew that everything would be solved easily if no blood was shed. But when even a drop of blood is spilt, it is hard to get back to how it was before»

The last quote also explains why the populations of both communities considered that it was too late to apply their own model of multi-ethnic non-violent coexistence in those places of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina where the threshold of violence had been crossed.

Challenging the ethnicity based zero-sum thinking and win-lose solutions promoted by dominant discourses, whereby the achievement of the goals of one ethnic group was conditioned by the defeat of the other group, the communities of Gorski kotar and Tuzla were clearly pursuing solutions that would accommodate the interests and well-being of all their members, recognizing that this was the only possible way to lasting peace. Therefore, they were resistant to accepting the war or ethnic divisions as a "shortcut" to any alleged solutions for any ethnic group. In that resistance, they were guided by their leadership, which played a critical role in removing the threat of generalized violence from those communities, as we shall see in the next section.

9.1.3. Governance: challenging dominant discourses and practices which were instigating fear and chaos, and the role of nationalist leaders as saviours

There is broad evidence that the salience of specific traits of social identity depends on the context. In the context of an organized state, such as Yugoslavia until the late 1980s, providing security and safety to the citizens was a duty performed by the state, therefore there was no need to rely on one's ethnic group for that purpose. However, in the context of the crisis and breakdown of the state, traditional structures ensuring safety disappeared and ethnic leaders portrayed themselves as saviours and exclusive providers of security, as we have seen in Chapter 5. At the same time they were instigating fear of ethnic out-groups. With such discourse, nationalist leaders secured the 1990 electoral victory in most of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and, out of fear and lack of other options, most citizens of the two countries started seeking safety within their own ethnic group, embracing the discourse of inter-ethnic conflict.

In Gorski kotar and in Tuzla this was not the case. My research found several governance-related commonalities in the two *oases of peace* which might have contributed to the prevention of broader buy-in into the discourse of inter-ethnic conflict and consequently to the prevention of violence in those two communities.

Citizens elected non-nationalist local authorities

While in most Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina it was the nationalist parties that won the 1990 elections, the communities of Gorski kotar and Tuzla elected non-nationalist moderate leadership. In the case of Gorski kotar it was the reformed communist party LCC-PDR, while Tuzla was the only city in Bosnia-Herzegovina which gave majority vote to the non-nationalist Union of Reform Forces and became governed by the coalition of this party with the Communist Party and the Democratic Party. Electing non-nationalist leaders was certainly a pre-condition and a critical first step which enabled the two communities for successful resistance to nationalist discourses and practices. However, this step alone would not have been sufficient for preventing the violence, as

proved by the experiences of a number of other towns and regions initially run by moderates which gradually succumbed to ethnic fracturing and other forms of inter-group violence.

Local authorities were reducing uncertainty by enforcing rule of law and giving equal treatment to all citizens

As discussed by Oberschall (2000), one of the views on the Yugoslav conflict is that its driving motivation was not ethnic hatred but fear and insecurity. Reducing uncertainty was of critical importance for preventing violence. Furthermore, Brewer (2011) recognizes that group identity is only one of many possible modes of reducing social uncertainty, while roles, values and laws can serve the same purpose. These three components, namely clearly defined roles and responsibilities of all citizens strategically defined and wisely communicated by the leadership, attachment to the values such as tolerance or preserving human life, accompanied by an uncompromised respect for the rule of law, were clearly observed in both *oases of peace*, as elaborated in the two case studies, reducing social uncertainty of their inhabitants.

Unlike in the rest of the two countries, in the *oases of peace* communal order was strictly enforced, with the most outstanding examples being the protection of private property of all citizens equally. While breaking into houses, stealing and destroying the properties of citizens of “enemy ethnic group” became the new norm in the rest of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the local governments in Gorski kotar and Tuzla did not allow such practices to take place in areas under their control. In addition to that, they prevented the dismissal from work of members of the “enemy ethnic group”, another new norm that was spreading fast in the rest of the two countries, preserving in this way ethnic diversity in some key functions and ensuring a minimum of living conditions – such as housing and salary – for all citizens.

