

UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

Sede di Milano

Dottorato di ricerca in Istituzioni e Politiche

Ciclo XXXV

S.S.D. SPS/04



UNIVERSITÀ  
CATTOLICA  
del Sacro Cuore

# **War Experiences, Post-Conflict Memories and Socio-Political Instability: A Comparative Study Between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia**

Coordinatore: Ch.mo Prof. Paolo Colombo

Tutor: Prof. Andrea Locatelli

Tesi di Dottorato di:

Angelica Vascotto

N. Matricola: 4915180





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

These pages are to reflect much more than just research work. Starting my journey in a library in Milan, passing through Bosnian villages and ending it in my hometown Trieste, involved much more than analytical skills. In fact, I consider it as a proper personal path where I constantly had to face big challenges, new emotions and to grow not only as a researcher but also as a proper individual. For this reason, I truly feel I have to thank many of the wonderful people who were by my side and supported me throughout this huge experience. Starting with my parents, who have always been the first ones to trust me, my ambitions, and my ideals, I have to thank my grandmother Maria: a former Istrian refugee who has always been one of my strongest points of reference and, as always, an infinite source of inspiration in my whole life but also, as you will probably notice, in my academic choices. My best friend Irany, whose smile always cheered me up when I most needed it, and Ylenia who, with her inimitable caring manners, taught me the beauty of struggling to reach the top of the mountains. Corrado, my old university mate, who has always been the brother I never had. My two supervisors, Andrea and Damir, who immediately trusted my project and supported me and my work for more than three years. Then, all the amazingly generous people I met in all my trips that always made me feel at home wherever I was. I need to mention Džulisa, Adis and Menachem who were of great help for my research outcomes. Then, there are a lot of other people who, most probably, do not really know how much they helped me to get here today and, hopefully, by reading this page, they will eventually understand it. Among these, a special thanks to Lorenzo.

*“Granice su u vašoj glavi”*

Musala Bridge, Mostar

## Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	8
<b>CHAPTER ONE. War Traumas, Post-Conflict Memories and Socio-Political Instability: A Theoretical Overview</b> .....	11
Introduction .....	11
1. The role of memory in Political Science .....	13
2. Literature Review on Memory .....	14
3. Literature Review on Trauma.....	21
4. Memory and trauma as foundations of ethnic identity .....	24
5 Theoretical Excursus on Socio-Political Instability .....	28
6. Means for Peace in Post-Conflict Societies: What Has Literature Offered So Far?	
32	
<b>CHAPTER TWO. Methodology</b> .....	45
1. Overview and selections of empirical cases .....	45
2. “Phase 1”: “Constrictive Memory” as a new tool for renewed risks related to post-conflict contexts.....	50
3. “Phase 2”: Socio-political instability and its numerical correspondences .....	54
4. Grading process .....	58
5. Fieldwork Activity: Between Empirical Data and Causal Relationships.....	64
6. Questions to Interviewees.....	65
7. Ethical Approach .....	66
8. Limitations.....	67
<b>CHAPTER THREE. Case Studies</b> .....	72
1. Post-Conflict Politics and Society – Analysis of the Regional Context.....	72
2. Bosnia and Herzegovina.....	74
2.1. Macro Level Overview .....	74
2.2 Micro Level Analysis .....	76
2.2.1 Stolac .....	76
2.1.2 Prijedor .....	80
3 Croatia .....	83

3.1 Macro Level Overview .....	83
3.2 Micro Level Analysis .....	84
3.2.1 Vukovar .....	84
4. Serbia .....	87
4.1 Macro Level Overview .....	87
4.2 Micro Level Analysis .....	89
4.2.1 Apatin .....	89
<b>CHAPTER FOUR. Life in post-conflict societies: through the eyes of locals.....</b>	<b>96</b>
1. Bosnia and Herzegovina.....	97
1.1 Overview .....	97
1.2. People stories.....	101
1.2.1 Stolac .....	101
1.2.2 Prijedor .....	115
2. Croatia .....	130
2.1 Overview .....	130
2.2 People stories.....	132
2.2.1 Vukovar .....	132
3. Serbia.....	143
3.1. Overview .....	143
3.2. People stories.....	144
3.2.1. Apatin .....	144
<b>Research Results and Conclusions.....</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>Annex .....</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>158</b>

## **Introduction**

Conflict resolution is often intended as a tool to solve clashes on an immediate level. Depending on the complexity of the context and the intentions of the parties involved, literature and empirical cases present many strategies that can be adopted in such cases: from diplomatic mediations to the deployment of peacekeeping forces; from military escalation to contention. Once a certain degree of security is reached, the reestablishment of a secure environment is to be accordingly designed. But what happens after conflictual situations that were based on features of personal identity and resulted in perpetration of atrocious crimes against civilians? Is the lack of armed confrontations the most functioning way to convey a sense of security to a population subjected to ethno-religious disparities? Can memories possibly lead to a renewed rise of tensions?

The last decade has seen a flowering interest in the topic of memory which started to be studied from the most varied perspectives. In fact, apart from being a mere aspect of everyone's daily life experiences, the concept itself lends to being treated from the most diverse set of disciplines. This is why scholars from numerous areas of study decided to focus on the topic and to make new important observations in relation to this extremely ample-angled subject. From sociology to global studies and from psychology to political science, the concept of memory has increasingly become a central theme in the literature. Not only became important to understand the dynamics leading the formation of this set of ideas and emotions but also the impact these have on the societies we live in.

This is why it is extremely necessary draw attention to the topic of memory and its reverberations in post-conflict societies where violent events were carried out on the basis of ethno-religious differences. When violence directly targets part of one's identity, the pain of loss, forced displacement or torture suffered, will make room into a heavy human baggage that will continue to persist for a lifetime despite the weapons having been laid down. Apart from the importance of citizens' well-being, a more structural issue might arise, namely that of socio-political instability. In fact, it is easy to agree that no society can endure on a foundation of insecurity, resentment, hostility and suspicion. This certainly can be proxy for a higher risk in countries that have experienced an ethnic conflict. It is here where the concept of collective memory becomes fundamental: how



cogent are war memories for the stability of a country? This is the main question this research intends to focus on. Starting from the literature on memory, trauma, political instability and peacebuilding practices, the designed framework will branch out into three fundamental aspects: the creation of a new theoretical aspect called “*constrictive memory*”, an attempt to measure the impact of this new research item in relation to socio-political instability, and finally a section about fieldwork data acquired during interviews. To provide more thorough answers and to produce a reflexion on real and current situations, I decided to develop four case studies belonging to three different countries: Stolac and Prijedor located in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Vukovar in Croatia and Apatin in Serbia.

The originality of this research is based on two main aspects. First of all, the concept of *constrictive memory*. This represents a brand-new research item that aims at reflecting the impact of memorialisation processes and the traumatic events occurred in a specific area. By using the process of operationalisation, it will be possible to understand the real impact of memories on the society and the general social attitude towards war-related issues. Then, after defining the concept socio-political instability, the two elements will be measured and analysed together with the aim of understanding their inner connection. Finally, the second element that contributes to the unicity of this research is the ample space given to data acquired in the field. Interviews have been pursued with organisation representatives and private citizens working and living in the selected areas. This further enriches the already existing data in current literature and helps understanding the significance of certain elements involving the daily life in post-conflict contexts, such as security, ethnic segregation and discrimination.

The dissertation is structured in four chapters. The first one provides a theoretical excursus on the literature related to memory and instability. The second one instead will introduce the methodological structure and the approach to fieldwork. All the variables corresponding to each research item will be presented along with the specific terms of measurement for each entry. For what concerns the section about fieldwork, I exposed all the information related to the interviews with locals and the ethical procedures adopted to pursue this project.



## FIRST CHAPTER

# **War Traumas, Post-Conflict Memories and Socio-Political Instability: A Theoretical Overview**

### **Introduction**

In the past decades, the field of international studies has been increasingly growing as new epistemological propositions started to be gradually included as new theories. As a matter of fact, authors belonging to the social sciences realised the need to include new perspectives in order to describe the reality in a more accurate way. Behaviours of people, societies, or political élites cannot always be described with a simpler approach, thus the necessity to broaden the spectre of analysis. If in the past the concepts of war and power, the Hobbesian world, the balance of power or the interdependence managed to give broad compatible explanations about the general behaviours within the international area, in the past twenty years scholars understood that events are often caused by the intervention of a broader number of elements. Thus, it emerged the need for more specific and inclusive theories. As a result, the field has been experiencing an enrichment of options. Many new events took form and contributed to the creation of new paths of understanding. Asymmetric wars, ethnic conflicts, gender perspectives and climate migrations are only some of the newest elements that started to be taken into consideration in the most recent studies.

Among these, memory studies started to develop as well bringing to light numerous facets<sup>1</sup>: some authors started by analysing specific case studies linked to public commemorations such as, for example, those connected to the Holocaust; others instead decided to focus on the advantages that certain past events bring to political élites for building consensus; while others decided to focus on the positions of states and societies in the post-colonialist era. Memory has thus started to become an interesting lens for the analysis of socio-political behaviours. As a matter of fact, if the field of international relations relates to the field of social sciences, the very human essence shaped by

---

<sup>1</sup> Ross Poole, "Memory, history and the claims of the past" in *Memory Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, SAGE Publications, Los Angeles, 2008, p. 149

memories cannot be excluded from the reactions of socio-political actors. Even if the concept of remembrance is particularly broad and can be analysed through various perspectives, the field of international relations is highly permeated by constant and continuous recalls of the past.

It is safe to argue that past experiences are those that contributed most to the establishment of certain patterns within the political spheres. These may not be necessarily linked to negative or disturbing events: troubling situations such as conflicts, segregation or economic crisis are not the only ones that can merge into detectable echoes. However, most authors agree on the stronger impact of past traumatic events in formulating future strategies. Here you can identify their importance when states, parties, pressure groups or certain communities find themselves bound to make choices. Therefore, if socio-political events are the reflections of the population's perceptions about their security, the connection with former traumas becomes particularly significant when addressing their specific interests. In this way, we can easily agree that negative memories of the past might represent stronger convergence points in leading decision-making toward definite directions. For all these reasons, it becomes necessary to focus on this aspect in conjunction with the study of socio-political instability. As part of social sciences, the study of traumatic memories of society is fundamental for the comprehension of the dynamics involving the international arena, the root causes of decision-making processes, and the actions brought about within smaller groups.

As evidenced in the introductory chapter, this thesis is intended to investigate the role of post-conflict memories in shaping socio-political instability. Two theoretical elements are combined with an attempt to understand their relationship through empirical lenses. Even if the arguments will come together with empirical data, first it is necessary to acquire comprehensive tools from the literature available. Here you can see the decision to dedicate the first chapter to a theoretical overview: in order to favour a qualitative analysis of the topics, theories from diverse backgrounds will be taken into consideration. First will be the case of memory and its reverberations on societal and political levels. Some of the concepts that will be inspected are trauma, collective memory, and memory transmission. Furthermore, we will study the potentiality of memory as a tool in the political sphere of a state. Subsequently, we will proceed by considering the literature contributions related to socio-political instability and we will

discover the actual inherent criticalities in the field. Finally, it will be provided with an overview of the means to re-establish peace and trust in post-conflict contexts. Even if it might seem fairly distant from the theoretical structure of the whole chapter, it will provide instead essential inputs for our coming arguments. Only with the use of all the data available from the field of memory, political science, and peace studies it will be possible to elaborate on the empirical data acquired and to draw the most thorough conclusions possible.

### **1. The role of memory in Political Science**

The past decades have seen an increasingly growing interest in the field of memory studies. Numerous disciplines started to cross contributions about this topic from various points of view. It is in this multidisciplinary prospect where the most interesting interceptions have arise: sociology started to dialogue with anthropology; political science and history with the world of psychology. In this mixed scenario, the field of international studies has become increasingly interested in covering topics associated with the study of memory. Political scientists have understood the importance of how and what people remember whether as causes of a renewed conflict or the establishment of well-designed peace processes. Nevertheless, the first attempt of academia to draw down some ideas about memory was started by sociologists and it is from there where all other disciplines take inspiration for their theories.

With the rise of sociological constructivist theories, the concepts of memory and identity have increasingly acquired relevance in the discipline, as well as later the political sciences. However, it was during the 1990s that the topic took a greater part in the literature. In particular, scholars have started to explore how ethnic, national or religious identities are built on historical myths and how these define who belong to a certain group. Thus, we can identify three main approaches looking at the formation of group identity and the function of historical memory: primordialism, constructivism and instrumentalism.

Primordialists argue that collective memory and identity are formed based on the primordial ties of blood, kinship, language and a common history.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, memory

---

<sup>2</sup> Wang, p. 12

is easily transferrable from generation to generation, leaving great space for the act itself of communicating and sharing information between family members. On the other hand, constructivists<sup>3</sup> view identity as something voluntarily created and shaped. In addition, it prescribes the socially constructed nature of both identity and ethnicity. Finally, instrumentalists focus on the motivational force behind the mobilisation of ethnic groups. As a matter of fact, they argue that the past is used to validate individual or collective interests. Most of the times, these involve in gaining power or popular support. As a consequence, a dominant group can also manipulate others. In other words, a group's goal employs historical interpretation and narrative as resources for their political strategy.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. Literature Review on Memory**

Pierre Nora is one of the most productive authors when considering the concept of memory. He identifies it as construction in permanent evolution, hold and kept safe by individuals and open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting. Therefore, it is formed by units of thoughts that can be subjected to censorship, projections or shields. In this regard, memory can be manipulated, consciously or unconsciously in order to present the reality in a certain way.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the essence of memory itself permeates the concrete world, the space, gestures, images and objects. At this stage, he promptly points out the differences between memory and history. Firstly, memory distinguishes itself for being always an actual and vivid entity. History instead can be easily described as the reconstruction of events and facts that do not exist anymore. The intellectual processes that lead to its recognition require to be supported with precise analysis and critical discourse. This process can often lead societies to develop aversion in interpreting those occurrences. The passage between memory and history made each group to reedify its identity through the revitalisation of its own history. The “must-remember” approach has converted each one it in its historian. Here the necessity to recognise the behaviour of individuals: they feel the need to search for confirmations about their origins. Other

---

<sup>3</sup> See Lev Vygotsky and Barlett (1932); Gomulicki (1956); Spiro (1977); Zangwill (1972); Weinreich, Bacova and Rougier (2003); John Hutchinson (2008); Breuilly (1996); Smith (2009); Connor (1992)

<sup>4</sup> John Hutchinson, Antony Smith, eds, *Ethnicity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, 8-9

<sup>5</sup> Nigel C. Hunt

authors<sup>6</sup> argue that memories are specifically reconstructed according to the theories of self, therefore all those personal views about who we are which belong to our personal narratives.

Among Nora's theories, he advances the idea of "*lieux de mémoire*". These are all those concrete and abstract elements which favour the act of remembrance: archives, museums, commemorations, anniversaries, symbols, treaties and monuments are all testimonies of a certain event. Places of memory do not generate themselves spontaneously, thus the necessity to pursue their creation and relive.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, Irwin-Zarecka asserts the great importance of official collectors, such as museums. These play an important home in terms of selecting, labelling, storing and making certain artefacts available for people. Archives too represent the traditional guardian of documentary evidence. However, these do not originate automatically: the creation of symbolic resources is the result of a combination between forces. For certainly, power is the main resource for securing more visibility in a memory project but this seems to happen more likely when the work involves many different sectors of civil society. Apart from this human experience, what in recent years has become more and more effective is the accessibility of privately produced records to the public itself.<sup>8</sup> In this way, it emerges an emphasis on the emotional aspects of the experience. It is by giving a public voice to people once unknown or forgotten that memory work gains much of its strength. Thus, the need for public support: individual narratives can carry a memory project in its first stages but without some institutional back-up, the results could not become available beyond a small circle of those directly involved.<sup>9</sup> In these terms she also recognises the importance of all intermediaries (like the "guardians of traditions" mentioned by Halbwachs<sup>10</sup>), thus what enters into collective memory and how. Realities of the past might be referred to as framed raw materials such as physical traces, records and recounts.

There are also cases of political regimes which declared particular events or people non-existent and proceeded to erase all memory traces accordingly. Countries, communities and politics are not equal in the positions they assign to different storytellers

---

<sup>6</sup> Kihlstrom, 2002

<sup>7</sup> Nora, p. 24-25

<sup>8</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, p.105

<sup>9</sup> Ibi., p. 139

<sup>10</sup> Halbwachs, p. 48

or in the importance they grant to remembrance and historical truth. What in one context represents a significant omission, may not do so in another.<sup>11</sup>

In particular, when memory is associated with common experience, has the capacity to develop a strong sense of bonding. This works very effectively with traumatic events but not only those. All experiences that have not been shared with others will not gather the same level of understanding. A sense of recognition is immediately acquired.<sup>12</sup> However, the contrary to most authors in this field, Irwin-Zarecka claims the impossibility of constructing an “objectively traumatic meaning on events subjectively experienced”. It is for this reason that minority groups in particular are very keen to preserve all materials, traditions and historical information related to their past experience.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the pre-existing literature on memory, Irwin-Zarecka conceptualises a new idea: the “instant memory”. In her opinion, there are events or certain moments which enter both private and public records on the spot. Audiovisual technology and the easiness to communicate with the world created a great number of memories which are not to endure. The central consideration connected to this idea is the role of sentiment: individuals focus on those moments that are somehow special, whether through joy or sorrow, special in their emotional intensity.<sup>14</sup> What makes the transition from “instant memory” to remembrance different in the case of traumas is that the existence of records is more the exception than the rule. The creation of records is then mostly a work of reconstruction, from a time distance, with all the mnemonic problems that this implies.<sup>15</sup>

Halbwachs is one of the first authors to address the concept of memory in relation to society. He argues that collective memory is not a given but rather a socially constructed notion. Social classes, families, associations, and communities all have distinctive memories that their members have constructed, often over long periods of time. Further, he develops two main streams: historical and autobiographical memory. The former reaches the social actor only through concrete records and it can be kept alive through commemorations and festive enactment. The latter instead refers to the memory

---

<sup>11</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, p. 121

<sup>12</sup> Irwin Zarecka, p. 47-48

<sup>13</sup> Nora, p.25

<sup>14</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, p. 171

<sup>15</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, p. 165



of events that we have personally experienced in the past. It may also serve to reinforce the bonds between individuals in their relationships. Among the two, autobiographical memory tends to fade with time more easily than the historical one. In fact, when it comes to historical memory, the person does not remember the event directly: this can be only stimulated in indirect ways through an act or participation such as reading a book, listening to a public speech or participating in a commemoration. He highlights how the family constitutes the essential social unity.