Challenging the discourse put forth by nationalist leaders in which they portrayed themselves as saviours, the local authorities in the two oases of peace became examples of good governance protecting equally all citizens on

their territory regardless of the mounting violence in the rest of the two countries. The case of the mayor of Tuzla standing up for Serb citizens while the city was under attack by Serbian military forces, or the care of the crisis cell in Delnice, in Gorski kotar, for the well-being of a Yugoslav National Army (YNA) soldier wounded on their territory, while YNA was attacking other places in Croatia, are just two examples of uncompromised efforts of the local authorities in both communities to prevent fear and chaos by protecting all citizens on their territory from any violence.

The results of my study point at the attitude of the local authorities in Gorski kotar and Tuzla as *managers accountable to all citizens* of their community, rather than saviours of the ethnic majority on their territory. With extraordinary efforts invested in preventing the spread of fear, chaos and illegal structures of governance, as we saw in Chapters 7 and 8, these two local authorities succeeded in maintaining order and safety, therefore the inhabitants did not feel the urgency of turning to their ethnic leaders for protection, as in other parts of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Local authorities were successfully navigating though the broader nationalist context and weakening nationalist voices in own communities

It is important to note that, in their efforts to prevent violence, local governments in Gorski kotar and Tuzla did not attempt to suppress or deny ethnic or national identification by their inhabitants, but rather engaged with them, embraced inter-dependence and multi-ethnicity as a solution and not a problem. The plea of the mayor of Tuzla to President Clinton not allow «the completely mistaken European concept of the division of Bosnia-Herzegovina along ethnic lines to be implemented, [as] [t]his would lead to [...] lasting, still bloodier conflict» (Beslagic, 1998, p. 81) or the decision of Croatian local leadership from Gorski kotar, in particular Franjo Starcevic, to proactively visit and engage with Serb leaders in their villages, are just two examples of this approach.

With such attitude local governments of both *oases of peace* also weakened the nationalist voices in their own communities, who could not make any accusations of discrimination, and demonstrated the highest levels of responsibility and capacity to respond to the war situation in an ethical way. This also contributed to preventing the establishment of para-governance and para-military forces, which were the main triggers of chaos and violence in the rest of the two countries.

In their efforts to preserve peace, both local governments were frequently faced with instructions and orders from central (capital) level which were hampering their own strategies of violence prevention, such as the order received in Delnice to withdraw all services to YNA barracks, or the public letter from the president of Bosnia-Herzegovina endorsing the forcible evictions of non-Muslim citizens in Tuzla. In dealing with such requests local governments applied balanced and creative approaches, in most cases strategically avoiding direct confrontation with much more powerful nationalist leaders at central level.

Another type of clash that had to be avoided was the confrontation with YNA, which had already caused armed violence and loss of human lives in other places. Both *oases of peace* were faced with the high risk of violence due to presence of military infrastructure, personnel and weaponry of YNA on their territories. The local leaderships in the two communities undertook strategic negotiations and attempted to remove this risk without precipitating open clashes. The leadership in Gorski kotar was successful in that effort, while in Tuzla the armed violence did break out during the withdrawal of the YNA from the city, under circumstances which remain controversial.

Partnerships were built and regular and constructive communication upheld to mitigate risks and prevent violence

In their efforts to prevent inter-ethnic fracturing and violence, local governments in Tuzla and Gorski kotar promoted cooperation and gathered support of a number of important actors. This included communicating constructively and proactively also with those groups that presented a threat

to the community, such as YNA forces in both Tuzla and Gorski kotar. My analysis showed that *regular, moderate and constructive communication* with all actors, coupled with the close cooperation with local media, police and military forces, leaders of political and religious organisations and civil society, were key in ensuring the success of the counter-discourse to the dominant discourse of violence. It is unlikely that such resistance would have been possible without this communication and collaboration, as the two communities were “swimming against the stream” of much more powerful dominant discourses promoted by high level elites.