A further step Halbwachs presents in his contributions is the concept of history. In his opinion, history does not consist of a series of single snapshots but rather of indistinguishably units following each other. History is therefore the academic objective study of the past and collective memories of the past are shared by communities. In terms of collective memory, jointly with Nora, also Irwin-Zarecka defines it as a set of ideas, images and feelings shared in the resources a community. There is no reason to privilege one form of resource or another. In this sense, there is a development in the dialectic between public and private.<sup>16</sup> In this scenario, Nora adds a further step: the multiplicative nature of collective memory. In this sense, he recognises the existence of as much memories as groups. Hunt defines it as the joint memories held by a community about the past.<sup>17</sup> Irwin-Zarecka further argues that collective memory is intricately related to the sense of collective identity individuals have in a certain community. In addition, these are imbued with moral imperatives such as obligations toward one's family and ancestors, the respect of certain notions of justice. In this way, communities tend to establish lessons about what is right or wrong in order to orient their expressions. With "collective memory" we can allude to three different layers: the heritage of the whole humanity, national experiences and intergenerational transmissions. In this sense, collective memory appears to meet a certain adaptability rate. However, she claims that remembrance is not automatically guaranteed. Another characteristic she identifies is the possibility for a private memory to be converted into one of public relevance.<sup>18</sup> However, she recognises the relevance of the so-called "*myth of the origin*". The presence of a

---

<sup>16</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, p. 4

<sup>17</sup> Hunt, p. 97

<sup>18</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, p. 53

glorious past, when such exists, lays at the core of moral beliefs and, at the same time, it strengthens the narrative of victimisation.

Framing an experience as that of oppression is particularly present when a shared sense of trauma or suffering already exists.<sup>19</sup> Most of the countries do not experience an ethnic full homogeneity within their societies. As a matter of fact, even state borders do not manage to define the limits between “us” and “them”. The most usual situation consists in a large majority of a certain part of the population sided with few minorities. This might result in what Łukianow and Wells refers for survivors as “*territorial phantom pain*”<sup>20</sup>.

In terms of memory transmission, Irwin-Zarecka observes that communities try to preserve their past primarily through private tellings but also through the construction of physical markers. Great relevance is often given to memory carriers considered by the community and descendants as “intergenerational heroes”<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, she identifies the importance of the second generation: while the first one is more interested in making a certain fact or trauma to be remembered, the following generation has a crucial role in what concerns searching for its own ethical answers. Popov and Deák<sup>22</sup> argue that learning about the past inevitably produces a social individual with a particular social identity while Aleida Assman argue that the transfer of experiences and knowledge across generations creates what she calls “*cultural memory*”<sup>23</sup>. Memories become intersubjective because are selected to constitute both group membership and individual identity. These are constantly reshaped, reinvented and reinforced to create boundaries and links between individuals<sup>24</sup>. Families, friendship groups and communities constitute environments for mnemonic socialisation and by extension, the embodiment of political heritage.<sup>25</sup> On the

---

<sup>19</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, p. 59

<sup>20</sup> Małgorzata Łukianow, Chole Wells, Territorial phantom pains: Third-generation postmemories of territorial changes, *Memory Studies*, 2022, p. 12

<sup>21</sup> Efrat Ben-Ze’ev, Edna Lomsky-Feder, The intergenerational hero: Carrier of a bonding memory, *Memory Studies*, 2022, p.2

<sup>22</sup> Anton Popov, Dušan Deák, “Making sense of the ‘difficult’ past: transmission of political heritage and memory-work among young people across Europe, in *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2, 2015, p. 38-40

<sup>23</sup> Aleida Assman, Штыри формы памяти, *Rocznik Ruskij Bursy*, 2017, vol. 13, No. 13, p. 223. See also *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, Fordham University Press, 2015

<sup>24</sup> J Boyarin, ‘Space, time, and the politics of memory’, in J. Boyarin (ed.) *Remapping Memory: The Politics of TimeSpace*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994, p. 23

<sup>25</sup> Keightley and Pickering, 2012

other hand Volkan identifies that memory, mainly characterised by traumas and glories, are passed down on a generational basis. For this to happen, he highlights the crucial role of three entities: the interactions between parents and children, the educational approach in schools and the presence of a certain group's ceremonies dedicated to specific triumphs or traumas.<sup>26</sup> Hunt adds further considerations in terms of memory transmission. He identifies the great importance of technology in easily storing and spreading information about the past. In addition, he advances a more specific reference to the process' timing. In his opinion, the shift from memory to a sense of the past is over about three generations.<sup>27</sup> The experiencing generation having a memory of what they have experienced, their children taking on those memories in a weaker but still mnemonic sense, and their children perhaps still having a sense of memory from listening to their grandparents. After this generation, a certain event tends to vanish more easily as there is nobody left who personally witnessed the event and can impart it directly or indirectly into the following generations. The memory may become collective if it relates to a major societal event.

The narrative of victimisation can serve to bolster group identity or to support political claims<sup>28</sup> and creates a dualism between victims and perpetrators<sup>29</sup>. Negative standards gain more public exposure.<sup>30</sup> The lines separating knowledge and visceral feelings are often blurred.<sup>31</sup> The transition from memory-as-possibility to memory-as-necessity raises the issue of justification in order to universalise the act of remembering. Finding the "right" reason to remember remains a challenge.<sup>32</sup>

Even is "collective memory" might allude to an idea of consensus, it is far from generating conflicts. Far from being a "natural" result of historical experience, it is a product of compromise between large numbers of people, all trying to secure their positions in the common historical experience. She argues that it is for this reason that realities of the past are frequently a subject of debate among groups. Like Halbwachs,

---

<sup>26</sup> Vamik D. Volkan, "Large Groups Identity and Chosen Traum" in *Psychoanalysis Downunder*, no. 6, 2005

<sup>27</sup> Hunt, p. 103

<sup>28</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, p. 18

<sup>29</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Memory as Remedy for Evil*, *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, vol. 7, 2009. p. 453

<sup>30</sup> *Ibi.*, p. 27

<sup>31</sup> *Ibi.*, p.29

<sup>32</sup> *Ibi.*, p.37

Irwin-Zarecka, collective memory is not a given result of historical experience rather it is a product of a deal between large numbers of people with a common purpose: securing their versions of the past.<sup>33</sup> These grievances might even result in the potential of violence. The roots of disagreement emerge from the emotional intensity intrinsic in the historical experiences themselves. Knowing more about the conflict at source helps us to identify the depth of emotions involved. Framing of emotions applies both to events within the living memory of the participants as well as those distant in time while the distinction itself is subject to continuing change due to the passage of time.

Among its potentialities, Irwin-Zarecka recognises a crucial resource for maintaining social bonds, claiming authority, mobilising societies or legitimising them.<sup>34</sup> Here the importance of gather public attention, especially in a world saturated with ideas and opinions. In addition, she recognises that each community will make great efforts to secure the remembrance of certain episodes. According to Kaufman, communities that recognise their essence through the concept of ethnicity are very incline to educate their members to hate other groups. To comply with it, people take events from their history and exaggerate them to suit the current narrative. Consequently, ethnic war is induced by ethnic leaders or activists by using political symbology and manipulate them to incite hostility and pursue ethnic domination over other groups.<sup>35</sup>

Another point Irwin-Zarecka points out is the possibility for memory to interact with the identity: the relationship between these two might be even problematic, however, what we are to recognise is how history offers a great deal of comfort, inspiration and the essential anchoring for the self.<sup>36</sup>

In terms of forgetting, both Paul Connerton and Irwin-Zarecka suggest that this can be frequently seen as something both needed and desirable. While the former focuses on the concept of “cultural amnesia” as a tool for reaching heuristic convenience<sup>37</sup>, the latter argues that too much concern with the past might be counterproductive for a community itself as there are more specific, culturally inscribed, principles that frame

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibi.*, p. 67

<sup>34</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, p. 67

<sup>35</sup> Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: They Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001

<sup>36</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, p. 99

<sup>37</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 99

forgetting in a positive way.<sup>38</sup> However, even if the author supports this position, she does not mention which is the real reason behind the necessity to forget: no potential consequences are mentioned in relations to the social landscape and its sense of unity. Preservation of the records, especially those involving situations of oppression, now acquires the very direct value of an instrument in struggle including retribution.

### 3. Literature Review on Trauma

The construction of post-conflict memories might not be seen as a mere battle between the act of remembering and forgetting. Most of the times, it represents both individual and political processes. Both come to terms with contestation over meaning of certain events as well as traumatic resonance. Very often, these provoke struggles over ownership, legitimacy and authority<sup>39</sup>: events of the past are key repositories of political authorities in the present and are easily harnessed to legitimise contemporary political orders<sup>40</sup>.

Before considering the effects of trauma, we start by considering the term “stress”. This can be described as a physical or emotional stimulus that disturbs a person’s internal balance. This can lead also to critical pathological levels. According to Levine and Ursin<sup>41</sup> highlight its role as a threat responder. As a consequence, a traumatic memory relates to the person’s initial unconscious response to a traumatic event. Traumatic responses can manifest themselves in various ways<sup>42</sup>:

- *Trauma*. For some people, memories of certain events become overwhelming and continuous. Thus, they find it difficult to cope with ordinary living because their memories turn emotionally unbearable and comprise of intrusions in the daily life.
- *Memory suppression*. Other people manage to suppress their memories, whether through conscious or unconscious mechanisms.

---

<sup>38</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, p. 126

<sup>39</sup> McGrattan, Hopkins, p. 490

<sup>40</sup> Connerton O., *How societies remember*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 3

<sup>41</sup> Levine S and Ursin H, “What is stress?”, in *Neurobiology and Neuroendocrinology of Stress*, pp. 3-21, New York, Marcel Dekker, 1991

<sup>42</sup> Hunt, p. 7

- *Cognitive response to memories.* Another group of people actively think about what happened, but they cognitively process their responses, change their narratives of the time and perhaps even learn from what happened,
- *Genuine detachment from bad memories.* Probably representing the majority of people, the fourth group distinguish itself for associating emotional spheres to certain events, but they do not perceive valuable distress

These are the most common categories in which we can place all those people who lived negative experiences. However, we have to keep in mind that what is traumatic for one person might not arise the same reactions for another. Nevertheless, there is a range of phenomena that is usually associated to trauma. These do not necessarily include only chronic situations, such as a persistent state of hunger and a sense of insecurity, or the taking part of an armed conflict. More precisely, they can also refer to more short-term and isolated events. These can be generated by the experience of rape, witnessing death, child abuse or being tortured.

Apart from physical damage, the most common consequence in terms of mental health is the onset of the so called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The key factors emerging in people's behaviour carrying PTSD range among intrusive re-experiencing thoughts, avoidance, anxiety, depression, aggression problems and emotional numbing. In order to be classified with this disorder, there must be also a significant impact on social, occupational or family spheres. In particular, children who experience war have their beliefs, habits and relational approaches scattered before they are even formed. What is also important to highlight is the actual inconsistency of one's role in developing side effects. As a matter of fact, it is not the more or less proximity to belligerent events that can lead to an increased or decreased level of traumatic reaction. Thus, both psychological and physical damage is not directly associated with the role a person had during the war: soldiers will have accordingly the same chances to develop traumas as civilians. Even if literature concentrates more on war veterans, the social component of cities and villages instead hold a crucial role in shaping a renewed sense of coexistence. During a conflict, civilians are more subjected to a deep sense of powerlessness than soldiers: they do not carry weapons, they are unable to defend themselves and obtaining subsistence resources might become an extremely difficult and risky situation. If a person becomes a refugee, there will be a significant environmental and psychological impact. They might worsen their

status in reception centres more than what they could experience in their own comfort zone.

The main problem with traumas is that in the human sphere negative memories are those ones that dominate in social narratives. In addition, these can be often decontextualised from their actual belonging. Even with generational change, memories continue to rage, particularly the most negative ones. These memories might be the stories told by parents or others or might be called in the behaviour of people, from the physically wounded to the traumatised. Thus, all the individuals involved in this process of recognition develop their own strong memories associated to a violent event, such as a war, torture or a situation of forced displacement. Those traumatic episodes do not represent mere history or past but rather a form of social transmitted memory.<sup>43</sup>

Considering the value of trauma and how it affects the social life, the psychological field<sup>44</sup> some authors focused on the impact of traumatic stress and how individuals learn to cope with their memories by processing the emotional content of their narratives. By trying to understand their trauma, they attempt to make it meaningful both for them as individuals as well as active part of a specific society. In these terms, it is important to identify the crucial role of self-narrative construction in forging the relationships within and outside a community. Janet<sup>45</sup> was one of the first authors to acknowledge the importance of narratives in the process of trauma-healing. In his opinion, in order to resolve a traumatic experience, the key lays in turning it a memory which is disjointed and incoherent into one in which the memory of the traumatic event is integrated into the life story. Traumatized people lose the coherence of their life narratives; traumatic events fundamentally alter the way people think, their views about their own strengths and weaknesses, how they believe others should act and the nature of the world generally.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Hunt, p.104

<sup>44</sup> Linley and Joseph 2006; Ness and Macaskill, 2003

<sup>45</sup> Pierre Janet, *Psychological healing: A Historical and Clinical Study*. Vol. 1, London, Allen & Unwin, 1925

<sup>46</sup> Hunt, p. 126

#### **4. Memory and trauma as foundations of ethnic identity**

One of the most important argumentations of the discipline is how past conflicts and the related collective memories hold a crucial role in shaping group identity and perceiving a sense of security. Basing the research approach on social identity theory, we can recognise that collective identity can be interpreted as a social category that varies along two dimensions: contestation and content. We will now proceed by analysing each component.

In social identity theory, contestation refers to the act of balancing controversies over the meaning of a particular collective identity.<sup>47</sup> As a matter of fact, specific interpretations of the meaning of an identity are sometimes widely shared among members of a group and sometimes less widely shared. In other words, contestation can be explained as a matter of variation between the characteristics of one's identity and the actual attachment to them. Instead, the content phase can draw elements from the following elements: constitutive norms, relational contents, cognitive models and social purpose<sup>48</sup>. The first one refers to the conception of norms as rule regulations for a group membership. Through the process of categorisation, a group identify and accept specific characteristic of an individual. As a consequence, constitutive norms not only identify their members but also the intrinsic interests of the group itself.

When we consider the relational content, we focus on the relationships people have with other individuals. In this way, each connection is formed by comparisons and references to other collective identities from which they distinguished. Other characteristics include: exclusivity – if you are a member of a specific group you cannot belong simultaneously to another group, status – superiority and inferiority dichotomy, and hostility – clash between the ingroup and the outgroup.

Thirdly, when we address identity as a cognitive product, we aspire to explain how a group membership influence the perception of how the world works and how it can be interpreted. Thus, identity determines the values of material and social incentives for specific actions and influences the evaluation of actions based on the incentives.

Prior getting to the social purpose aspect, there is the need to advance a brief premise. Since the group formulates specific meanings and goals, behaviours and acts of

---

<sup>47</sup> Wang, p. 19



its members are specifically framed. As a consequence, due to a precise interpretation of the world, the group's identity creates socially accepted and sanctioned roles. Here the importance of a social construct in perceiving an identity: actions and results of behaviours are not derived based on preferences but rather from fulfilling the role allowed by collective identity. Also in a traumatic context, collective memory ensures a continuity in a specific community. This enables future generations to construct their own personal and social identities by shaping their present in relation to the past associated to their community. This sense of social identity is directly related to the fact that memory is intrinsic to the process of binding, bonding and "othering".<sup>49</sup> The maintenance of a relatively stable political culture is fostered through commemorative and symbolically salient work that focuses on in-group sentiments and ideologies<sup>50</sup>.

Jelin advanced the idea of ethnicised memory in which the content is constructed and shaped by a clearly set and unchanging conception of past, present and future. In addition to this, Mack highlights the tendency to develop a process of outgroup derogation and dehumanisation and ingroup idealisation and glorification<sup>51</sup>. In this context, group and political leaders often manipulate the sense of victimisation that is diffused within the society.

On one hand it has emerged the evidence that the more there has been conflict between groups, the more likely those individuals judge one another on their affiliation rather than on their individual characteristics.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, identity may be a product of a conflict itself: clashes, a sense of hostility and violence can sustain the origins of a social identity.<sup>53</sup> Identity is formed by experiences of both the individual and the society.<sup>54</sup> According to Smith, ethnic, national, or religious identities are built on historical myths that define who and what a group member is.<sup>55</sup> Following this logic,

---

<sup>49</sup> McGrattan, Hopkins, *Memory in Post-conflict Societies: From Contention to Integration*, in *Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 16, No. 5, p.488

<sup>50</sup> Mc Grattan, Hopkins, p. 491

<sup>51</sup> Mack 1983

<sup>52</sup> Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>53</sup> Peter Black, "Identities," in *Conflict: From Analysis to Intervention* eds., Sandra Cheldelin, Daniel Druckman, and Larissa Fast (London: Continuum, 2003), 149.

<sup>54</sup> Wang, p. 14

<sup>55</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986

recognising the identity of group members involve the recognition of who the group's enemies are.

Historical memory as an identity marker can influence behaviours and interactions on many different levels: from politics to society and education. It could also work as a constitutive norm, therefore specifying all the rule and norms that define a specific group. In addition, it constitutes references and comparisons to other groups, especially the ones with historical problems with the group. However, one of the most important consequence is the fact that memory affects the way how groups interpret and understand the world around it. On the national level, identity determines national interests. In turn, these determine policies and state actions. Thus, the need to understand people's collective memory: it represents a viable way to national or more local interests.<sup>56</sup> In particular, the concept of security. As advanced by Budryte, Resende and Becker, the securisation of historical memory is one of the rising factors that might affect global stability. As a matter of fact, memory might become a security issue and non-state actors could engage in "*defending memory*" or any other situation where the history of a group might be misinterpreted.<sup>5758</sup> Steele<sup>59</sup> argues that self-identity is intertwined with concept of ontological security while Kinnvall and Mitzen adds that this is associated with social existential anxiety by bringing together three IR questions: security dilemma, anarchy and the potential for change<sup>60</sup>. Finally, Antweiler advances the idea that the analysis of memory can provide crucial indicators of political conditions in terms of governability.<sup>61</sup>

For all these reasons, it is not audacious conceiving that key historical events, both traumatic or glorious, form great part of ethnic group markers. Losses, defeats, acts of humiliation, attacks and persecutions all contribute to a binding process. Following these propositions, there have been authors considering the topic from a more psychological

---

<sup>56</sup> Wang, p. 11-12

<sup>57</sup> Dovil Budryte, Erica Resende, Douglas Becker, 'Defending Memory': Exploring the Relationship Between Mnemonical in/Security and Crisis in Global Politics, *Interdisciplinary Political Studies*, July 2020, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 8

<sup>58</sup> See also Lina Klymenko, Marco Siddi, Exploring the link between historical memory and foreign policy: an introduction, *International Politics*, Vol. 57, 2020, pp. 945-953

<sup>59</sup> See Brent J. Steele, ontological security in international relations: self-identity and the IR state, *The new international relations*, 2008, pp. 191-207

<sup>60</sup> Catarina Kinnvall, Jennifer Mitzen, Anxiety, fear, and ontological security in world politics: thinking with and beyond Giddens, *International Theory*, 2020, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 252

<sup>61</sup> Katrin Antweiler, Memory as a means of governability, *Memory Studies*, 2023, p.13

angle. According to Galtung<sup>62</sup>, there are three main forces that contribute to the creation of a national or large-group identity: the chosenness (in other words, the idea of being the people chosen by transcendental forces or historic), trauma and myths. The so-called Chosenness-Myths-Trauma Complex is crucial not only for understanding the nature of one's origins but also how a community functions and reacts in conflict. In support of this theory, Volkan advances more precise proposition: individual identity is inextricably entrenched with the identity (ethnic, national, religious etc. etc.) of relatively large groups. In his research he highlights the selective process of historical memory, either as trauma or as glories. He recognises the existence of a "chosen trauma" and a "chosen glory" as bonding elements of group identity.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, when memories are used to construct a powerful inclination, the direct consequence of this act is the creation of root causes of conflict, a sense of prejudice and nationalism.<sup>64</sup> According to Hunt's contributions, war experiences can heavily change one's sense of self or identity.<sup>65</sup> As a matter of fact, a person grows up creating a personal belief's system which can be easily destroyed by violent events.

An important role is the one hold by history. As a matter of fact, history has the capacity of forging national consciousness through the provision of significant data to politicians. If information is simply stored, it is of no value. Thus, there is the need to actively relive and reshape it according to the necessities of a specific time.

Cairns and Roe<sup>66</sup> highlighted the importance in analysing the relationship between memory and conflict. As a matter of fact, they argue that understanding the nature of their connection in order to properly design a solution. To worsen the situation, they identify an irremovable sense of victimhood that stems from unacknowledged and unreconciled historic losses. Instead of representing a starting point for reconciliation it presents a

---

<sup>62</sup> Johan Galtung, 'The Construction of National Identities for Cosmic Drama: Chosenness-MythsTrauma (CMT) Syndromes and Cultural Pathologies', In *Handcuffed to history*, ed. P. Udayakumar. Westpoint, Praeger, 2001

<sup>63</sup> Volkan, *Bloodlines*, p. 48

<sup>64</sup> J.W. Pennebacker, *Collective Memory of Political Events: Reflection on the Relationship Between Past and Present*, Palgrave Macmillan, chap. 3, 2006

<sup>65</sup> Hunt, p. 10

<sup>66</sup> Cairns E., Roe M. D, Introduction: Why memories in conflict? In *The role of memory in ethnic conflict*, pp. 3-8, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan

powerful barrier to peacemaking and diplomacy. As a result, there might be a revoking sense of wrong and injustice.

## **5 Theoretical Excursus on Socio-Political Instability**

As we will see, the concept of socio-political stability is as much important as problematic. Sanders himself documented the lack of agreement on the very causes of stability and instability.<sup>67</sup> As a matter of fact, most authors who tried to approach the topic and to formulate a definition, come across diverse obstacles in terms of specificity. The entire field seems to be permeated by confusion: correlation is counterweighted with causation, the causes of instability are unclear in their meanings; and different studies of apparently the same phenomenon attribute stability to uncertain or different political objects.<sup>68</sup> Most of the inconsistencies result in the nature of the data used in research activity: it is more commonly processes according to the convenience rather than for its conceptual integrity.<sup>69</sup> In order to understand in a clearer way the research, at this point the chapter aims at representing a dive into the most relevant authors who covered the topic.

One of the most relevant authors in the field of political instability is Leon Hurwitz<sup>70</sup>. He promptly recognised the existence of a direct connection between the study of instability and the democratic systems. As a matter of fact, he argues that the understanding of the causes of disorders do create more preoccupations to democracies rather than illiberal regimes. So, this is why his research is particularly focused on this aspect. In order to define the concept, the author proceeds with operationalisation. He thus identified three main “stability detectors”. These can be identified with the following clauses:

- The ability of the political system to persist turbulences
- The existence of a legitimate political system

---

<sup>67</sup> David Sanders, *Patterns of Political Instability*, Macmillan, London, 1981

<sup>68</sup> Keith M. Dowding, Richard Kimber, *The Meaning and Use of ‘Political Stability*, in “*European Journal of Political Research*, No. 11, 1983, p. 229

<sup>69</sup> P. H. Melanson, L. R. King, *Theory in Comparative Politics: A Critical Appraisal*, in “*Comparative Political Studies*”, Vol. 4, pp. 205-231

<sup>70</sup> Leon Hurwitz, *An Index of Democratic Political Stability: A Methodological Note* in “*Comparative Political Studies*”, Vol. 4, No. 1, April 1971, pp. 41-68

- The presence of an effective decision-making structure within the political system

For the study of democratic political stability, he thus advances three indexes: the persistence of pattern, the index of legitimacy/system support and the index of effectiveness. To support his research, he assigned a specific score according to the valence of the case. The macro-level applied are as follows:

- *Persistence*. Each change in chief executive can represent evidence of instability. The cases that can apply follow this logic: pattern elements (i.e. general parliamentary elections), neutral elements (i.e. accidental death of the prime minister) and unstable elements (i.e. assassination of the chief executive).
- *Legitimacy*. In order to be classified as stable, Hurwitz argues that a democracy has to maintain a certain value of support from citizens, thus being seen as legitimate.
- *Effectiveness*. The author supports the idea that, to be stable, a democracy has to have a minimum tendency of a *roi fainéant*.<sup>71</sup> The term refers to a “signifying acceptance of and satisfaction with governmental outputs by the population”.

The study advanced by Hurwitz is one of the most relevant contributions about the definition of political stability. However, this does not preclude the presence of some irregularities. Yet these permeate the three focal points of his approach. In specific, the extent to which those could validate or invalidate the hypothesis. For example, in terms of persistence of governments, does it really reflect a stable democratic essence? Established the fact that he defines the government as an administration which favour post-election formation, change in the prime minister/president and resignation/re-election processes, by following the logic proposed: is a stable and healthy democracy really designed by the persistence of the same political élites? It is necessary also to evaluate other intervening factors such as a government that choose to call an election before the end of its full term or one that is forced to go to polls. Eckstein<sup>72</sup>, for example, sees the endurance of a regime as only a part of the meaning of stability because a regime

---

<sup>71</sup> View offered by Almond and Verba in “The Civic Culture”, Ed. Little Brown, Boston, 1965

<sup>72</sup> H Eckstein, A Theory of Stable Democracy, in “Division and Cohesion in Democracy”, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1966,

may endure as a result of a series of lucky accidents. Instead of longevity, Gurr<sup>73</sup> proposed the concept of “durability” in order to furtherly stress the capacity to persist and adapt in response to stress. The same argumentation can be applied to the other two following points: is a high rate of social support and policy-making effectiveness true indicators of stability? There are plenty of cases in which authoritarian regimes could fit in this overview. This fact is inevitably confined to democratic systems and it cannot be used with other regime structures.

Another crucial element taken into account in literature is violence. Stability as the absence of violence is perhaps the most common value considered by authors, whoever it does not preclude the existence of theoretical irregularities. Among these, the very first objection aroused is that violence episodes might constitute tests to prove a system’s stability, however stability itself that can be identified as such if it manages to cope with it rather its frequency in its recurrence.<sup>74</sup> As a matter of fact, Sanders highlighted the fallacy of assuming that identical frequencies of a set of events in different countries denote the same levels of instability.

The longevity approach however remains the most supported idea of equation with stability. Duration of governments thus represents the main argumentation brought out by Blondel, Dodd and Hurwitz. The only slight differences between the various contributions lay in the definition itself of government. Eckstein<sup>75</sup> as well recognises the value of endurance of a regime, however, he points out the necessity to verify the exact existence of it. As a matter of fact, he argues that political spheres might meet particularly favourable conditions and, in this way, surviving certain turbulences that could had not otherwise.

Another interesting approach, more society-oriented, has been advanced by Ake<sup>76</sup> and Sanders<sup>77</sup>. They decided to focus on patterns of behaviour, either concerning “regularity” or “normality” tendencies. The main hypothesis that Ake advances is that the political structure in society constitutes a network of role expectations that impose constraints upon the political acts performed by individuals. In other words, stability is

---

<sup>73</sup> T. R. Gurr, *Persistence and Change in Political Systems 1800-1971*, in “American Political Science Review”, Vol. 68, pp. 1482-1504

<sup>74</sup> Dowding, Kimber, p. 230

<sup>75</sup> Eckstein, pp. 227-228

<sup>76</sup> Ake, 1974, 1975

<sup>77</sup> Sanders 1981

given by the societal auto-restriction of behaviours imposed by the political system. Thus, any act outside those agreed is a manifestation of instability. In this way, the author gives strong weight to laws and conventions. On the other side, Sanders identifies instability as any variation in the normal occurrence pattern of regime changes, thus leading to a potential presence of infinite manifestations.

Even though the two authors draw interesting points in terms of political instability, the views they support face many problems of vagueness. Dowding and Kimber identified some critical issues in the definitions they propose. In their opinion, the propositions advanced stand far away from being linear, circumscribed and attached to demonstrable acts. First of all, Ake highlights the strong connection between instability and uncertainty, as they were part of the same equation. Even if a potential agreement in this sense could be viable, another aspect that leads the definition of political instability to be problematic is the idea that instability itself has to be represented by all acts performed in a political system.<sup>78</sup> Linked to this point, Sanders acknowledges that, as a consequence, there are various types of instability. However, the main question that arise is the following: what could we identify as a mere political act? Are protests, media criticism and strikes political expressions as well? Another imprecision is offered by Sanders when referring to “normality” in the potential succession of destabilising event. As a matter of fact, he does not provide a specific measurement to state the actual form of political stability: he just gives a rough idea of what stability might look but with no actual foundations. We just understand that it is related to the political sphere.

As evidenced until now, the only attempt of giving a fair definition of political instability incur into considerable shady areas. If from one side the persistence of a certain regime might allude to a strong and stable context, critics have been raised towards the actual importance in modifying the political system. Even if a common ground can be found between these two propositions, the major doubt surrounds the proper identification of destabilising political acts. Finally, the political culture, as a set of attitudes and beliefs which give meaning to a political system, contributes in diversifying categories. Nevertheless, the intention to approach this particular field has not been idle. All agree that political stability is not a mere abstract concept since it refers to certain facets of the society. In addition, what has increasingly gained evidence is the role of system change.

---

<sup>78</sup> Dowding, Kimber, p. 233

This aspect should not be excluded *in toto*: what has emerged to be the discriminating factor is the type of change which pressure a system. Easton<sup>79</sup> adds that, to be considered stable, a system has to have a slow rate of change so as not to create problems affecting its survival or persistence. Dowding and Kimbers keep the same idea, but advance its contraposition with “forced change”. They argue that this notion is essential to the idea of instability: change that is accepted voluntarily by any political object cannot be interpreted as a proof of instability.

Another crucial point to evaluate is the impact of potential threats to the system. Indeed, these can be considered as the intervening factors which establish the level of order or instability. Cases such disorders, rallies and violent episodes within the society find themselves to be part of the final equation as well. In this cases, the State - or regime - has diverse choices at their disposal. If a government decides to react, the nature of the actions may vary: from laid-back approaches to firm impositions. Depending on the composition of the society, its political culture, its historical background and its level of wealth, reactions can be very diversified. A system can ignore certain contingencies and if no variation is perceived, it apparently shows a good resilience rate, thus it can be interpreted as stable. In other cases, the promotion of a softer line can represent the starting point of a broader series of causations.

## **6. Means for Peace in Post-Conflict Societies: What Has Literature Offered So Far?**

Whoever approaches the field of International Relations, will discover immediately its extremely interdisciplinary nature. As a matter of fact, the study of states and their behaviours involves the need to consider a huge variety of aspects: from economic tools to social perspectives, and from security issues to regime characteristics. Given its malleable composition, while analysing certain events or contexts, we will always have the need to further investigate within its disciplines. Hence, in order to further determine the objects of this research, it is fundamental to explore two branches of this field of study: peacebuilding and transitional justice.

---

<sup>79</sup> Almond, Verba, pp. 106-107



Even if these disciplines might seem disjointed ramifications, instead their conformations intercept on many points. Both of them are defined as a set of processes aimed at establishing a stable and a reconciled society after a conflict. However, they use different strategies to pursue their objectives. Starting from peacebuilding, the easier way to identify it is a combination of activities focused on transforming conflictive cultural and structural conditions by encouraging communities to talk, repair relationships and trust. Usually brought about by NGOs, international organisations or states' cooperation agencies, it involves a long-term process and uses a wide range of tools: from art to schooling, musical events or thematic gathering. All the events are to resolve ethnic, religious, class or national divisions by designing them with the support of violence prevention, trauma healing and conflict resolution. The discipline started to emerge after the Second World War but it was only in the seventies' that the Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung coined the term "peacebuilding"<sup>80</sup>. For the first time, there was an attempt to define it also in relationship to the other two most common concepts: peacekeeping and peacemaking.

- ***Peacekeeping***. The original definition or peacekeeping tak from the realist approach of "balance of power" and Hertz's "security dilemma"<sup>81</sup>. The former vision suggests the idea that states try to secure their survival by preventing any other state or entity to gain enough power to dominate all the others. The latter, also called the "spiral model", expect a certain state to increase its military power or deepen its alliances in order to counter others' supremacy. As a direct consequence, all the other entities respond to this action by undertaking similar choices. In all this situation, it can be experienced a growing sense of insecurity, and this might lead to an actual military confrontation. It is in this frame that emerges the concept of peacekeeping: the realist legacy suggests that in highly instable contexts it is necessary to overcome risks linked to unbalanced forces. Thus, particularly in transitional conflict areas, the approach is intended to be dissociative: antagonists are kept away from each other under mutual threats of potential punishment if they transgress (territorially or due to human

---

<sup>80</sup> Johan Galtung, "Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding", in *Impact of Science on Society*, No 1, Vol. 2, 1976, pp. 282-304

<sup>81</sup> Jhon Hertz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma", in *World Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2

security violations). The attempt to create a stable balance is often accompanied by other measures such as social distance and the use of geographical barrier or impediments (rivers, mountain chains, deserts...). If these obligations are not met by one, two or more belligerent forces involved in the conflictual area, and therefore the imposed measures appear not be sufficient to contrast skirmishes, third parties may be called in to exercise peacekeeping operations. These can include patrolling borders, secure the respect of human rights, monitoring ceasefires etc. etc. If from one side this system guarantee some sort of equal balance between forces on the other side the role of armaments holds a crucial role for deterrence. Not only has to be ensured the capacity to destroy but also it has to adhere credibility that the military can be actually used to preserve the status quo.<sup>82</sup>

In the field of peacekeeping we distinguish three main forms: intra-national, intra-regional and international peacekeeping. With the term intra-national peacekeeping we usually refer to what the state is to implement to preserve security within its own territory. Intra-regional peacekeeping instead engages in the attempt to control peace among periphery states towards its centre. Finally, international peacekeeping is the only means somehow disposed in terms of international law. Indeed, it is envisaged under the UN Charter and prescribes the use of force into certain circumstances, in order not to overcome the principle of non-intervention. Such cases might be represented by heavy human rights violations, high military escalations that could undermine an entire regional security and the lack of respect of war conventions. In addition, such solution induces the unanimous approval within the UN Security Council. Even if they could be pursued through a variety of operation, usually peacekeeping missions are set following a cease-fire prior and/or after a peace agreement between conflicting parties.<sup>83</sup>

- **Peacemaking.** The main objective of this strategy lays its foundations on the actual capacity to eradicate sources of tensions in a conflictual area. Peacemaking processes

---

<sup>82</sup> Galtung, p.282

<sup>83</sup> J. Michael Greig, "The Peacekeeping-Peacemaking Dilemma" in International Studies Quarterly, No 49, 2005, p. 621

often involve external parties. These can present themselves as arbitrators or conciliators and can be represented by state or multilateral entities. Generally, the whole process involves long-term actions that include a number of measures to transform an ongoing conflict. Most techniques involve the use of diplomacy for facilitating a restored dialogue between conflicting parties.<sup>84</sup> In this sense, a highlight is needed: conflict resolution is not intended as an avoidance action but rather the attempt to transcend incompatibilities toward the identification of common goals. Most conflicts originate from a clash of interest “directions”: one or more sides may actually be pursuing incompatible aims. Thus, there is the need to gather parties to the lead of a constructive mobilisation. Even if parties may not be equal in their capacities, conflicts tend to be shaped horizontally. Another point that needs to be specified is the actual landscape of incompatibilities: violence and hatred are only manifestations of a conflict and they may persist long after the actual conflict has been solved. In this sense, the conflict may easily represent a state of structural insecurity evident on both political and military levels. Strategies to overcome such disputes vary according to the actual context: the number of actors involved, the aims pursued by each party, the nature of the conflict itself (i.e., internal or external) but can be recalled some general ideas:

- *Integration*
- *Disintegration*
- *Multilateralisation/Federalisation/Power Sharing*
- *Trading*
- *Compromising*
- *Incompatibility resolution*<sup>85</sup>

When using these tools, a conflict might be resolved by preserving the actor system, by expanding or contracting it. In the last two cases, the number of actors involved might change leading it to an increase or decrease. The immediate result of these actions is the widening or shrinking of actors’ balance of interests.

---

<sup>84</sup> United Nations definitions, available at: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/terminology>

<sup>85</sup> Galtung, p. 292

- ***Peacebuilding.*** Still nowadays there is no proper agreement on the specific definition of peacebuilding. As a matter of fact, the discipline is still subjected by growing ideas about how is actually responsible for it and how the process should proceed<sup>86</sup>. Being part of the international relations discipline since an early stage, as of today no single agreed-upon definition has been created: for some authors it is conceived the same as peacekeeping and peacemaking, other authors prescribe its different nature from the other peace-related actions/missions and others see it as a mere concept referring to post-cold war way to explain and justify international interventions<sup>87</sup>. Others use the term interchangeably with development, preventive diplomacy, conflict prevention and conflict resolution<sup>88</sup>. Even if there is still lack of proper agreement on a sharp definition, there are various elements that reach a general agreement.