The role of the local media proved to be crucial in both *oases of peace*. Curle (1995) stresses that, rather than by bad people, violence is performed by confused and misdirected people, which was often the case in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. However in the two *oases of peace* the local media - local radio in the case of Gorski kotar, and local TV, radio and newspaper *Front Slobode* in the case of Tuzla - paid great attention to providing citizens with regular and accurate information. In doing so they also provided a counter-balance to the nationalist discourses of other media with balanced, constructive and hope-inspiring media content and tone.

Peace was preserved with perseverance, wisdom and courage

In the two communities in the focus of this study moderate politics was combined with numerous extraordinary efforts, wise governance and cooperation of a number of actors aiming at achieving the same goal – preserving lives and the multi-ethnic structure of their communities. These efforts required high levels of wisdom and courage, as they were directly undermining the goals of nationalist leaders.

During the conflict in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina local governments of both two *oases of peace* were often exposed to criticism, denigrated as “red”, “communist” and treated as traitors of own ethnic group. However, by persevering in their efforts and preserving peace in their multi-ethnic communities, the *oases of peace* became a living example of counter-

discourse to the dominant voices which were claiming that inter-group violence was inevitable and that divisions along ethnic lines were necessary to stop it.

9.2. What made Gorski kotar and Tuzla oases of peace: a summary

In early 2013, while preparing the design of this research, and after having collected only the initial information on the communities of Gorski kotar and Tuzla, I was searching for the preliminary concept that would best reflect the unique character of the two communities in the focus of my study. Having considered different options, I agreed with my supervisor to tentatively use the notions of *oases of peace* or *oases of coexistence* while conducting in-depth research and revisiting my initial hypothesis. When a year and a half later, in November 2014, I had the privilege to meet Josip Horvat, one of the key actors of the non-violent struggle in Gorski kotar, I learned that he had written a book about his wartime experience titled - *Oasis of peace*. He forged this concept with his closest colleagues during 1991, when they decided to embark on the path of resistance to violence. Much more than a mere coincidence, the realization that we came up with the same concept prior to meeting each other was a beautiful initial moment of mutual recognition for both of us and a beginning of friendship which lasted till Josip's premature death in 2016.

Interestingly, I also found that members of both communities disliked the concept of coexistence. A respondent in Tuzla told me:

«There is no co-existence or co-living, there is only life. We don't live one next to each other, we live together» (Interviewee 11)

A similar rationale was shared in Gorski kotar:

«I don't want to talk about coexistence because this term implies that somebody forced us to live side by side, and in Moravice this is not the case. Peace and harmony here are natural, not a result of somebody's political will» (Marinkovic, 2011).

These considerations reconfirm a deep belief in diversity as a value, present in the two communities. Fully embracing the rational of the two communities, I

also opted to use the concept of *oasis of peace* when referring to them in my study.

Josip Horvat (2003, p.8) defined the *Oasis of peace* in Gorski kotar as the «Rule of Peace as antipode to War, coexistence and tolerance opposed to hatred, as the final Good that will stop the Evil». In his unique and poetic way, through this definition Horvat actually described *the absence of direct, structural and cultural violence* in Gorski kotar, which corresponds to the *academic definition of peace* introduced by Galtung (1990, 1998). As we have seen from the case studies and cross-case synthesis, this absence of violence in Gorski kotar, and a very similar one in the city of Tuzla, was not a result of fortune or propitious circumstances. On the contrary, it had to be achieved through a proactive, strategic approach that required firm and tenacious resistance to the generalized acceptance and promotion of violence as a shortcut to the goal of putting one's own ethnic group in a dominant position.

I am using the concept of *oasis of peace* for both Gorski kotar and Tuzla because as I have shown in the thesis the three types of violence identified by Galtung were proactively and successfully prevented *within* those communities. Therefore, I am referring to the *communal peace*, in full awareness that both communities, and particularly the one in Tuzla, were subjected to external violent attacks, which made the preservation of the communal non-violence even more challenging.

As a result of the prevention of *direct violence* in the two communities citizens were not harmed, harassed or evicted on the basis of their ethnicity, unlike what was happening in other parts of the two countries. *Structural violence* was prevented by ensuring equality for all citizens in principle and in practice. For instance, the structure of the relationships was such that members of ethnic majorities and ethnic minorities had a say in decision-making processes and were genuinely consulted through different fora. Also, differing from other parts of the two countries, in Gorski kotar and in Tuzla citizens were not losing their jobs for belonging to the minority groups. *Cultural violence* was prevented through discourses and actions of the leadership and

local media, who continued promoting and valuing diversity and resisted ethnic identity-based stereotypes reinforced by nationalist elites.