By this term we identify a long-term process of encouraging the population to establish a dialogue, thus repairing damaged relationships caused by a war. Particularly put in practice right after a conflict, working on relationships between people and communities represent to be the key resource to end violence. Hence the importance of preventing a return into conflict through the use of positive elements within a society.<sup>89</sup> The predominant appearance of peacebuilding approaches is seen in intra-state conflicts and in post-conflict contexts. As a matter of fact, a conflict might be already ended, agreements can be signed and policies contrasting weapons diffusion might be on however all these conditions do not guarantee the ending of hostile actions. In an ethnic conflict, communities still might be hesitant to share the same spaces with another community while in a political-based civil war, people belonging to different parties could be sceptical in establishing a renewed political system. Most of the times, peacebuilding activities include actions taken on a very local context by involving communities and local agents.

---

<sup>86</sup> Jennifer M. Hazen, "Can Peacekeepers Be Peacbuilders?" in *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2007, p.324

<sup>87</sup> Paul F. Diehl, 'Paths to Peacebuilding: The Transformation of Peace Operations', in Mason and Meernik (eds), *ibid.*, p.108; Paris (see n.4 above), p.2.

<sup>88</sup> Lisa Schirch, *Civilian Peacekeeping: Preventing Violence and Making Space for Democracy*, Uppsala: Life and Peace Institute, 2006, p.12; Nec,la Tschirgi, 'Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Revisited: Achievements, Limitations, Challenges', conference report, New York: International Peace Academy, Oct. 2004, pp.2–4.

<sup>89</sup> Paul Diehl, p. 108

As a reflection of the UN's Charter and the later Agenda for Peace<sup>90 91</sup>, actions contributing to pacify instable areas became one of the main objectives and strategies on which to formulate the international community's policies. Thus, the term "post-conflict peacebuilding" entered in the international landscape. Not only did the concept become a structural part of government strategies to face instabilities and intervention in third-countries but also it started to highlight for the first time one of the most innovative ideas in international law: the recognition of civil society right to security. Especially from the early nineties, there has been a high increase of actions both from governmental agencies as well as non-profit organisations committed to work on the ground with local societies. According to the problematics raised by the specific location (segregation, spread of weapons, religious contrasts etc. etc.), peace workers have started to perform a diverse range of projects and activities. Most of them usually include the involvement of youth, former combatants and women.

In terms of political structure, peacebuilding is subjected to three main approaches to the interventions: one is attached to liberal models of peace. The first one lays its foundations on the reliance on democratic institutions and a market economy to address the causes of conflict. Many authors, such as Kant<sup>92</sup>, Doyle<sup>93</sup>, Gelpi and Griesdorf<sup>94</sup> argue that the proper realisation of a democratic context favours the establishment of a more peaceful society. On the other hand, the second approach supports the idea of rebuilding the status quo regardless the presence of democratic or authoritarian values. While a consolidated liberal democracy could represent the best way to approach conflictual situations, the transition from an authoritarian regime to a liberal model might be very risky<sup>95</sup>. Insecurity could permeate the entire system provoking renewed waves of violence within the

---

<sup>90</sup> United Nations, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping*, Security Council, 31st January 1992

<sup>91</sup> Paris, *At War's End*, pp. 19-20

<sup>92</sup> Immanuel Kant, *To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, Hackett Publishing Co. & Inc, 2003

<sup>93</sup> Michael W. Doyle, 'Three Pillars of the Liberal Peace', in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 99, No. 3, August 2005, pp. 463-466

<sup>94</sup> Christopher F. Gelpi, Michael Griesdorf, 'Winners of Losers? Democracies in International Crisis, 1918-94', in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95, No. 3, September 2001, pp. 633 - 647

<sup>95</sup> See Roland Paris

society. Thus, liberal reforms could be insufficient to rebuild the institutional apparatus. Useful tools can be given by the establishment of dialogue channels between factions, therefore the transformation of relationships within the society and the development of non-violent mechanisms of conflict resolution.<sup>96</sup> The third approach constitutes the idea that liberal model is actually damaging the non-western<sup>97</sup> countries subjected to intervention. The fact of externally taking action worsen the autonomous capacity building. The reduction of domestic legitimacy might merge into the lack of weak political autonomy and unstructured self-governance planification. As a consequence, the state might not be able to recover a former context of violence and it could instal a dependency relationship with all the third-countries involved in the restoration process<sup>98</sup>.

Even though the concept of peace itself and its strategies seem to be vague, another crucial point that has to be added in the debate is the question of responsibility. Who own more legitimacy to head the decision-making processes in the international peace agenda? There is no actual consensus on the extent to which international actors should monitor and work in post-conflict contexts rather properly afflicted states. Until now, actions have been taken mostly by third parties, however there is an emerging consensus that a great role has to be taken also by the national government of a conflictual area and its population.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, the debate does not end here: another factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the actual role and effort being put in by international actors in a third country's peacebuilding process. Most of the time, post-conflict societies lack of capacity and resources to lead it, and this is one of the reasons justifying external intervention. Even if these actions could fairly contribute to the re-establishing of a certain level of stability, the country could persist in not acquiring the proper tools for combating disorders. One of the main consequences for international actors entering these contexts is the temporal length of their support: they could create strategies to be pursued on a short-term, nevertheless their presence and actions in the country would not see an end.

---

<sup>96</sup> Tore Rose, 'Reflections on Peacebuilding and the UN Development Assistance Framework', *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, Vol.2, No.3, 2006, p.64; Schirch (see n.11 above), p.13.

<sup>97</sup> Jhon Darby, Roger Mac Ginty eds, *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Peace Processes and Post-War Reconstruction*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2008, p. 257

<sup>98</sup> David Chandler, *Empire in Denial: The Politics of State-building*, London: Pluto Press, 2006, p. 27

<sup>99</sup> Hazen, p. 326

By advising and assisting national governments, a country could fail to develop its own capacity to deal with its post-conflict situation, thus transforming itself into a deeply weak country.

Aside the academic debate within the international relation sphere, another important topic that is related to the help societies to deal with the past in post-conflict contexts is transitional justice. This is a relatively new field which encompasses a number of instruments aimed at changing the path of a regime in which major human rights violations have been committed. There is an actual interception of various fields such as the legal, the political, the social and psychological ones. The main objective is fostering reconciliation processes. Also in this case, definitions may vary from author to author due to the so recent attempt to define such a new use of already known instruments to overcome conflict and tensions. By taking into consideration the definition proposed by the United Nations<sup>100 101</sup>, they refer to transitional justice as a set of judicial and non-judicial measures that redress the legacies of massive human rights abuses either during war, dictatorships, occupation or other violent conflicts and situations. These generally are represented by trials, truth commissions, memorials, reparation processes, restitutions, compensations, and amnesty and can include criminal or political procedures. The main intention behind the use of transitional justice is the attempt to facilitate civil or political initiatives during transition and transformation processes. Every measure that governments and civil society actors decide to pursue, has to comply with the international human rights standards. Even if the discipline has been brought to attention in recent years, the concept itself can be dated back in the centuries. States and governments have always tried to create firm resolutions about past violence. Historical episodes such as retribution against ousted oligarchy in the Ancient Greece, the imprisonment of Napoleon Bonaparte after his defeat, the amnesty proclaimed by President Andrew Johnson at the end of the US Civil War and the War Guilt Clause within the Treaty of Versailles are all very good examples of transitional justice measures adopted in the past<sup>102</sup>. However, the events which

---

<sup>100</sup> United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General: The rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies, 23 August 2004

<sup>101</sup> United Nations, Guidance Note of the Secretary-General: United Nations Approach to Transitional Justice”, 10 March 2010

<sup>102</sup> Olivera Simić (ed.), *An Introduction to Transitional Justice*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016, p. 30

constituted the very first layer of the modern concept of transitional justice is the creation of the Nuremberg Trials. This was the first effort put into practice by the entire community in order to delineate the foundations of the international criminal law. After the devastations and the mass violations perpetrated particularly against Jewish, governments understood the importance to define the responsibilities linked to such actions. In this way, they managed for the first time to create legal concepts of crimes shared by most international actors.

Even though the theoretic structure of this whole concept can resist most pressures, transitional justice is not far from rising contradictions. The first one is the dichotomy between state authority and legitimacy. As a matter of fact, the judicial aspect represents one of the most profound foundations of societies. Since the ancient times, the definition of crimes, the selection of proper sentences and the conviction of perpetrators have always been connected to the recognition of authority and power. Thus, whatever form of community has been part of history, since the very primordial stages, justice has always been put into practice. Forms may have varied but the idea is common to every culture. However, what has changed in the contemporary era is exactly linked to the question of authority: whose actual responsibility is when it comes to investigate, judge and condemn individuals perpetrating crimes which involve high violations in war contexts? The fact of having established an international criminal law created and signed by state actors means partially delegating power to third institutions to take care of such situations. What happens instead if a crime is committed during a conflict within a disintegrated country that will not exist anymore? Which regulations should be applied to? And what happens in terms of retributions if a government does not want to see and recognise any connection to its previous dictatorship? Finally, what happens if a state or an individual do not accept and comply with the terms? Can a law enforcement procedure be imposed? Whose authority weigh more? As you see, there are some controversial issues that are usually addressed when referring to the concept of transitional justice. For as many controversial factors the discipline may raise, there are many commonly agreed points which gives it a universal approach. The whole process attains to demystify and deligitimise the past with the aim of strengthening the present and future political or



societal structures.<sup>103</sup> Transitional justice measures can be divided into different categories<sup>104</sup>:

- *Procedural.* These measures involve the use of criminal justice and can include trials, the creation of specific tribunals and vetting procedures according to international human, public or humanitarian law. This practice is predominantly focused on perpetrators and so are vetting measures or lustration policies of civil servants and public officers. The legal framework is shaped by international norms and conventions such as human rights treaties. Apart from the proper willingness to prosecute perpetrators of harsh crimes, this measure is also intended to overcome situations of impunity, something that is really common in post-conflict societies. Though the 1999 Rome Statute<sup>105</sup> and the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC), individual accountability has been increasingly reaching the same level of state accountability with respect to past injustices. In this context, retributive justice is defined by the retroactive clause: perpetrators should only be charged under the laws of the previous regime only and if only they did not commit crimes against humanity, such as genocide, systematic rape or torture.
- *Interpersonal.* These include a number of restorative measures which can be also addressed as all acts involving reparation, restitution, rehabilitation or compensations. Alongside the more material aspect, it includes various means to cut hostility and re-establish relationships between former enemies. Many of these activities usually involve get-together events such as reunions of combatants belonging to different factions, reconciliation programmes to political prisoners, organising workshops for youth or supporting dialogue organisations.
- *Informational.* Also called acknowledgement measures, these practices involve the raising awareness by political actors of previous wrongdoings. They are usually performed by the formation of history or truth commissions, public apologies, search

---

<sup>103</sup> Simić, p. 2

<sup>104</sup> *Ibi.*, p. 4-6

<sup>105</sup> International Criminal Court, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, available at: [rome\\_statute\\_english.pdf \(icc-cpi.int\)](https://www.icc-cpi.int/rome_statute_english.pdf)

for missing people and mass graves, the endowment of memorials and memorial days. In addition, other acknowledgment practices can be carried out through finding informational spaces in public debates, producing non-biased film and documentaries about certain events of the past, publishing literature or novels, inserting historical facts in school textbooks, conducting scientific research and letting researchers to access data<sup>106</sup> or publicly naming victims.

However, as already mentioned, the discipline is extremely varied. In order to maintain a certain sense of legitimisation throughout the process, the ambition always rotates around inclusivity. All parties or community members involved in the previous conflict or dictatorship are addressed for these practices. Apart from being a useful technique to make the process more effective, the intention behind all these procedures is to put responsibilities on all sides and to favour a democratic approach. The new government does not portray itself as victimisers of the previous regime, thus enemies of the current political structure. The ambition is not the creation of a “winner’s justice”<sup>107</sup> but a judicial system that preserves and take care of all members of the society indiscriminately. For sure this is the main ambition, however not always it is possible to put it into practice: victims and perpetrators will not get together very easily and new political parties will try to advance their strategies in order to support the interests of their specific community. This is why transitional justice procedures are to be accompanied by peace-making and peacebuilding practices.

## **Conclusions**

In the last twenty years, the study of memory has engaged various inputs in relation to the field of social sciences. The detachment from broader theories toward the need to acquire more specific lenses brought scholars to investigate a number of new variables. Among these, memory has resulted particularly relevant to understanding the behaviours of individuals within societal frameworks. Even if there are different approaches to the subject, authors agreed on the importance of memory through multiple angles: the

---

<sup>106</sup> Elisabeth Baumgartner, Lisa Ott, ‘Determining the fate of missing persons: The importance of archives for “dealing with the past” mechanisms, in *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 99, No. 2, 2017, p. 665

<sup>107</sup> *Ibi.*, p.3

presence of collective narratives, the repercussions on decision-making processes, the power of bringing unity in an ethnic or national community, and the inevitable strength of memory transmissions between generations. These are only a few elements recognised by the aforementioned literature contributions. For the purposes of this research, another important has been brought to attention: the difficulty in establishing structured parameters for socio-political instability.

As a matter of fact, the concept remains particularly wide and susceptible to variations. Mostly connected to democratic ideals, elements such as government duration, absence of violent episodes, and efficiency in decision-making processes are extremely volatile aspects. Indeed, these do not fully represent stability and do not include other typologies of socio-political structures. The first assumption, which expects the presence of a functioning democracy, cannot be entirely validated since there is a lack of structural specifications (number of chambers, the role of presidencies, composition of the society, actual population's acceptance levels etc. etc.). Finally, theoretical perspectives do not include the variable of perceptivity: different people agree on different standards of socio-political stability.

Even if literature is demonstrated not to be complete, the theoretical overview presented in this chapter is particularly relevant prior to approaching the following sections. It has become clear the great importance for political élites to deal with post-conflict memories of their society: segregation, a sense of hostility between communities and a lack of unity are only a few consequences in contexts that experienced notably traumatic experiences. Adverse memories tend to strengthen people's negative perceptions of the other and this does not help in eradicating divisions within the same country itself. In order to mend and stabilise such situations, the field of international studies advanced new ideas. Among these, we briefly explored the discipline of peacebuilding and its declinations. The means to cope with different circumstances differ both in the method and the actual tools used: from the use of diplomacy to the direct work of local non-profit organisations; from the employment of peace-keeping forces to the promotion of educational curricula focused on coexistence and tolerance. Nonetheless, as we will observe in the next chapters, not always these strategies are fully implemented or appear to be fully working. To this extent, memories from the past and personal distress often remain unsolved by leading repercussions to reveal themselves in the socio-political

life of an entity. Thus, it becomes evident the intertwining nature of memories, lack of peace, and forms of instability.

## SECOND CHAPTER

### Methodology

#### Introduction

This chapter will present the methodological framework of the research conducted for this project. It is worth mentioning that there are two essential elements that will be introduced hereafter: firstly, the identification of a new analytical tool called “*constrictive memory*” and, secondly, the description of memory removal and built-up memory. Furthermore, the two-phased strategy adopted in this research will be presented. Aside from these essentials, further details about the results, the fieldwork experience and the personal data management will be presented too. In order to proceed in the most linear manner, the first section will offer a brief overview of the level of analysis and the selection of case studies. Subsequently, the new element of analysis will be introduced alongside the study of numerical correspondences between data entries. Later, there will be two sections discussing fieldwork features and the questions asked to participants in the interviews. Finally, the last two sections will address the ethical measures adopted and the complexities that emerged during the interview processes.

#### 1. Overview and selections of empirical cases

The foundations of this research are based on a selection of case studies taken from two levels:

- Macro = State
- Micro = Units (municipalities)

The selection of states includes Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. Along with these macro dimensions, the research also takes into consideration local municipalities as micro cases. These have been chosen according to a general trend variation. Some of the characteristics comprise ethno-national divisions, traumatic events that occurred in the area at the time of the war, and sectarian polarisations. The micro locations selected are:

- *For BiH:* Prijedor and Stolac. The city of Sarajevo has been included only in terms of a meeting location (especially with organisations' representatives and individuals from academia).
- *For Croatia:* Vukovar. Also, Osijek and Zagreb have been a significant point of reference for meetings with Croatian scholars and peacebuilding practitioners.
- *For Serbia:* Apatin.

The methodological reasons why these choices were made are as follows:

- *Areas affected by war.* This is the first layer of selection and prescribes that all selected locations somehow experienced war. As we will see in the next chapters, they all faced different warlike facets; nevertheless, the consequences on society have been different. Here is the importance of this study of variables correlation.
- *Accessibility to communities.* In order to acquire the best possible pieces of information, it has been necessary to select places that could be safe and accessible for foreign researchers. By doing preventive analysis, these locations demonstrated to be better positioned in terms of community openness, number of NGOs working in the area, and lack of visible hostile acts towards research and researchers. Even if these factors might appear of limited relevance for the study at hand, they resulted in being the most crucial aspect to take into consideration when designing fieldwork strategies and objectives. Two were the main ambitions: more efficiency in data acquisition (due to time constraints) and presence of as little as possible security hazards. For what concerns the latter point, Covid-19 emergency raised general concerns about instability in all countries, but the area of Western Balkans was facing aggravating factors. In particular, Bosnia and Herzegovina was experiencing the deepest political crisis after the war due to secession threats advanced by Republika Srpska, while Serbia, on its path to EU integration, was facing escalations on the frontier with Kosovo. These are just a few considerations that will be further elaborated in the next chapters.

- *Ethnic balance between communities.* In order to acquire the most varied information, I decided to work in areas with a high level of ethnic heterogeneity. My aim was having the opportunity to intercept all kinds of narratives, not just the leading one. On the contrary, by selecting very homogenous locations, researchers could face lack of counter narratives, thus absence of all the most diverse historical lenses.
- *Preference for more “static” communities.* Especially Bosnia and Herzegovina, all three countries experienced strong internal and external displacement during and after the war. For this reason, when a researcher wants to investigate on localised collective and individual memories, in certain areas it might be possible to encounter almost only people who did not actually experience war in that specific location but lives there as a result of internal displacement or, more often, because of taken jobs. For this reason, in order to pursue a better accuracy of peoples’ experiences, the idea rotated around the ambition to focus on more static communities, therefore places that did not experience extremely strong displacement or immigrations (especially in recent years). Just to mention a few examples, in Croatia I decided to focus on Vukovar rather than Osijek, since the latter for many years has represented the point of reference for the economy and education of the entire Slavonia region. For this reason, it is extremely common to meet people who had moved from neighbouring villages or commuting from rural areas to work in the city. On the contrary, Vukovar is a much smaller reality, where it is less common for a Croatian coming from other areas of the country, or even foreigners, to find a job there. The same thought came up when I found myself choosing between Mostar and Stolac: both of them belong to the southern part of Herzegovina, which relates to interesting war history; however, society in Stolac is much more crystalised than the Mostarian one, due to its secondary position in the region and its circumscribed location in a valley surrounded by mountains on all sides.
- *Medium-small municipalities.* Following some of the principles referred in the previous points, the aim of selecting medium-small municipalities was based on

the idea of accessing in an easier and more efficient way static communities. Contrary to big cities, where everything moves very quickly and personal stories are not often intertwined with local history, smaller realities still present much clearer sources of analysis.

The whole research will follow a qualitative approach as it will consider small-N cases and variables are treated with qualitative values. It will be pursued through state-of-art literature on various indicators (post-conflict memories, traumas, socio-political instability etc. etc.), data available on institutional/international levels, and from local-based interviews.

While the macro level will be covered mostly by data acquired within literature and background information that emerged during interviews, an original approach will be used when analysing the results of micro-levels. The process will be built up in two phases. The first one concerns the creation of brand-new research items through the combination of two already-existing concepts. The elements included in the definition of “*memorialisation*” and the aspect of “*traumatic events*” will be combined in order to estimate the impact of war-related events in post-conflict societies. While the latter addresses the process of actively favour the act of remembrance (i.e. construction of monuments, the pursuit of commemorations, the spread of symbols etc.etc.), the second aspect intends to specifically put a light on the stronger or lower impact of collective traumatic events. The ambition of this piece of research is to present a broad but at the same time specific understanding of two main ideas: the trends involving the abovementioned concepts related to specific case studies and, the workability of the proposed new research item as a whole. The objective of this methodological process is to offer current literature original tools to verify and measure the impact of war memories related to socio-political risks in post-conflict societies.



		MEMORIALISATION	
		<i>LOW</i>	<i>HIGH</i>
TRAUMATIC EVENT	<i>LOW</i>	Low Constrictive Memory	Overemphasised Memory
	<i>HIGH</i>	Discarded Memory	High Constrictive Memory

Figure 1. Four types of Constrictive Memory

Constrictive Memory thus represents the combination of two main concepts. Depending on their intensity, each of them materialises in different results. As you can see in Fig. 1, the diverse impact of memorialisation and traumatic events contributes to a wide range of pragmatic consequences on socio-political levels. By taking into consideration high memorialisation rates and, at the same time, low-conceptualised traumatic events that occurred in a specific area, we find ourselves in front of a case of *overemphasisation of collective memory*: as a matter of fact, when political élites make great use of the past by actively creating and spreading biased historical narratives, which in reality correspond to minor events occurred within a community or whose legacies do not even belong to that specific place but rather to other realities on the national level, historical narratives manage to take the lead and to acquire an over-estimated role within the whole public sphere. Thus, in such cases, we can see how the need to construct memory and to preserve the persistence of certain interpretations about the past that are not so attached to a place do not show historical dissociation but rather a form for actively making sure to maintain certain socio-political structures and visions. At the same time, if memorialisation processes are not particularly used, we find ourselves in front of the case of *discarded memories*: certain past events do not hold a particular interest in being preserved neither by the political élites nor the society, thus they do not hold a crucial position in the local historical narratives.

A different situation is when past traumatic events are perceived proximate or insist on a community in an extremely tough way. In those cases, there are two potential scenarios that might occur: on one hand, memorialisation could represent an element that did not manage to acquire and conquer a particular spot within local societal development nor was strongly “artificially” shaped by political élites; on the other hand, we could see

cases of intense memorialisation processes that are being put into practice through more pervasive approaches by the establishment and spread of symbols, memorials, recurrent commemorations or museums recalling a contingent event interpreted through using a specific lens, which often results being biased or one-sided conceptualised. In those cases, memory could be more *constrictive*: its direct consequences on society and how this actually behaves in relation to it manifest a variation. Thus, the actual weight of memory perceived and lived in a society correspond to diverse consequences permeating socio-political structures of citizens' daily lives. This theory intends to show a better understanding of the actual significance and repercussions of war-related issues in long term timeframes.

After laying the foundations of this new theoretical approach, the second phase will consist in analysing the relationship between the new items belonging to the concept of *constrictive memory*, and socio-political instability. To do so, this research will make use of an operationalisation process. The two main concepts are to be declined into concrete and potentially measurable categories (e.g., violent events that occurred during the war, presence of dissimilar collective narratives, war casualties for constrictive memory; income inequality, governance structure, schooling segregation for the socio-political instability section). According to the actual consistency of data acquired, each category will be given a score and, thus, contributing to better understand the impact of each category.

## **2. “Phase 1”: “Constrictive Memory” as a new tool for renewed risks related to post-conflict contexts**

Scholars have produced varied literature contributions about memory. In recent years, the study has developed numerous facets in a manner that it started to become a proper nascent discipline. As we saw in Chapter 1, its mouldable nature has given us the opportunity to vivisection it through multiple lenses: from sociology to cultural studies, from political to psychological and finally technology. We agreed that memory may be in

continuous mutation rather than something with rigid boundaries<sup>108</sup>, thus, the involvement of diverse frames of analysis often becomes necessary.

Books and articles started to expatiate within the literature and scholars from diverse disciplines decided to offer contributions to combine different aspects of social sciences. Among the most interesting examples, some of the most relevant fields that have emerged in the last few years concern the use of technology in storing memories as well as how to better guarantee the generational transfer of memories within a community. By trying to analyse a number of experiences and different cases, practitioners have tried to provide new explanations for memory-related phenomena. Nevertheless, as of today, the field still remains very theoretical and empirical studies are still very sectoral. Consequently, when approaching new research questions, current literature shows a lack of tools for the measurement of diverse memory impacts. The usual strategies focus on analysing different contexts using mere socio-political perspectives. It is for this reason that, with the ambition to pursue this new kind of research by trying to fill the empirical void, it has been decisive to think about an original, functioning and efficient route to let scholars and practitioners investigate the intersection between the role of memory and the socio-political structure of a country or a municipality making use of more comprehensive tools.

For all these reasons, this research constitutes a brand-new attempt to analyse the impact of post-conflict memories in societies where some sort of peace has been restored or represent cases of frozen conflicts. The innovative aspect lays in the actual association of two already-existent elements which creates a completely new theoretical framework. As a matter of fact, memorialisation is generally referred to as the processes of preserving memories, but generally it does not refer to the actual influence of it on people and communities. In addition, the *places of memory*<sup>109</sup> which are present in certain areas do not always recall events or episodes that actually took place in the same place. This fact presents a double-faced result: on one hand, the act of recalling certain events, which are disjointed from the territory where these occurred, creates a form of emotional disengagement; on the other hand, it becomes a potent form of symbolism which can be

---

<sup>108</sup> Ed. Lucy Bond, Stef Craps, Pieter Vermeulen, *Memory Unbound: tracing the dynamics of memory studies*, Berghan Books Inc., 2016, p. 1

<sup>109</sup> See Nora

easily used to create or maintain social unity within a country or a specific region. For this reason, it is evident the need to focus on the substantial repercussions on a localised community when both conditions are involved. In addition to these elements, we need also to reflect on the importance of violent proximity in relation to war both from collective and individual perspectives too. Examples of such situations can be found in every society. We can instantly think about some of the grimmest cases that took place in the history of humankind: the Shoah, the Rwandan genocide, or people's memories from the Second World War itself. People's perceptions are bound to vary according to their connection to certain conditions. Among the most crucial ones, it is worth mentioning closeness to victims (which can be emotional, cultural, ethnic, and the most territorial immediacy where events took place).

On the basis of such evaluations, constrictive memory can be operationalised according to the following indicators: the number of civilian losses, the nationality-based demographic variation, the presence of commemorative monuments, the recurrence of commemorations, the actual presence of past proximate violent events, as well as and critical details emerged during the interviews. In our specific case, these relate to the 90's conflicts through the eyes and perception connected to a municipal level. The reasons why these categories have been selected are multiple and will be discussed below:

1. The *number of civilian losses* in the area contributes to the establishment (or the lack of it) of a certain social attachment toward the conflict. As a matter of fact, it is to be assumed that a municipality that counts a larger number of victims will develop a stronger impact on both emotional and social levels. On the opposite, a smaller number of victims is expected to create less resonance in families and local dynamics.
2. In order to understand the level of acceptance towards a minoritarian community in post-conflict societies, a *nationality-based demographic variation* will be presented. Taking into consideration the last few censuses, we will try to understand whether a community that once was minoritarian feels more or less comfortable living in the areas selected. Levels of distrust or acceptance certainly reflect in the societal composition: the more hostility, fear, and lack of

opportunities a minoritarian group will face, the more they leave and emigrate somewhere else. On the contrary, if a minoritarian community rather increases in its number, the place will prove to be more open and reassuring. Strong losses (indicated with negative values) are bound to a higher impact of constrictive memory in the area. On the contrary, we expect that a high increasing percentage will refer it to a less impacting value;

3. The *presence of commemorative monuments* is particularly relevant as it represents the result of the actual process of negotiation on how to interpret the past<sup>110</sup>. The fact that a certain area has developed “*places of memory*”<sup>111</sup> testifies a concrete intention to lead people and institutions revive given episodes of the past. In this way, there has been a form of public recognition. The process involves various aspects, such as the support from the population as well as the political élite administering the area. For all these reasons, it is expected that a major presence of monuments will result in a much more developed culture of memory. On the contrary, it is safe to say that a less considerable amount of memory work will provoke less impact on society. Here there is the need to highlight a very crucial specification: a small or no presence of monuments does not necessarily mean people do not carry personal bearings from past events. What changes is the mere fact that there is a lack of certain processes put into practice by the governing political élites (e.g. lack of democracy, weaker impact of counter-narratives on the local socio-political landscape, lack of resources...) to favour a certain elaboration, one way or another.
4. *Public commemorations* represent another powerful way through which certain past events are remembered by society especially if these are recurrent and potentially divisive. The more presence of a commemoration, the more impact will have on society and the way the past is remembered. On the contrary, we

---

<sup>110</sup> JO Eun A, *Memory, Institutions, and the Domestic Politics of South Korean-Japanese Relations*, International Organisation, 2022

<sup>111</sup> See Nora

assume that fewer public commemorations will have less effect and influence on the population.

5. In terms of *violent events occurred during the war*, it is easy to grasp their connection to the construction of collective memory. Here I advance two specific sub-categories:
  - a. Major fights and battles
  - b. Crimes against civilians

Among all facts of war, these two elements are strongly connected to people's memory and current attitudes towards former perpetrators. As a matter of fact, the actual physical and emotional proximity to such painful episodes further contributes to the eradication of negative feelings against the community who took part in those kinds of actions. In addition, if narratives are not managed, this situation can crystalise and, as a result, frictions and sense of insecurity might perpetuate on a long-term level. Hostility and lack of trust within the population may worsen and remain latent even after various generations. For all these reasons, these categories have been inserted into this study. In point of fact, the fostered hypothesis suggests that the more presence of such events in a municipality will result in more difficulty for people to metabolise the past, thus converging into more suspicion, detachment towards the opposite community and difficulty to reach a peaceful transition, therefore, also political instability.

### **3. “Phase 2”: Socio-political instability and its numerical correspondences**

Apart from an initial theoretical approach, the whole research interest lays its foundations on understanding the actual correlation status between the elements pertaining to the theoretical approach and its actual practice. As a matter of fact, in order to pursue accurate research and elaborate on its results, it has been necessary to insert a further step into the methodology. It is for this reason that Phase 2 has been introduced. The aim of this section is to operationalise the above-mentioned concepts. Both *constrictive memory* and *socio-political instability* are thus divided into specific variables necessary to measure the effects of such research advancements. In the following paragraphs, the two items will be

presented, and it will be given a brief explanation in order to clarify the relevance of the choice for each sub-category.

After analysing all the variables linked to the concept of constrictive memory, now I will proceed by introducing those related to socio-political instability. For practical reasons, they have been divided into four macro areas: economic conditions, governance, social conciliation, and security. Each of them includes a number of smaller variables which are to better describe socio-political instability in the selected municipalities.

*Economic conditions:*

- *Gross Domestic Product* (GDP) represents one of the most common ways to gain valuable information about the size of an economy and how it is performing. The growth rate of real GDP is often used as an indicator of the general health of the economy. For these reasons, it is included in our study: the hypothesis advanced is that the more positive value it provides, the less socio-political instability will result in the society. On the contrary, a less performing index value is thought to create a broader impact on instability.
- *Inequality* is a particularly relevant signal for analysing socio-political instability. As a matter of fact, economists argue that a stronger inequality might deep societal divisions and exacerbate crisis. In particular, it has been suggested that inequality can weaken democracy and give rise to authoritarian movements<sup>112</sup>. For all these reasons, this research intends to focus on this variable in order to evaluate socio-political instability: the more inequality is adduced, a more instable status will create. Since specific data on the local level is not available, a proportion between the regional and national GDP values was made. In this way, it will be possible to evaluate the difference between the case studies selected in terms of wealth national standards.

---

<sup>112</sup> Anshu Siripurapu, *The U.S. Inequality Debate*, 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2022, available at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/us-inequality-debate>

### Governance

- *Election frequency* is one of the most relevant categories when analysing the stability of a country. As a matter of fact, when considering democratic frameworks, this is a very crucial pattern to evaluate since it gives a picture of the actual accountability of domestic legislation. If elections are not held on a regular basis, this can be interpreted as a negative sign for the democratic setting of a political system. At the same time, going to ballots multiple times before the end of legislation may indicate strong forms of instability within the government itself. It is important to verify frequency and for this reason, there will be a focus on the number of elections that have been held in the last three legislations.
- *Frequency in party changes* is considered another relevant element to describe the health status of a democracy. As a matter of fact, a demonstrated balanced party presence in the government shows both a more power distribution and a general access to a broader variety of political ideas. Situations where the same party detains power and visibility for longer terms does not recall usual democratic patterns but rather autocratic ones.
- Particularly in high ethnically-mixed societies, *the presence of minorities in government* indicates a major interest in pursuing policies that are favourable to the largest crowd. As a matter of fact, a weaker consideration of such communities would imply small or no involvement of all parts of society in the political life of the country.

### Social Conciliation

- *Presence of schooling segregation* is one of the most interesting aspects when measuring the socio-political instability of a country. In countries or municipalities with strong ethnical diversity, it might occur that official



regulations prescribe the formation of different curricula. The line between cultural preservation and an actual division of society remains pretty blurred. Instability comes when different communities limit their interaction to maximum levels. These can be represented by multiple wages of experiences. For the purposes of this research, schooling segregation is considered a crucial element. As a matter of fact, the educational sphere touches more topics than it appears: how education is managed by local administrations, differences in subject learning, and how contact between communities is treated and perceived. The assumption on which this research is that ethnic differentiation in schooling is correlated to social instability, therefore the more schools show to be ethnically segregated, the more negatively they impact on the socio-political context of the area.

- *Presence of urban segregation* is another important indicator of socio-political instability. The fact that communities organise their territory by voluntarily creating physical distance between them is extremely indicative of hostility or at least a deep sense of insecurity towards the other. For this reason, this variable is to be taken into consideration for this study: the more distant and circumscribed communities live one from each other, the more unstable is its socio-political life. On the contrary, living in a mixed-ethnic urban structure shows a more peaceful coexistence.
- The *presence of different worships* in the same municipality might represent a sign of cultural coexistence. Nonetheless, it could be seen also as a potential spark to fuel further disparities, especially in fragmented societies caused by past conflicts. Inhomogeneity is thus considered a potential threat to stability.

### Security

- *Crimes* are very indicative events that may cause a general rise of instability. Apart from showing deep divisions as well as social disagreement, suffering

may cause problems at a security level thus undermining socio-political stability. The more they occur, the more unstable the society is.

- The last point to be analysed is how the level of *police force* is dealt with by countries and municipalities. In societies with higher risks of protests, subversions, or violent attacks, we assume that a bigger number of policemen will be employed on the territory to solve local challenges. On the contrary, when facing a society that is managed by a relatively smaller number of officers and/or policemen, we expect fewer impacting issues concerning security. For this reason, we will try investigating the official number of police officers deployed in the area.

<b>CONSTRUCTIVE MEMORY</b>	<b>SOCIO-POLITICAL INSTABILITY</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Civilian losses during the war</i></li> <li>• <i>Demographic variations</i></li> <li>• <i>Commemorative monuments</i></li> <li>• <i>Recurrence of commemorations</i></li> <li>• <i>Violent events occurred during the war – fights/battles (1)</i></li> <li>• <i>Violent events occurred during the war – reported crimes against humanity and war crimes (2)</i></li> </ul>	Economic conditions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Income inequality</i></li> <li>• <i>GDP</i></li> </ul>
	Governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Election frequency</i></li> <li>• <i>Frequency in party changes</i></li> <li>• <i>Presence of ethnic minorities in government</i></li> </ul>
	Social conciliation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Schooling segregation</i></li> <li>• <i>Urban segregation</i></li> <li>• <i>Worship distribution</i></li> </ul>
	Security <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Crime rate</i></li> <li>• <i>Police force</i></li> </ul>

*Table 1: A review of the selected categories for the operationalization process*

#### **4. Grading process**

In order to compare and evaluate the results of the research objects, each item will be given a score. Giving a specific value to each entry is necessary to provide the most

accurate outcomes from the research results. Grading will be done starting from 0 (minimum impact) and 1 (maximum impact). More precisely, scores will be differentiated as follows:

- LOW = 0
- LOW TO MID = 0.25
- MID = 0.50
- MID TO HIGH = 0.75
- HIGH = 1

By making a proportion with the final result of each categorised entity, we will have a single score for “*constrictive memory*” values and another final one for those belonging to the concept of “*socio-political instability*”. The aim is to find an actual correspondence between the numerical values and their respective category, therefore demonstrating a relationship between the two concepts analysed in this research.