With the above efforts, fears of individual citizens from all ethnic groups in the two *oases of peace* were reduced, their arguments taken into account during decision-making processes, therefore they did not feel the urgency to seek protection from their ethnic leaders or to resort to the use of violence to get control of their own lives and to protect their own interests. Therefore, peace was maintained with deliberate efforts and at risk of ethnic ostracism for all those promoting *inter-ethnic cooperation as a social counter-practice during war*.

Embracing diversity as a value and as a shield against violence was one of the keys to the success of the two *oases of peace*. Jabri (2006, p. 157) states that «the legitimation of war is situated in discursive practices based on exclusionist identities» and asks if it is «therefore possible to conceive of peace as situated in a critical discursive process which, rather than reifying exclusion, incorporates difference». The experiences of the two *oases of peace* provide a positive answer to this question.

Although differing in ethnic composition of their population and some other demographic aspects, Tuzla having an urban population and Gorski kotar a more rural one, the comparative analysis of the two case studies shows strong similarities of the two *oases of peace* in terms of norms, values and experiences. Even though these experiences had very positive effects on the lives of the citizens of the two communities, they remained «endemic» or restricted to those two specific areas during wartimes in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, they continue challenging dominant discourses of the past and present, as will be elaborated in the next section.

9.3. Challenging discourses of violence then and now: the persistence of the two oases of peace

Exploring the experiences of the two areas which preserved a multi-ethnic character and inter-ethnic cooperation, I attempted to discern the extent to

which dominant discourses of violence were challenged by the existence and persistence of the two *oases of peace*. To answer this secondary question of my study, I looked into the influence of the *oases of peace* on the realities elsewhere in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war, but also into the sustained impact that they continue to have in the societies of the two countries. The analysis shows that, despite their limited influence on the immediate wartime realities during 1991-1995, the *oases of peace* seem to be having a prolonged impact in challenging dominant discourses of violence and contesting the ethnicization of the problem and solutions in the two countries.

9.3.1. Limited impact of the counter-discourses from the two oases of peace on 1991-1995 wartime realities

The analysis of the available data revealed that, despite their success in preventing violence at the local level, the two *oases of peace* did not cause a domino effect that would spread the resistance to violence to other areas of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina during wartime. While exploring the collected data I identified three elements that might have contributed to such an outcome.

Firstly, as elaborated in Chapter 6, nationalist elites made sure to silence, marginalize or discredit the alternative voices which were challenging discourses of violence and putting at risk the elites' interests. In the context of the two *oases of peace*, numerous and sometimes overt attempts of nationalist elites to discredit or obstruct the local violence prevention efforts were observed both in Tuzla and in Gorski kotar. For instance, as we have seen in Chapters 7 and 8, the president of Bosnia-Herzegovina Izetbegovic publicly criticized the attempts of the mayor of Tuzla to guarantee the right to private property equally to all citizens, and in Gorski kotar Radio Delnice was continuously denounced for rejecting to change its name into Croatian Radio Delnice and local authorities criticized for apologizing to the parents of the wounded YNA soldier.

Secondly, although they made extraordinary efforts to keep communal peace in the areas under their governance, the authorities of Gorski kotar and

the Tuzla authorities were not pacifist *per se*. The analysis of the experience in the two *oases of peace* shows that preventing the creation of the whirlwind of violence from the earliest moments of war was key to their success. The two communities remained unique in preserving inter-ethnic peace, as other areas were getting dragged into violence. In such context the citizens of Tuzla and Gorski kotar adopted a certain level of what Jabri (1996) calls «double moral standard», according to which some behaviours are acceptable on the battlefield, but not in private life. Many inhabitants of the two *oases of peace* participated in the war in other areas of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the role of soldiers, but adjusted their behaviour to «peace mode» when returning to their *oasis of peace* as citizens. While in other areas of the two countries the «war mode» also invaded the civilian life, which translated into killing of civilians or occupying empty houses, this type of behaviour was not imaginable in the *oases of peace*, and the distinction between civilians and soldiers from all ethnic groups was preserved.