Due to the different nature of each of the proposed elements, here follows the indications used for the grading process for the concept of *constrictive memory*. Starting by considering that on a national level the countries selected for this research range from three to six million inhabitants<sup>113</sup>, categories are to be evaluated following these numerical specifications:

- Civilian losses during the war<sup>114</sup>
  - LOW: up to 500
  - LOW TO MID: from 500 to 1000
  - MID: from 1000 to 1500
  - MID TO HIGH: 1500 to 2999
  - HIGH: 3000 and over

---

<sup>113</sup> Population of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2013): 3,531,159 (available at: <http://www.statistika.ba/?show=12&id=49800> ); Population of Croatia (2021): 3,871,833 available at: <https://dzs.gov.hr/vijesti/objavljeni-konacni-rezultati-popisa-2021/1270> ; Population of Serbia (2021): 6,834,326 (available at: <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-Latn/oblasti/stanovnistvo/procene-stanovnistva>)

<sup>114</sup> Values chosen on a proportional basis with the number of inhabitants

- Hostility towards minoritarian communities: migration levels <sup>115</sup>
  - LOW: From 10% onwards
  - LOW TO MID: From 5% to 10%
  - MID: From 2% to 4%
  - MID TO HIGH: From 2 to – 2%
  - HIGH: From – 2% and below
  
- Presence of commemorative monuments
  - LOW: from 0 to 3
  - LOW TO MID: from 3 to 5
  - MID TO HIGH: from 5 to 8
  - HIGH: from 8 upwards
  
- Recurrence of commemorations
  - LOW: from 0 to 3
  - LOW TO MID: from 3 to 5
  - MID TO HIGH: from 5 to 8
  - HIGH: from 8 upwards
  
- Fights/battles<sup>116</sup>
  - LOW: none
  - LOW TO MID: from 0 to 30
  - MID TO HIGH: from 30 to 365 from 4 to 7
  - HIGH: from 365 onwards

---

<sup>115</sup> Comparison between data taken from the last two census

<sup>116</sup> Here the intention is to refer to the number of days where the area subjected to study was directly involved in extremely violent events. Data may be approximate as they refer to officially recognised military operations and/or siege activities. As a consequence, other forms of violence might have occurred in the area but have not been inserted in the broader narratives due to contested or unofficial data available. The values aim at offering only an indicative approach.

- ITCY convicted for crimes against humanity and war crimes
  - LOW: from 0 to 2
  - LOW TO MID: from 3 to 4
  - MID TO HIGH: from 5 to 10
  - HIGH: from 10 and above

After considering the first research item, we will consider now the selected variables for *socio-political instability*. Starting with the economic conditions, gradings are based on the following measures:

- GDP (nominal)
  - LOW: over 50,000 EUR
  - LOW TO MID: from 20,000 to 50,000 EUR
  - MID: from 10,000 to 20,000 EUR
  - MID TO HIGH: from 5,000 to 10,000 EUR
  - HIGH: from 0 to 5,000 EUR
  
- Inequality<sup>117</sup> (EUR)
  - LOW: below 5,000
  - LOW TO MID: from 5,000 to 7,000
  - MID: from 7,000 to 10,000
  - MID TO HIGH: from 10,000 to 15,000
  - HIGH: above 20,000

Considering now the governmental section:

- Election frequency<sup>118</sup>
  - LOW: none

---

<sup>117</sup> World Population Review, available at: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/income-inequality-by-country>

<sup>118</sup> This variable refers to the number of times citizens had to go to ballots in the last three legislatures. The value “Low” refers to “no elections held at all” (such as, for example, the case of Mostar that for twelve years did not manage to vote for a new municipal council).

- LOW TO MID: 1
- MID TO HIGH: 2
- HIGH: 3 and above
  
- Frequency in party changes<sup>119</sup>
  - LOW: 0
  - LOW TO MID: 1
  - MID TO HIGH: 2
  - HIGH: 3 (or over, in case there have been early elections)
  
- Minorities in government <sup>120</sup>
  - LOW: none
  - LOW TO MID: 1
  - MID TO HIGH: 2
  - HIGH: 3

Social aspects, grades will follow these patterns:

- Schooling segregation (percentage of segregated schools)
  - LOW: 0 to 10%
  - LOW TO MID: from 10% to 30%
  - MID TO HIGH: from 30% to 60%
  - HIGH: over 60%
  
- Urban segregation
  - LOW: None
  - LOW TO MID: Partial<sup>121</sup>
  - MID TO HIGH: Intermediate<sup>122</sup>

---

110 Party alternation in the last three governments.

<sup>120</sup> Here I am addressing the number of minority ethnic parties.

<sup>121</sup> This value refers to residential spaces only (streets and/or neighbourhoods)

<sup>122</sup> Here segregation goes beyond and involve ethnic separation even in services and leisure

- HIGH: Total<sup>123</sup>
- Presence of different worships<sup>124</sup>
  - LOW: from 0 to 3
  - LOW TO MID: from 3 to 7
  - MID TO HIGH: from 8 to 10
  - HIGH: over 10

Proceeding now with the security sphere, variables will be measured in the following way:

- Crime rate<sup>125</sup>
  - LOW: from 0 to 1
  - LOW TO MID: from 1 to 3
  - MID TO HIGH: from 3 to 10
  - HIGH: above 10
- Number of policemen<sup>126</sup>
  - LOW: from 0 to 1000
  - LOW TO MID: from 1000 to 2000
  - MID TO HIGH: from 2000 to 4000
  - HIGH: over 4000

---

<sup>123</sup> Division refers to a proper physical separation between contentious communities (see the case of Mostar)

<sup>124</sup> This variable intends to describe worships belonging to different faiths. The idea behind this analysis is trying to understand how actually tolerated minoritarian confessions are in certain municipalities. For each location will be provided information about local majority and these numbers represents the amount of worships representing minoritarian confessions.

<sup>125</sup> Number of riots every year in the last five years

<sup>126</sup> Since no data is available on a local level, the focus will be on the region/entity. Rates have been generated on the basis of general European averages in relationship with the number of inhabitants. ([https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Police, court and prison personnel statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Police,_court_and_prison_personnel_statistics))

## 5. Fieldwork Activity: Between Empirical Data and Causal Relationships

In order to understand whether a real correlation exists between constrictive memory and socio-political instability, a fine-grained causation analysis is presented with the support of the information gathered directly on the field. In this respect, an entire chapter will cover the data that emerged during the interviews, thus focusing on an in-depth perspective.

The proper act of interacting with the local population and organisations working in the different areas will enrich the reflections on all the dynamics studied in this research. In addition, it will give much more specificity to the topics covered throughout the operationalisation process of the above-mentioned concepts (see “Phase 2”). As we will see, a series of descriptions as well as theoretical explanations about particular variables will emerge, and these will further contribute to enriching the approaches of both using current literature as well as developing reflections on a policy level. Some of the dimensions that will be examined will cover very crucial topics such as a sense of insecurity, lack of trust, fear, hostility, and perception towards politics and education.

For what concerns the selection of “*micro*” case studies, (i.e. the list of municipalities), it has been part of a longer process. These have been the following concerns:

- Accessibility to communities, such as lower risks related to personal security for the researcher and better availability of the local community to accept interaction
- Presence of more “static” communities, that is not particularly subjected to past or present displacement/immigration, in order to have a better vision about war memories linked to a specific territory
- Areas of proximity to violent events connected to war
- Fair balance between homogeneous and heterogenous communities with the aim of verifying more carefully the potential presence of counter-narratives
- Medium-small municipalities

People involved in the interview processes reflect the following criteria:

- People aged between 17 to 70
- Residents in Serbia, Croatia, or Bosnia and Herzegovina



- Private citizens, activists, and workers in the field of human rights and peacebuilding

In all places where I did fieldwork, the selection of people followed mostly always the same pattern. I began by doing some research about the organisations present in the area, both on non-profit and international levels. After a general understanding of which issues they were all working on, I fixed certain thematic matches with my research and contacted them directly via email. After briefly introducing myself and my PhD project, and the intention to solve certain research questions about post-conflict memories in the area. By doing so, I promptly showed interest in establishing a connection with the intention to ask them a few questions about their experience about their work matching my areas of investigation. Some of them gave availability for a conversation on the phone or via Zoom, while most of them accepted to hold an interview in person. After getting to know each other, receiving valuable insights for the research and gaining trust, I usually asked them if they had further suggestions in terms of contacts, both in the non-profit world and at the mere societal level. As a result, all people I eventually interacted with became a part of a net of connections I made all starting from the NGO world. Last but not least, an important role has been played also by academia, especially in terms of literature contributions and open discussions about theoretical and fieldwork approaches in the region.

## **6. Questions to Interviewees**

Interviews were held with both organisations' representatives and private citizens. For this reason, due to their different personal and work-related backgrounds, as well as areas of expertise, questions have been designed accordingly. Based on the research ambitions and the ethical guidelines prescribed by the department, two batteries of questions have been conceived: one directly intended for people working or cooperating with non-profit organisations while the other for private citizens. Interview questions to both organisations and individuals can be found in the Index section.

According to various factors, such as the level of sensitivity and openness of the interviewee, the history of the location where the interview was held, and his/her professional position, during the conversation topics may have distanced themselves from the original plan. Situations that might have either prevented or favoured one's expressivity were numerous, and these must be taken into consideration when analysing the final results. In some situations, the pieces of information provided were sufficient enough to provide a certain clear outlook while in others, topics happened to be broadly expanded or certain details remained vaguer. Nevertheless, all the information raised and provided are acknowledged and have been considered added values due to the high importance of each person's contribution, and thus have been inserted into the final official data.

## **7. Ethical Approach**

After discussing the research question, the methodology, and all the objectives to pursue in the context of fieldwork activity with both my supervisors, I requested the project validation from the Ethical Committee of the University of Sarajevo. Due to the involvement of human resources in this research and the sensitivity of the topic, I hereby guarantee that I am the only controller of all the data acquired throughout the research process. Storing procedures have always been in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR 2016<sup>127</sup>).

Apart from the mere bureaucratic procedures, my approach to interviewees and the design of the questions were also modeled in order to be in line with the ethical values prescribed by the university department. Following the suggested guidelines, the whole interview process was subjected to ethical mitigations. Here I mention a few measures I personally adopted:

- Interviews were held both in English and the local languages
- No minor or other vulnerable category was included in the process
- Each interviewee was provided with two documents: an information sheet and a consent form. The first one intended to present the aim of the research, the rules of the interview (duration, possibility to withdraw...), and contacts (both mine

---

<sup>127</sup> Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and the Council, 27 April 2016, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32016R0679>

and those of my tutor). In the second document, the participant was requested to insert his/her preferences about his/her identification (full name, anonymity or pseudonym), the choice of being audio recorded, a full understanding of the entire process and a final signature.

- I reminded the possibility to withdraw from the interview at any time. In addition, I asked to let me know in case he/she felt distressed at any point of our conversation so that we could immediately drop any emotionally hurtful topic.
- Questions always remained very general with no intention to investigate on personal aspects of interviewees' life. All information emerged spontaneously with no pressure from my side. I often started from one general idea (e.g. "What's collective memory?") and left plenty of space to the interviewee to develop his/her thought and broaden it at their will.
- Certain words carrying negative connotation such as "*trauma*", "*violence*" and "*pain*" were avoided. Also, direct personal pronouns such as "*you*", "*your family*", "*your friends*" and other deictic words were eluded in furtherance of less direct references to their individuality or personal experiences. It was up to the interviewee to present the information that he/she truly wished to share.

## **8. Limitations**

Sooner or later, all research contributions encounter challenges. These usually go from methodological design to data acquisition and processing. This research is no less than the others. For this reason, the present section intends to address all the criticalities found during the entire route. The objective is to introduce other scholars or PhD students to the potential difficulties that could emerge during their research working in the same discipline and/or geographical area. The final ambition is trying to offer some solutions about how to overcome them. There are mainly five points to address:

The first one is very broad and concerns topic sensitivity. This reverberated into multiple facets and comprised consequences on different levels. The first result constituted the difficulty to find people willing to participate in the interviews and expose their thoughts. Lack of trust and fear for potential consequences on the social level demonstrated to be very pervasive. From my side, I decided to proceed in the following

way. First of all, when introducing myself and my project, I showed immediate interest in the topic on a broader level and reassured interviewees that my aim was not to investigate directly personal memories but rather their perceptions about post-conflict memories in their society. Nevertheless, I showed openness in case they voluntarily decided to share more about themselves. These specifications demonstrated to work very well: promptly people felt confident and secure enough to establish very profound connections.

The second limitation remains linked to the previous one, however, it relates more directly to the socio-political contexts of the selected locations and their effects on data acquisition. The problem did not concern the proper selection of study areas but rather the strong difference in data accessibility between them, thus resulting in the obtainment of a diverse amount of information for each location. As a matter of fact, I can anticipate already some results: information acquisition resulted much easier in Croatia than in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and this was the direct consequence of societal and political openness. Serbia, as a hybrid regime with strong cases of contrast to the freedom of expression for people and local organisations, represented the most difficult country to access. Consequently, it constituted the case study for which I was able to interview fewer people. On the contrary, as a more open country, Croatia gave me the opportunity to interview a bigger number of people and access the territory in a much easier way than other locations. In addition to this, differences did not involve only the number of people to interview but also the typologies of security precautions I had to maintain as a foreign researcher. Again, if in Croatia I could easily introduce myself as a PhD candidate from the Catholic University of Milan, in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina I had to be more careful as sometimes resulted more appropriate to highlight my affiliation with the University of Sarajevo. At the same time, if in Croatia my profile and some publicity did not raise preoccupations, in Republika Srpska and Serbia I was obliged to create and maintain a much lower profile in order not to be identified as a threat. From a methodological point of view, all this represents a weakness for sure, yet I am firmly convinced that the difficulty to approach certain topics in certain areas answers already many research questions, especially when a variable such as socio-political instability is involved as a focal point in the study.

The third and fourth limitations to this research have been carried by Covid-19 restrictions policies and, consequently, time constraints. As a matter of fact, due to Italian regulations for countering coronavirus infection rates, it has been impossible to travel to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia for a very long time since those countries were classified as extra-EU, thus with prohibited access unless I provided proof of second citizenship ownership or strong medical reasons that obliged me to enter those countries. This resulted in starting the fieldwork only in June 2022, the end of my second-last year leaving me only with around six months to pursue my research in the most accurate way before starting the writing process of the thesis. Traveling to Croatia has been a bit easier but still highly subjected to national regulations. In order to mitigate the delays, I tried as much as I could to start working on building a network before my departure on a remote level. I must admit that especially for these kinds of research, the in-person approach is always the most efficient. Nevertheless, starting approaches via email produced in the meantime some little advancements.

The last limitation of pursuing this research concerned travel logistics. Regional public transportation is very poor in all three countries and Covid-19 regulations did not help with it: due to social distancing, each journey offered a smaller number of available spots and increased risks of infection. However, after trying private transportation and undergoing a break-in (which even resulted in my entire luggage robbed), I decided to continue with public transport. Thus, I travelled all around Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia by bus. The only locations where I had to use a car due to strong logistical constraints were Slavonia and South Bačka, respectively Croatia and Serbia.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter, I analysed the methodological structure of the entire research. Challenges were multiple, however, there has been a huge effort to think and determine a functioning path to answer our questions in the most accurate way.

I started by providing a general introduction about the research topic, the level of analysis, and the main approaches used throughout the whole process. Subsequently, I presented the case studies and the patterns used for their selection. Prijedor and Stolac for Bosnia and Herzegovina; Vukovar for Croatia and Apatin for Serbia were chosen for this study

and the results arise from the literature review and the fieldwork experience will be offered in the next few chapters. These locations responded to a specific strategy to guarantee the most thorough results in these contexts. In specific, medium-small municipalities, areas affected by war, good accessibility, areas with ethnical balance between communities, and places subjected to lesser internal displacement were used as the most viable parameters.

The next step was introducing a two-phased research structure which involves two concepts that have been analysed and explained through operationalisation by verging them into variables. The first one is called *constrictive memory* and represents a brand-new element in current literature. It prescribes a broader unification of two already-existing sub-concepts: memorialisation and proximity to violent events. By bringing together both elements' most crucial aspects, this new component acquires an extremely huge value for the research: the outcome is to combine the most impacting aspects of war experiences and traumas through individual and collective eyes.

After presenting this new methodological content, I proceeded by introducing the second element of analysis. Socio-political instability has demonstrated to be a recurrent theme in literature, especially in the last few decades. Nevertheless, what still lacks is a commonly agreed definition which can be used by scholars to analyse a broad variety of case studies, especially in post-conflict societies. For this reason, I offered a sharable explanation of such concept through the advancement of a few variables. These are covered by four macro-categories: economic conditions, governance, social conciliation and security.

Subsequently, in order to analyse the data acquired, I presented all the steps to be taken in order to measure the researched phenomena. Thus, in the paragraph about the grading process, I introduced a five-based selection with proper scores which will establish the impact level.

Finally, I decided to write a paragraph about the limitations of my research. As a matter of fact, I understand that as much as we aspire to reach semi-perfect scientific levels, these are often unrealistic aims. As we all know, social sciences are very subjected to irregularities and changes since they directly involve the study of individuals within societies. Thus, the unexpected is always behind the corner. Numbers and statistics give great help, however, when facing fieldwork trips, often researchers find themselves in

front of very complex obstacles that are not easy to overcome. For all these reasons, I decided to point out the difficulties I met during my research with the hope that future scholars, who decide to use this same research methodology, might be able to solve them and reach even more accurate results.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Case Studies

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the results of the process of data acquisition originated from the field work. Each case study will be briefly introduced with a general overview about the country and the local socio-political context. After that, a few tables will offer specific information related to the variables described in the previous chapter. Through operationalisation, we will be able to establish the impact level of the theoretical items advanced in this research: *constrictive memory* and socio-political instability. Each piece of information will correspond to a specific score that will provide valuable assessment indicators. A comparison of the results from the different case studies will be provided letting the reader gather a complete understanding of both national and local criticalities in the selected location of this study.

#### 1. Post-Conflict Politics and Society – Analysis of the Regional Context

In the last three decades, the whole eastern Europe has experienced a number of crucial events and transformations. For centuries, the Habsburg and the Ottoman empires alternatively ruled the region and aimed at providing a common political identity for the great variety of cultural and religious groups present in the area<sup>128</sup>, especially in the Balkans. The disintegration of these two empires had numerous implications. Among them, two elements became salient: the spread of territorial claims and the eventual creation of brand-new countries where minority groups increasingly became politically salient<sup>129</sup>. With the advent of the Second World War, violence brutally erupted and impacted on the relationships between ethno-national groups of the region. Some

---

<sup>128</sup> See Serhii Ploky, *Lost Kingdom: The Quest for Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation*, Basic Books, New York, 2017; Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2016; Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008

<sup>129</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 55-78



scholars<sup>130</sup> advanced the idea that in that area wartime violence was experienced much more intensely than in Western Europe and directly affected large parts of civilian segments. As a matter of fact, according to statistics, all families had close relatives who experienced murder or strong deprivations. When comparing population losses, only Poland lost nearly 20 percent of its pre-war population while France less than 2 percent and the United Kingdom 1 percent.<sup>131</sup> War brought extreme losses, both on social and economic levels causing a long path for reconstruction. Nevertheless, the region managed to reach a certain level of stability. By the end of the Eighties', the countries reconfigured their internal and external political dynamics. Nevertheless, as of today, transition remains a constant component in Eastern European politics. Most countries approached liberal democratic structures, however, in recent years, scholars and analysts of the region observed an increasing tendency of neo-authoritarianism and illiberalism<sup>132</sup>.

Violence between ethnic groups was nothing new in the region. As a matter of fact, episodes of contrast occurred multiple times in the last few centuries. Legacies from the past resurfaced, especially with a view to ethnic cleansing strategies. Forced migrations and societal assimilation were the most commonly put into practice. While the Turkish aimed at assimilating mixed groups on administrative and cultural levels, the Habsburg used the strategy of Catholic conversions<sup>133</sup>. Both realities comprised extremely diversified cultural layers which instead resulted in an increased polarisation of group. When Yugoslavia aroused, it seemed to represent a successful project for dealing with ethno-religious diversities. Nevertheless, past strategies started to expose latent critical issues. Among these, the cultural and historical differences started to manifest in contrast with the new territorial claims. The diverse experiences that took places all around the region contributed to the creation of a relatively new social fragmentation. The initial strategy adopted by Josip Broz Tito, which was mainly based on developing cultural and economic unification within the Slavic populations of the South, bore fruit: social and

---

<sup>130</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, Basic Books, New York, 2010

<sup>131</sup> Czesław Łuczak, *Polska i Polacy w drugiej wojnie światowej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań, 1993, p. 683

<sup>132</sup> Grzegorz Ekiert, Jan Kubik, Milada Anna Vachudova, "Democracy in the Postcommunist World: An Unending Quest?", in *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2007, pp.1-24

<sup>133</sup> R. J. Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy 1550-1700*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 39-140

political spheres resulted being more homogeneous as Yugoslav identity became a social glue. Nevertheless, with the rise of nationalism, ethno-religious differences started to emerge leading each community to start fighting for representation, power and ultimately ruling. Communism and anti-fascism heritage no longer represented the main socio-political patterns for keeping together so different communities.

Among the three countries analysed in this research, Bosnia and Herzegovina holds a very particular role. Located in an intermediary position, the country has always had a strong heterogenic propensity, and this led its religious and political structures to become increasingly intertwined. This resulted in the evolution from a religious identity to the ambition of creating a proper national and political one<sup>134</sup>.

As of today, following international patterns, also the Eastern European region is experiencing strong democratic backsliding<sup>135</sup>. In particular, considering the case studies selected in this piece of research, the three Western Balkan countries have been experiencing the same trajectory but in different terms. It would seem totally unexpected since Croatia managed to finally become a full EU member and the other two have been granted candidate status and are currently working on opening acquis chapters. Nevertheless, as we will see afterwards, contradictions are behind the corner. In the next paragraphs, we will try to discover more about all the issues involving these three countries in relationship war memories and socio-political instability.

## **2. Bosnia and Herzegovina**

### **2.1. Macro Level Overview**

Bosnia and Herzegovina holds one of the most complex post-conflict state structures in the region. Designed through Dayton Peace Agreement<sup>136</sup> in November 1995, its post-conflict institutional framework has been based on the principle of constituent peoples. Thus, Croats, Bosniaks, together with Serbs, take part in political process based on power-

---

<sup>134</sup> Mitja Velikonja, *Religious Separation and Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Texas A&M University Press, 2003, p. 13

<sup>135</sup> Damir Kapidžić, *The rise of illiberal politics in Southeast Europe*, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2020, pp. 1-17

<sup>136</sup> Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, available at:

[https://www.constituteproject.org/countries/Europe/Bosnia\\_and\\_Herzegovina?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/countries/Europe/Bosnia_and_Herzegovina?lang=en)

sharing techniques. The national presidency is formed by three members representing their respective ethnic constituents. Power is devolved to two entities: the Serb Republic (Republika Srpska, also addressed as RS) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). While the former presents a majority of Serb-Orthodox communities, the latter involves the presence of Croat-Catholic and Bosniak-Muslim groups. Apart from leading their respective internal politics and discuss together about national issues, the two federal entities have another common duty: the joint administration of Brčko District<sup>137</sup>, a small area located on the northern border with Croatia which comprises the presence of Serb and Bosniak communities on approximately equal proportions.

Even if that power-sharing agreements are thought to be the best viable ways to re-establish a safe environment for political choices in extremely divided societies, the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina shows other results. As a matter of fact, one of the strongest consequences that the institutional framework generated was the perpetuation of internal divisions rather than the creation of a true balance between former hostile groups. As of today, trust was never truly reached, and still nowadays war-related dialectics are often used by politicians to guarantee their positions in government and to offer the idea that social needs are actually different from community to another. What Bosnian politics tries to convey is the fact that ethno-nationalist parties are specifically those who understand the true needs of their groups. For the fear of repercussions and lack of security, people tend to vote for their respective ethnic-national political party. By creating a favourable context at the subnational level based to war memories, parties can remain constantly in power even professing to uphold democratic values such as free, fair and recurrent elections<sup>138</sup>. National interests are not usually conceived in public displays, and it is for the same reason there is no strong national appeal as shown by empty squares on the occasion of the Statehood Day (*Dan državnosti Bosne i Hercegovine*) on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November or the Independence Day (*Dan nezavisnosti*) commemorated on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March. Interests and objectives for the country are often referred as incompatible views

---

<sup>137</sup> Florian Bieber, Local Institutional Engineering: A Tale of Two Cities, Mostar and Brčko, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2003, pp. 420-433

<sup>138</sup> Damir Kapidžić, Subnational competitive authoritarianism and power-sharing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2020, p. 81

between groups, thus it is generally extremely difficult to pursue common strategies.<sup>139</sup> Ethnic collective identities have been manipulated and politicised in such a way that they could become insurmountable fixed labels.<sup>140</sup>

While in Europe nationalistic tendencies have particularly increased in recent years<sup>141</sup>, since the latest conflict in the context of the Yugoslav secession, ethnicity has always remained a constant approach when dealing with social issues. In the last few years, nationalist propaganda has been the nucleus of Bosnian political life. In particular, Republika Srpska is the entity where the figure of Milorad Dodik turned nationalistic tendencies into proper rhetoric of secessionism<sup>142</sup> which reached their peak in 2021: with the designation of a new and independent agency for tax collection and health autonomous from Sarajevo claiming that next step would be the creation of an independent military apparatus. After the shock caused in Bosnian institutions and among citizens recalling images from the war, for some time potential risks of escalations seemed to remain stagnant. However, it was after the general elections in October 2022 Dodik publicly renewed threats of secession.<sup>143</sup> Throughout the years he gained consensus among Serbs living in Republika Srpska as no big social movements mobilised to contrast such ambitions.<sup>144</sup>

## 2.2 Micro Level Analysis

### 2.2.1 Stolac

---

<sup>139</sup> Arianna Piacentini, *The Weight of Ethnic Collectivism: Youth, Identifications, and Boundaries in Post-conflict Bosnia Herzegovina*, Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2018, p. 265

<sup>140</sup> *Ibi.*, p. 262

<sup>141</sup> Marcel Coenders, Marcel Lubbers, Peer Scheepers, *Nationalism in Europe: Trends and Cross-national Differences in Public Opinion*, European Review, Vol. 29, No 4, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 484-496; Quentin Duroy, *The Rise of Neo-Nationalism in Europe: A Veblenian Perspective*, Journal of Economic Issues, Vol. 54, No. 4, 2020, pp. 987-1001

<sup>142</sup> Aleksandar Savanović, Aleksandar Vranjš, Nevenko Vranješ, Željko Budmir, *Izvori, geneza i priroda secesionističke retorike u Republici Srpskoj*, Političa Misao, Vol. 57, No. 1, 2020, p. 116

<sup>143</sup> Reuters, *Bosnian Serb pro-Russian leader renews secession threat*, 10 October 2022, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/bosnian-serb-pro-russian-leader-renews-secession-threat-2022-10-10/>

<sup>144</sup> Savanović, Vranjš, Vranješ, Budmir, p. 116-117

Stolac is a small town situated in the southern area of the Federation (FBiH), the Neretva-Herzegovina canton and its origins date back to very ancient times. This is proved by the presence of prehistorical heritage such as the caves in Borojevići (*Badanj Cave*) from 15,000 years ago and the *Radimlja stećak* necropolis, an archaeological site located in Vidopolje dated from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Due to its position, it served as a crossroad between the Dalmatian coast and the heart of Herzegovina. Today it has about 14,400 inhabitants, however, in the last few decades, it has experienced strong depopulation. Lack of job opportunities and widespread sense of hostility between the local communities has encouraged people to leave for other Bosnian cities or the neighbouring Croatia. As a matter of fact, poor economic conditions and the disputes between the Croat and Bosniak community have not facilitated the establishment of a serene environment.

In terms of constrictive memory, the research presented the following results:

	<i>Civilian losses during the war</i>	<i>Demographic variation (of the original minoritarian community)</i>	<i>Presence of commemorative monuments</i>	<i>Recurrence of commemorations</i>	<i>Fight/battles</i>	<i>Reported crimes against humanity and war crimes</i>
	190 <sup>145</sup>	+21,9 % <sup>146</sup>	4 <sup>147</sup>	2 <sup>148</sup>	21 <sup>149</sup>	1 <sup>150</sup>
<i>Score</i>	0	0	0.25	0	0.25	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0.50</b>					

According to the above evaluations, Stolac holds a medium level of constrictive memory. Proximity to violent events and ethnicised war narratives has a certain impact, however, until now it has not reached the highest level. Therefore, the actual weight of memories and post-conflict matters have a supposed acme. Nevertheless, escalation cannot be ruled out *a priori* that the context will degenerate as polarised social dynamics are still very present. When looking at the results, the first element you can easily observe is the demographic variation: the historical minoritarian community represents nowadays the majority of the entire population. This indicates that the environment was favourable enough not to present opposition for the Croat community to remain in the area and develop their social setting. However, it is necessary to point out a crucial fact that contributed as strong point for creating this circumstance: the approach of Croat élites in

<sup>145</sup> Data originally taken from “*Bosansk knjige mrtvih*” by Mirsad Tokača, available also on Prometej, “*Pojedinačan popis broja ratnih žrtava u svim općinama BiH*” (<http://www.prometej.ba/clanak/drustvo-i-znanost/pojedinacan-popis-broja-ratnih-zrtava-u-svim-opcinama-bih-997>)

<sup>146</sup> Reference to the Croat community. Comparison was done between the 1991 and 2013 census.

<sup>147</sup> For what concerns the Bosniak community, the most important monument is the Centralno šehidsko spomen obilježje dedicated to victims of the Bosnian Army. In regard to the Croat community, there are no monuments directly connected to the war but rather the presence of various religious symbols: Spomenik cv. Ilija, the Catholic Cross placed on the top of Stolac hill and *via crucis* stations places along Stolac Old Town.

<sup>148</sup> From the Croat side, the most important commemoration is held at Radimlja archeological site in remembrance of Croat victims of Second World War. Even if it does not refer directly to the latest conflict, it is often used as political space to promote nationalist and religious propaganda in favour of Croats (even politicians from the Republic of Croatia participate). The second most important commemoration is held in front of the monument (placed right behind the main square) in honour of anti-Fascist victims – mainly Bosniaks attend this event.

<sup>149</sup> The most relevant confrontation was put in place through the Operation Jackal took place from the 7<sup>th</sup> of June until the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1992

<sup>150</sup> ICTY case: Prlić et al. (<https://www.icty.org/case/prlic> )

the country from the neighbouring Croatia has favoured the relocation of many Croat families in the area with the specific aim of reinforcing the ethnic presence along the borders<sup>151</sup>. This will become clearer in the next section thanks to the contributions originated from interviews.

Now, considering the data that surfaced about socio-political instability, we can observe the following results:

	Economic conditions		Governance			Social Conciliation			Security	
	GDP	Income inequality (GDP difference with the capital)	Election frequency	Frequency of party changes	Presence of ethnic minorities in the government	Schooling segregation	Urban segregation	Worship distribution	Crime rates (national)	Ministry of the Interior staff number
	10,503,760 EUR (20,539,696 BAM) <sup>152</sup>	5,546,814 EUR (10,836,541 BAM)	3	None <sup>153</sup>	None	100%	Partial	7	1.31 <sup>154</sup>	999 <sup>155</sup>
<i>Scores</i>	0.50	0.25	1	0	0	1	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0,37</b>									

As evidenced in the data, Stolac demonstrates to have a “*low to mid*” rate of socio-political instability. Although the general overview seems to maintain a balance, it is necessary to take them *cum grano salis*. In particular, when considering the political perspective, it has to be noted that Stolac municipality that has been governed by the same Croat conservative party (HDZ - BiH) for twenty years and has had mostly the same mayor in charge since 2004. This situation cannot be associated to real democratic tendencies, and it raises real concerns about the actual salience of the Bosniak community. Yet from data it becomes clear that there is still a strong lack of dialogue between

<sup>151</sup> International Crisis Group, *Minority Return of Mass Relocation?*, May 1998, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a6eb0.html>

<sup>152</sup> Data from 2017 and referred to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH - [https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Bilteni/2019/NUM\\_00\\_2018\\_TB\\_0\\_EN.pdf](https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Bilteni/2019/NUM_00_2018_TB_0_EN.pdf))

<sup>153</sup> Mayor Stjepan Bošković started his office in 2004 and currently still detain the same role

<sup>154</sup> Data from 2020, available at: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/BIH/bosnia/crime-rate-statistics>

<sup>155</sup> Data related to FBiH Police Administration (<https://polis.osce.org/country-profiles/bosnia-and-herzegovina/#fbih-police-administration-9972>). No data on local level available.

communities, especially in the public sphere. This has been worsening relationships between citizens as evidenced also by schooling and urban segregation values and this cannot exclude further escalations in the future.

### 2.1.2 Prijedor

The town is located in the northwestern part of Republika Srpska. Today has around 30,000 inhabitants, however, the number refers to various settlements situated in the neighbouring areas. The town is neither big nor have big industries, however, in the national landscape, it is very well known. As a matter of fact, it is a very symbolic location in reference to the Nineties's conflict. Prijedor was one of the most affected areas in terms of violence against civilians and violation of human rights. When in April 1992 Serb forces took control of the municipality, they initially started to remove all the non-Serb population (mainly Muslim and Croat) from high-rank responsibilities. After these first steps taken toward ethnic segregation, war events took more tragic directions. A number of concentration camps were quickly assembled in the neighbouring territories and local population began to be decimated. Places like Omarska, Manjaca, Keraterm, and Trnopolje sadly become the symbols of immeasurable suffering.

In terms of constrictive memory, this is the data that emerged from the research:

	<i>Civilian losses during the war</i>	<i>Demographic variation of minoritarian community</i>	<i>Presence of official commemorative monuments</i>	<i>Recurrence of commemorations</i>	<i>Fight/battles</i>	<i>Reported crimes against humanity and war crimes</i>



	4868 <sup>156</sup>	11,4 <sup>157</sup>	1 <sup>158</sup>	2 <sup>159</sup>	Around two years <sup>160</sup>	15 <sup>161</sup>
Score	1	1	0	0	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0.60</b>					

As evidenced in the table, memory in Prijedor still carries heavy social burdens. Nevertheless, according to this analysis, post-conflict issues have been managed in a way to create a sort of apparent balance, stability and cohesion between communities. However, we can immediately identify very decisive values such as, first of all, the high emigration rate of Bosniaks and high proximity to violent events, which results in two variables: the very high number of civilian losses and the duration of the siege in town. The fact that there is a little presence of memorials and commemorations limits a varied and diversified discourse about war narratives. This certainly increase senses of fears and suspicion between and among people. Also, another relevant point to consider is the high number of reported crimes to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Among the cases treated by the commissions, most indicted are from the Serb community. However, being situated in Republika Sprska, puts a totally different light on war criminals. As a matter of fact, they are often idealised and perceived by the population like heroes as evidenced by the huge number of street graffiti<sup>162</sup> and anti-Muslim songs and allusions usually pursued usually in the context of the 9<sup>th</sup> of January's

<sup>156</sup> Tokača, p. 176

<sup>157</sup> Data comparison between the 1991 and 2013 census (<http://www.statistika.ba/?show=12&id=20486>)

<sup>158</sup> Centralni spomenik "Zas krst časni". Nevertheless, there are various unofficial art representations (murals) in support of the Serb community.

<sup>159</sup> Dan bijelih traka (Day Armband Day) celebrated by the Bosniack community and Dan Republika Srpske (Day of Republika Srpska) from Serbs

<sup>160</sup> During 1991 the local context deteriorated very quickly 1991. The Serb takeover which started in 1992 and proceeded throughout 1993

<sup>161</sup> ICTY cases: Banović; Brđanin; Karadžić; Kranjišnik; Kvočka et al.; Mejakić et al.; Milošević; Mladić; Mrđa; Plavšić; Sikirica et al.; Stakić; Tadić; Talić; Stanišić and Župljanin. List available on: <https://www.icty.org/en/cases/interactive-map>

<sup>162</sup> Aleksandar Drakulić, Balkan Insight, *New Neo-Nazi Graffiti Painted on Walls in Prijedor*, 13 January 2022, available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/01/13/new-neo-nazi-graffiti-painted-on-walls-in-prijedor-bosnia/>

commemoration. Particular attention is gathered with the celebrations and the military parades usually organised in Banja Luka (see details from 2022).<sup>163</sup>

For what concerns socio-political instability, the research offered the following outputs:

	<i>Economic conditions</i>		<i>Governance</i>			<i>Social Conciliation</i>			<i>Security</i>	
	GDP	Income inequality (GDP difference with the capital)	Election frequency	Frequency of party changes	Presence of ethnic minorities in the government	Schooling segregation	Urban segregation	Worship distribution	Crime rates (national)	Ministry of the Interior staff number
	4,490,560 EUR (8,823,628 KM) <sup>164</sup>	10,902,263 EUR (21,299,220 BAM)	4 <sup>165</sup>	1 <sup>166</sup>	None	100%	Partial	5 <sup>167</sup>	1.31	5.290 <sup>168</sup>
Scores	1	0.75	1	0.25	0	1	0.25	0.25	0,25	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0.57</b>									

The scheme shows that the town of Prijedor is subjected to a medium level of instability. Very interesting is the data which refers to the economic conditions: in comparison to the rest of the country, the GDP is very low showing that the area does not offer an encouraging wealthy context. The lack of opportunities and poor conditions might contribute to the rise of unstable situations such as protests, riots, abrupt changes in the

<sup>163</sup> See video advertised by SNSD party (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gFKtxBv0-s>). Other useful source from AlJazeera, UN raises concerns over hate speech in Bosnia, 14 January 2022, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/14/un-raises-concerns-over-hate-speech-in-bosnia-serbia>

<sup>164</sup> Data of 2014 (<https://komorars.ba/macroeconomics/?lang=en>)

<sup>165</sup> In Demember 2021 were arranged anticipated elections due to the resignation of Dalibor Pavlović. In October of the same year a scandal led Milorad Dodik to impose his resignation.