Further analysis of the discourses and practices from the two *oases of peace* confirms that their authorities and citizens made a clear distinction between the areas where they considered peace was feasible and other areas where they believed that armed struggle was the only option. As stated by Horvat (2003, p.71):

«For the strategy like ours we needed some “*lucky stars*”. The resistance in all parts of Croatia could not have been organized in the same way, as many have been directly caught into the whirlwind of war, whereby the only alternatives were to take up the arms against the enemy or to put your belongings into a plastic bag and leave towards places such as Gorski kotar».

I agree with Horvat that once the armed violence starts taking place, the choices become extremely limited and the return to non-violent solutions, particularly if only promoted at the local level, seems almost impossible. I also agree that there might have been some «*lucky stars*» on the side of Gorski kotar inhabitants and their authorities, such as the fact that this area was on the edge of the imaginary map of the «Greater Serbia», therefore maybe not

strategically crucial for Milosevic and his collaborators. However, I believe that it is important to complement Horvat's thinking with an additional reflexion that challenges to a certain extent the paradigm of unviability of non-violent options in other areas.

It is crucial to keep in mind that the above mentioned «whirlwind of war» in most of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina did not start out of the blue sky, but rather required some internal forces that helped it build into a storm. The fear of local inhabitants, divisions, revived negative past experiences, exclusion and other «contributing winds» that were so prudently prevented in Gorski kotar and Tuzla, were at the basis of the creation of the whirlwind of violence in the rest of the two countries. Galtung (1990, 1996) describes this as an iceberg of violence, in which direct violence is only the top of the iceberg made possible by the existence and fomenting of structural and cultural violence. In order to promote structural and cultural violence at sub-national level, dominant nationalist voices of violence needed local support or local passiveness. Therefore, the whirlwind of war in many other places of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina may well have been prevented or at least curtailed had there been – following practices in the two *oases of peace* - systemic and determined local efforts that sought to prevent cultural and structural violence at the very early stages of conflict.

Thirdly, the *oases of peace* had a limited impact on the wartime realities because their efforts and voices were not given adequate attention by the actors in the international community who were involved in the peacebuilding processes. Numerous efforts by the Tuzlan authorities to influence the perceptions and behaviours of the international community with regard to the «Bosnian solution», insisting on the need to consider options beyond nation states, were analysed in Chapter 8. Those efforts are visible particularly from the correspondence of the Tuzlan authorities with actors from the international community, in which they warned about the devastating effects that any territorial divisions along ethnic lines would have. Nevertheless, the international community kept dialogue exclusively with nationalist leaders as

representatives of ethnic groups, and in so doing helped to marginalize any alternative options.

In summary, the two *oases of peace* had limited influence on broader wartime realities, which can be closely linked to the dominant identity politics during wartime. As indicated by Jabri (1996, p. 131), which expression of identity dominates or prevails is dependent on the degree of control different social groups exercise over discursive and institutional practices. The authorities in Tuzla and Gorski kotar had high levels of control over discursive and institutional practices in their areas of control (city, municipality), but very little influence on the broader context, where the ethnic identity logic was imposed. However, the achievements in those two areas, preserving their multi-ethnic character and accomplishing non-violent conflict resolution at a local level, are admirable taking into account the huge power asymmetry between them and the dominant discourses that prevailed at that time. Moreover, as their experiences continue challenging over-simplified narratives about the past, the two *oases of peace* remain “a pebble in the shoe” of nationalist discourses until present. The level of challenge that those achievements continue presenting to dominant discourses can be perceived, for example, from the ongoing pressure and criticism to which counter-discourses are being exposed still today, more than twenty years after the war. The evolution of the dynamics between dominant discourses of violence and their counter-discourses in the two *oases of peace* is briefly analysed below.

9.3.2. Resistance goes on: Gorski kotar and Tuzla in post-war times

Preserving inter-ethnic cooperation and preventing violence during wartime proved to be highly beneficial for the communities of Gorski kotar and Tuzla. Having saved from destruction not only their infrastructure, but even more importantly the pre-existing social networks, after the war the two areas soon reached the top of the list of development and well-being of their populations in the two countries. Unlike other regions and cities of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina which were struggling, and still struggle, with the rehabilitation of the physical and social infrastructure and reconciliation difficulties, Tuzla and

Gorski kotar were able to move on. As such, the two *oases of peace* are a living proof that war is not the fastest, but the most costly option, for which the price is being paid by multiple generations in war-torn areas.

After the war the two *oases of peace* continued strengthening their multi-ethnic character, positive inter-ethnic relations and good governance. As a counter-narrative to dominant discourses of violence, and as a living example of benefits of multiple identities and inter-ethnic cooperation, the two communities are sites in which conventional thinking concerning the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina is contested. As such, they continue to be exposed to criticism and scepticism by advocates of those dominant discourses, who continue to attempt to deny or denigrate the experiences of Gorski kotar and Tuzla even two decades after the end of the war. Some of those efforts, such as attempts to deny that peace was maintained in Gorski kotar, were analysed in Chapters 7 and 8. In both communities I was told by those I interviewed that they are still questioned about which side they were on during the war, and being openly «accused» of lacking Croat-hood, Bosniak-hood and Serb-hood during and after the war. I also witnesses the ongoing debates about the wartime experiences in the media of both local communities.

This persistent challenging of the counter-discourses of non-violence developed in Gorski kotar and Tuzla should be considered in the context of post-war realities in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Firstly, as demonstrated by Sekulic et al. (2002), although the levels of ethnic intolerance in the Yugoslav republics were not high before the war, they did grow significantly after the war, as a consequence of dominant discourses and practices of violence. This means that seeking recourse or refuge in ethnic groups continued and was further strengthened in post-war times. Nationalist discourses in both countries remained dominant, proactively reducing the space for alternative, supra-ethnic and bottom-up group identification processes.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina the entire state infrastructure remains based on three separate nations. A clear example of the continued marginalization and

de-legitimation of supra-ethnic identification processes was observed in 2013, during the first post-war census in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the testing phase of the census, 35 per cent of the population self-identified as Bosnians, using a supra-ethnic category of belonging to the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina rather than a national category. Just like in 1990, the nationalist parties got alarmed and swiftly reacted with intensive campaigns instructing the population to declare using one of the three national categories, and not some «inexistent» category such as Bosnian. The main argument that the leadership of all three ethnic groups used to support ethnic identification during the census was that the remaining two groups would outnumber one's own group therefore putting at risk its rights and interests. However, it is evident that supra-ethnic identities or a potential decline in the salience of ethnic identities undermine the political «logic» on which the current Bosnia-Herzegovina is built, and puts at risk the interests of the ruling elites who remain in power.

Secondly, the attempts to diminish positive inter-ethnic experiences in the two *oases of peace* are closely linked to the struggle for the collective memories. As expressed by Elcheroth and Spini (2010) the battle over memories is at the same time a battle over the definition of identities, and those who win the symbolic struggle over the definition of a common identity are in a privileged position to guide the behaviour of the group. The dominant discourses in the three ethnic groups are promoting collective memories which justify own ethnic group violence as a defence against other groups, celebrating one's own group actors who engaged in violence as national heroes and denouncing actors of violence from other groups as war criminals. While this is causing continuous tensions in the region, it also feeds the national pride and sense of belonging of many individuals and diverts the attention of the population from many other substantial problems. In such a context, the experiences of the two *oases of peace* blur the simplified narratives of all ethnic groups, challenging their discourses of victims / victimizers and on other related in-group / out-group dynamics.

Gorski kotar and Tuzla are a living example that violence was evitable, that it didn't bring any good for most of the population, and that multi-ethnic society

is possible and can thrive and prosper. This is why their experiences are still a great source of disturbance to the nationalist discourses in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. For these experiences to continue contributing to the complexity of collective memories and fomenting critical thinking about group identification processes and inter-group relationships in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the past, present and future, it is necessary to further strengthen the body of knowledge on these and similar community counter-discourses to discourses of violence. Some of the possible directions of further study are explored in the final section of this study.

9.4 Research implications and possible directions for future research

As elaborated in Chapters 1 and 2, the currently existing body of research looking into the discourses and lived practices of non-violence in war-torn countries is very limited. While there are historical examples of the ferocity and pervasiveness of politically-driven violent conflicts in which identity is thought to have had a causative role, such as in the former Yugoslavia or Lebanon, for example, there are also cases of pockets of inter-ethnic cooperation or *oases of peace*, as they were named in this study, which are outcomes of deliberate and determined efforts of resistance. As these *oases* problematize the generalized knowledge that exists on the conflicts in those countries and contribute to the complexity of their understanding with new narratives, I believe that it is of utmost importance to continue documenting and analysing the experiences of community resistance to identity-based violence and learning from them. To increase our understanding of the resistance processes and effects in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere, it is also necessary to establish and analyse the links between types of resistance at a community level and other types of resistance to violence.

The experiences of Gorski kotar and Tuzla show us that the preserved narratives and collective memories of positive inter-group relations from the past, particularly from WWII, were very beneficial and wisely used by the local authorities for reducing group-based fears and for promoting cooperation among citizens of different ethnic groups in the *oases of peace* once the violent

conflict started in other parts of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is therefore possible to expect that further documentation and dissemination of narratives of inter-ethnic cooperation and other positive inter-group experiences from 1991-1995 war might help mitigate the risks of future identity-based conflict on the same territory. The same applies to other countries and regions where group identities are being frequently abused to instigate inter-group resentments in the interest of the elites pursuing their own political and economic goals.

An additional gap in the knowledge that I observed during the elaboration of this study is related to the currently limited understanding of the sudden change in the levels of acceptance and legitimation of violence among the population of the former Yugoslavia. As elaborated in Chapter 5, from best friends, good neighbours or close colleagues sharing decades of joint life, many people from different ethnic groups overnight turned into enemies ready to kill each other. Although there are numerous hypotheses about the sequence of events and the cause-effect process that led to such change, the body of knowledge related to this sudden shift is still limited. I believe that further research of discourses and practices related to this topic could contribute to better understanding of these highly important dynamics.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

List of interviewees

	<i>Community</i>	<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Type of engagement</i>
Interviewee 1	Gorski kotar (CRO)	Mrkopalj	M	Croat	Military
Interviewee 2	Gorski kotar (CRO)	Vrbovsko	M	Serb	Political
Interviewee 3	Gorski kotar (CRO)	Delnice	M	Croat	Political
Interviewee 4	Gorski kotar (CRO)	Delnice	F	Croat	Media
Interviewee 5	Gorski kotar (CRO)	Mrkopalj	F	Croat	Civil Society
Interviewee 6	Gorski kotar (CRO)	Vrbovsko	M	Serb	Civil Society
Interviewee 7	Gorski kotar (CRO)	Vrbovsko	M	Serb	Religious
Interviewee 8	Gorski kotar (CRO)	Delnice	M	Croat	Police
Interviewee 9	Gorski kotar (CRO)	Mrkopalj	F	Serb	Civil Society
Interviewee 10	Tuzla (B-H)	N/A	M	Croat	Political
Interviewee 11	Tuzla (B-H)	N/A	M	Muslim	Political
Interviewee 12	Tuzla (B-H)	N/A	F	Muslim	Media
Interviewee 13	Tuzla (B-H)	N/A	F	Serb	Political

Interviewee 14	Tuzla (B-H)	N/A	F	Muslim	Civil Society
Interviewee 15	Tuzla (B-H)	N/A	M	Other	Media
Interviewee 16	Tuzla (B-H)	N/A	M	Croat	Religious
Interviewee 17	Tuzla (B-H)	N/A	F	Serb	Civil Society
Interviewee 18	Tuzla (B-H)	N/A	M	Croat	Military
Interviewee 19	Tuzla (B-H)	N/A	F	Serb	Political
Interviewee 20	Tuzla (B-H)	N/A	M	Muslim	Military

Appendix 2

Minutes from the meeting of Gorski kotar community leaders held in September 1992

«On September 16 [1992] a meeting was held in Vojni Tuk, with participation of:

1. Djuro Trbovic, president of the Community of Partizanska Dreznica
2. Lazo Mamula, president of the Community of Gomirje
3. Milan Mamua, president of the Community of Jasenak
4. Anto Breljak, president of the Community of Ravna Gora
5. Franjo Starcevic, president of the Community of Mrkopalj
6. Dragutin Crnic, Community of Mrkopalj
7. Vlado Kovacic, secretary of the Community of Mrkopalj
8. Rade Mrvos, representative of Tuk
9. Jovan Dragic, commander of the Police branch Jasenak
10. Robert Jurisic, commander of the Police Station of Vrbovsko
11. Ivica Briski, commander of the Police Station of Delnice
12. Davorin Racki, president of the Assembly of the Municipality of Vrbovsko
13. Davorin Pocrnic, president of the Executive Council of the Assembly of the Municipality of Vrbovsko, and
14. Josip Horvat, president of the Executive Council of the Assembly of the Municipality of Delnice

Due to an oversight by the organizers of the meeting - communities of Mrkopalj and Gomirje - the meeting was not attended by the representatives of the Municipality of Ogulin.

The topic of the meeting was: Peace to all who inhabit the area of Bjelolasica, regardless of their national or religious feelings; the peace that we managed to preserve, with the exception of some deadly accidents and individual bad intentions which could not be controlled. The merit for this achievement belongs to all – the people, the leadership of the communities of Bjelolasica area, the leadership of all of the three municipalities of Bjelolasica area, Croatian army and police. We knew how to think of peace in the moments when – it's too hard to even say it – maybe it was psychologically easier to get into war against one another.

At the meeting we all agreed – and the leadership of Municipality of Ogulin (to which we apologize once again) is kindly asked to accept our agreement – to continue holding the meetings in the same spirit and with the same purpose as this first one, held in Tuk. This purpose is:

Active peace among us

As a sign of peace, we agreed to mark the peak of Bjelolasica, and that the paths leading to Bjelolasica be marked in such way; so that Bjelolasica can overgrow itself and grow into a monument.

We agreed that we should get better connected – by better roads.

We agreed to work together so that already this winter we would have a functional ski center in Vrelo and that the municipalities of Delnice, Ogulin and Vrbovsko will agree on the access to Bjelolasica from the side of Delnice and Razdolje.

Finally, we need to talk to the leadership of the Republic [of Croatia] about everything that we think about and that will be maturing for application and implementation, with the aim of gaining their approval and support.

The next meeting might be held in Jasenak in mid-November, after the return from Austria of prof. Franjo Starcevic, who will participate on November 5 and

6 at the consultations on the «Paths of peace in Croatia», that will be held in Villach and Salzburg, discussing in particular our good «complex» of Bjelolasica – which of course does not mean that we could not meet even earlier if there would be anything important to discuss.

Signed:

Professor Franjo Starcevic, president of the Community of Mrkopalj and Vlado Kovacic, secretary of the Community of Mrkopalj

Appendix 3

Schematic outline of discourses of war and their counter-discourses

Chapter 4	Chapter 5 (dominant discourses of violence)	Chapters 6-8 (counter-discourses)
Complexity and fluidity of group identification processes	Ethnic identity primacy Closed, exclusive Nationalism, majority rules “Logic” supported by international community	Multiple group identities Open, inclusive Citizenship, equality Logic supported by local experience of heterogeneity
Complexity and fluidity of inter-group relations	Recalling negative past Violence against other groups considered as appropriate Win-Lose approach (us or them) Ethnic fracturing as “solution”	Recalling positive past Violence not appropriate Win-Win approach Ethnic fracturing as a “problem”
Complexity and fluidity of governance	Valuing homogeneous political space Leaders as saviours of own ethnic group Parallel structures of command, chaos, fomenting fear	Valuing heterogeneous social space Leaders as managers accountable to all citizens Clear lines of responsibility, rule of law, reducing fear