<sup>166</sup> Srpska Demokratska Stranka (DNS) governed won the elections in 2012 and in 2016. Since 2020 Prijedor is governed by Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata (SNSD). Brief addendum: even if parties changed, political alignments proved to remain towards right-wing conservatism and Serb nationalism. Data available on “Centralna Izborna Komisija BiH” portal (<https://www.izbori.ba/Default.aspx?Lang=3>)

<sup>167</sup> Džamija Donja Puharska, Džamija Zagrad, Čaršijska džamija Prijedor, Gradska džamija Stari grad, Djemino ognjište

<sup>168</sup> Data from 2009 concerning police officers in Republika Srpska (<https://polis.osce.org/country-profiles/bosnia-and-herzegovina#ministry-of-the-interior-%E2%80%93-republic-of-srpska-9978>). No data on local level available.

political sphere, and common manifestations of violence. All this might further develop inevitable impact on the sense of safety and security in an already deeply divided society.

### 3 Croatia

#### 3.1 Macro Level Overview

Since the end of the war, Croatia has been considered as a successful example of how to rebuild a post-conflict society: re-establishing its economy as well as its political structure in such a short time, in comparison to the other countries involved in the Yugoslavia dissolution process, has shown noticeable points. Not only the country managed to rebuild itself from the ground but decided to pursue a path toward the creation of a fully democratic republic. The inclination toward democratic values led Croatia to increasingly align itself with the European landscape. The willingness was so strong that Croatian governments decided to take the path for a full European integration. So, Croatia became an EU member in 2013 and in January 2023 finalised the whole process by entering the monetary union. Thus, the narrative about Croatia as part of EU's enlargement strategies has always been offered by both national and international actors as a success. Nevertheless, there are some issues that need to be considered when referring to this case.

According to Freedom House report from 2018, Croatia has been experiencing a gradual democratic backsliding in the areas of national-level governance, independent media, and judicial frameworks. Similar conclusions were reached in Kapidžić (2020) article about the rise of illiberal politics in Southeast Europe.

The Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* - HDZ) has been the most dominant political party in the last twenty years and managed to establish its roots and influence yet during the wartime period. As of today, it represents the most voted party and proved to be the one that governed the majority of legislatures since the independence from Yugoslavia. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) came to power only on two occasions when HDZ was experiencing strong internal crisis<sup>169</sup>. In addition, there are significant veto actors that share most ideological perspectives with HDZ political

---

<sup>169</sup> Dario Čepo, *Structural weaknesses and the role of the dominant political party: democratic backsliding in Croatia since EU accession*, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 2020, pp. 141-159

agenda and are particularly present in the whole national landscape: the Catholic Church and the veterans' organisations. By aligning with HDZ's rule, they manage to direct government resources to their particular aims while in turn, HDZ use their special relationship to advancing conservative and nationalistic political agendas when political opposition becomes stronger.<sup>170</sup> It becomes evident the strict relationship between party ideologies and wartime dynamics: once again discourses about ethno-national divisions emerge in all socio-political spheres making the perception of constant hostility and conservatism. For all these reasons, wartime dialectics are still used by the political élites during electoral campaigns, and segregation of Serb communities is present in all aspects of the society. A number of non-profit organisations are still working nowadays on human rights issues as well as freedom of speech.

## 3.2 Micro Level Analysis

### 3.2.1 Vukovar

Vukovar is a town located in Easter Slavonia region on the Croatian bank of the Danube River. Once a cutting edge area for the Yugoslav economy thanks to its central positions, its large flat lands, and great fertility for agriculture, has now become one of the poorest areas of the country. Placed far from big economic centres, job opportunities for locals are very few and, as a consequence, there are high rates of emigration. Despite the destitute economic conditions, during the years Vukovar has become an important symbol for all Croatian nationals. From the early life stages<sup>171</sup>, of all Croatians are taught that the city had an extremely relevant role during the War of Independence, or, as they call it, the "Homeland War" (*Domovinski rat*): it was in that town where many Croatians gave their lives for the freedom of the entire country, and this is why it is seen as a social duty to remember and celebrate it. For this reason, every school in Croatia are to arrange field trips to show pupils such important symbol for the identity of the entire country.

War narratives are still very present in the daily life of both Vukovar and we will see from the data exposed in this and the following chapter. Starting from tv programmes

---

<sup>170</sup> *Ibi.*, p. 4

<sup>171</sup> Connie Svob, Norman R. Brown, Vladimir Takšić, Katarina Katulić, Valnea Žauhar, Intergenerational transmission of historical memories and social-distance attitudes in post-war second-generation Croatians, *Mem Cogn*, 2016

about the life of war veterans, hate speeches towards the former enemy and contentious issues are often the focal point of public speeches<sup>172</sup>. Even if a part of the society does not fully adhere to the politics of memory and the memorialisation<sup>173</sup><sup>174</sup> procedures adopted, great part of the society still sees in Vukovar the role of the “*bastion of Croatian identity*”, also strengthened by the fact that it is located on the river facing the border with Serbia.

The city is thus split into two parallel realities<sup>175</sup>. Schools, local radio, stations, sport clubs, and cultural associations, bakery stores and coffee shops are socially separated along ethnic lines<sup>176</sup>. In addition, the use of language and its script is another form of division and often results in incidents or damaging episodes in the streets, especially originated from Croat community<sup>177</sup>.

In terms of constrictive memory, these are the results originating from the acquisition of data:

	<i>Civilian losses during the war</i>	<i>Demographic variation of minoritarian community</i>	<i>Presence of commemorative monuments</i>	<i>Recurrence of commemorations</i>	<i>Fight/battles</i>	<i>Reported crimes against humanity and war crimes</i>
	3000* <sup>178</sup>	-13,49% <sup>179</sup>	14 <sup>180</sup>	2 <sup>181</sup>	87 <sup>182</sup>	5 <sup>183</sup>

<sup>172</sup> See Metod Šuligoj, Elena Rudan, Media-generated characteristics of Homeland War-related commemorations in Croatia, *Memory Studies*, 2022, pp. 1-18

<sup>178</sup> There are no officially confirmed lists, so values are still subjected to argumentations. The number hereby offered represents the most realistic value proposed by Colin M. Fleming in Clausewitz’s *Timeless Trinity: A Framework for Modern War*, Routledge, 2016 (taking in consideration various studies).

<sup>179</sup> Comparison between 2011 and 2021 census results (<https://dzs.gov.hr/naslovna-blokovi/u-fokusu/popis-2021/88>)

<sup>180</sup> Spomenik Domovinski rat, Spomenik “Zadro Blago”, Spomenik HOS-ovoj “Štafeti smrti”, Spomenik žrtvama stradalim u Vukovaru, Spomenik pukovniku HV-a Petru Kačiću, Spomenik poginulim I nestalim policajcima u Domovinskom ratu, Spomenik Žrtvama za slobonu Hrvatsku, Spomenik Ovčara, Spomen dom hrvatskih branitelja (na Trpinjskoh cesti), Spomenik puklovniku HV-a Vlimiru Đereku-Sokol, Spomenik stradalnicima u Domovinskom ratu na putu Nuštar-Marinci, Memorijalni centar Domovinskog rata, Mjesto sjećanja – Vukovarska Bolnica, Ploče s imenima vukovarskih žrtava 1991 godine, Memorijalno groblje žrtava domovinskog rata

<sup>181</sup> Dan sjećanja (Remembrance Day), anniversary of Marko Babić death (“hero of Vukovar defence”)

<sup>182</sup> The “Battle of Vukovar” lasted 87 days, from the 25<sup>th</sup> August till the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1991

<sup>183</sup> ICTY cases: Milošević; Dokmanović; Hadžić; Mrkšić et al.; Šešelj. List available on: <https://www.icty.org/en/cases/interactive-map>

Score	1	1	1	0	0.75	0.75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0.75</b>					

From the evaluation of available information, Vukovar reaches a high level of constrictive memory. There are a few points to consider but first of all, the high number of memorials. If on one hand they present relevant historical facts and favour the construction of a national identity, on the other side they may be obstructing reconciliation between the two communities. As a matter of fact, widespread encouragement of selective memory prevents society to move forward.<sup>184</sup> In addition, the strong demographic decrease of the Serb community proves that a big part of the society do not feel secure and comfortable to live in a society too focused on nationalistic ideologies.

For what concerns socio-political instability, there are the results emerged during the research:

	<i>Economic conditions</i>		<i>Governance</i>			<i>Social Conciliation</i>			<i>Security</i>	
	GDP	Income inequality (GDP difference with the capital)	Election frequency	Frequency in party changes	Presence of ethnic minorities in government	Schooling segregation	Urban segregation	Worship distribution	Crime rates (national)	Ministry of the Interior staff number
	1,299,444 EUR	54,304,855 EUR	3	None	None	100%	Intermediate	4	0.97	N/A

<sup>179</sup> Comparison between 2011 and 2021 census results (<https://dzs.gov.hr/naslovna-blokovi/u-fokusu/popis-2021/88>)

<sup>180</sup> Spomenik Domovinski rat, Spomenik “Zadro Blago”, Spomenik HOS-ovoj “Štafeti smrti”, Spomenik žrtvama stradalim u Vukovaru, Spomenik pukovniku HV-a Petru Kačiću, Spomenik poginulim i nestalim policajcima u Domovinskom ratu, Spomenik Žrtvama za slobonu Hrvatsku, Spomenik Ovčara, Spomen dom hrvatskih branitelja (na Trpinjskoh cesti), Spomenik pukovniku HV-a Vlimiru Đereku-Sokol, Spomenik stradalncima u Domovinskom ratu na putu Nuštar-Marinci, Memorijalni centar Domovinskog rata, Mjesto sjećanja – Vukovarska Bolnica, Ploče s imenima vukovarskih žrtava 1991 godine, Memorijalno groblje žrtava domovinskog rata

<sup>181</sup> Dan sjećanja (Remembrance Day), anniversary of Marko Babić death (“hero of Vukovar defence”)

<sup>182</sup> The “Battle of Vukovar” lasted 87 days, from the 25<sup>th</sup> August till the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1991

<sup>183</sup> ICTY cases: Milošević; Dokmanović; Hadžić; Mrkšić et al.; Šešelj. List available on: <https://www.icty.org/en/cases/interactive-map>

<sup>184</sup> Janine Clark, Reconciliation through Remembrance? War Memorials and the Victims of Vukovar, International Journal of Transitional Justice, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2013, pp. 116-135

Score	1	1	1	0	0	1	0.75	0.25	0	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0.55</b>									

Vukovar shows a medium level of socio-political instability, however, there are two elements that stand out. The first one is the extremely unequal economic condition between the town and the rest of the country. This might lead to renewed situations of disorders and discrimination and should be considered as a source of potential escalation. The second one is the number of police officers deployed in the area. An apparently simple and unobjectionable element, it hides further crucial considerations instead. When for other countries it was just a very difficult piece of information to get, in the Croatian context it is impossible. According to Croatian law, this is a sensitive issue categorised as “very secret” and “state secret”<sup>185</sup>. This fact certainly raises a lot of questions. First of all the transparency of a democratic republic concerning a public service such as the security and safety of Croatian citizens. Secondly, as a researcher, doubts start arising about the actual sensibility of such information and the reasons why the country wants to keep this data secret: from a sense of insecurity towards potential confrontations as well as the level of militarisation of such forces, none of them for sure in line with democratic and EU values.

#### **4. Serbia**

##### **4.1 Macro Level Overview**

After the Yugoslav dissolution, in the first couple of years after Milošević rule, the Serbian government had the chance draw a line between the former political experience and a brand-new one. The aim was to distance Serbia from the political choices that brought the country to war and show that Serbs went forward leaving behind a past of

---

<sup>185</sup> OSCE POLIS, Croatia Country Profile, referring to 511-01-52-1153/2008 law, available at: <https://polis.osce.org/country-profiles/croatia>

violence and hatred<sup>186</sup>. However, political élites remained particularly close to the political lines initiated by Milošević himself, leaving media, activists and non-profit organisations to deal directly with war issues such as questions connected to public responsibility and the recognition of victims. Their work has always been very challenging as Serbia showed not to support values such as freedom of expression<sup>187</sup>.

Since 2012, when the Serb Progressive Party came to power, historical revisionism became a crucial part of political discourse. War narratives started to become the key to political legitimacy and state authorities. Memory is based on populist approaches underlining elements such as national pride, the incompetence of the international community that made unfairly suffer Serbian people throughout the 90's. This is why policies changed towards the idea that there is a need to regain due authority both on a national and international landscape. The starting point to do so was focusing on the brave and strong Serb population. It was in this context that the political élite started turning war events into idealised items to spread around starting with the idealisation of war criminals.

Serbian politics of memory is based on a few patterns. The first one is the strategy of denial: according to institutional authorities, war never occurred on the territory of Serbia and the country itself never participated in any conflict. Secondly, all the assumptions made in relation to cases of genocide and other war crimes committed in other areas of former Yugoslavia are totally denied. As Serbia never participated in any war, all responsibility towards potential crimes is not attributable to Serbia but rather to spontaneous paramilitary groups who voluntarily decided to take part in the military confrontations. Nevertheless, if on one side there is a lack of recognition of past war events, on the other there is a strong consideration toward victims of Serbian nationality.<sup>188</sup>

---

<sup>186</sup> Jelena Subotić, *Hijacked Justice: Dealing with the Past in the Balkans*, Ithaca, Cornell university Press, 2009, p. 41

<sup>187</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Press release “*Serbia: UN experts calls for political will to translate laws to into concrete actions to protect freedom of expression*”, 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2023, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/04/serbia-un-expert-calls-political-will-translate-laws-concrete-action-protect>

<sup>188</sup> Fond za humanitarno pravo, *Politika sećanja na ratove devedesetih u Srbiji: istotijjski revizionalizam i izazovi memorijalizacije*, Beograd, October 2021, pp. 7-12



Apart from these contradictory approaches, Serbia has decided to pursue the path toward EU membership. In 2012 Serbia has been granted the status of state candidate. As of August 2023, 22 out of 35 chapters have been opened<sup>189</sup>. There are still big concerns about the respect of human rights, especially freedom of expression.

## 4.2 Micro Level Analysis

### 4.2.1 Apatin

As you will notice also in the fourth chapter, doing research in and about Serbia has presented numerous challenges. Accessibility is still extremely difficult, data supposedly to be of public domain are not publicly available and people are very reluctant to talk as they fear repercussions. Police is very militarised and promptly sedate public gathering, especially if against the government. This is why it has been very difficult even for me to acquire all the data I needed to pursue this research.

Apatin is a town located in West Bačka District in the region of Vojvodina. It is placed right on the border with Croatia but on the left bank of the Danube river, from the opposite of Vukovar. According to the few data on the 2011 census, the population of the town was around 17,000. As you can see from the research results, constrictive memory of the town is null:

	<i>Civilian losses during the war</i>	<i>Demographic variation of minoritarian community</i>	<i>Presence of commemorative monuments</i>	<i>Recurrence of commemorations</i>	<i>Fight/battles</i>	<i>Reported crimes against humanity and war crimes</i>
	N/A <sup>190</sup>	-1.08	0	None	0	0
Score	0	0,75	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0,12</b>					

<sup>189</sup> European Commission, Serbia Membership status, available at: [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/serbia\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/serbia_en)

<sup>190</sup> No official data is available for this value

From this table, we can observe how little impact has a territory that once was very close to a theatre of war. There are no signs of such events even if it is 50 kilometers away from Vukovar and it takes 30 minutes by car to get to Erdut. No official data has been published on the number of victims Apatin suffered during the war nor on military operations that have affected the area. Also, another interesting aspect is the extreme proximity to this location to Croatia but the actual “distance” that need to be covered to reach it: as a matter of fact, if you want to travel enter the Croatian border from Serbia there are only three locations that you allow you to do it: Batina, Erdut and Ilok. So, you can talk a walk on the Serbian bank of the river, watching from a distance of 50 meters towns like Dalj, Vukovar or Borovo and not being able to reach them if you do not take the car and drive one hour to reach the official frontier. This says a lot about the hostile relations the two countries still have toward each other.

In terms of socio-political instability, these are the data that came out of the research:

	<i>Economic conditions</i>		<i>Governance</i>			<i>Social Conciliation</i>			<i>Security</i>	
	GDP	Income inequality (GDP difference with the capital)	Election frequency	Frequency in party changes	Current presence of ethnic minorities in government	Schooling segregation	Urban segregation	Worship distribution	Crime rates (national)	Ministry of the Interior staff number
	13,778 EUR (1,615,864 RDS) <sup>191</sup>	39,684 EUR (4,654,233 RDS)	3	3 <sup>192</sup>	None	0%	None	2 <sup>193</sup>	1.02	12,371 <sup>194</sup>
Score	0.50	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0.25	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0.45</b>									

Even if the country is not particularly transparent, there has been some chance to obtain the necessary information. According to this categorisation, Apatin holds a low to mid rate of socio-political instability. However, in comparison to other areas where criticalities emerge from strong societal divisions, in this case instability shows to originate from the poor economic conditions of the area. Another crucial indicator is the extremely high level of police officer employed in the region as well as in the rest of the country: this indicates the area might be subjected to escalations, therefore the need to be staffed for monitoring and/or repression purposes.

<sup>191</sup> Data of 2021 referred to the Vojvodina region (<https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2022/HtmlL/G20221332.html>)

<sup>192</sup> In the last three legislatures, various parties alternated their composition in the local government. In 2012, there was a coalition of Socijalistička partija Srbije (SPS)/Partija ujedinjenih penzionera (PUP) with Demokratska Srpanka (DS)/Socijaldemokratska partija Srbije (SDPS)/Demokratski savez Hrvata u Vojvodini (DSHV). In 2016 a coalition of Socijalistička partija Srbije (SPS)/Srpska radikalna stranka (SRS) / Demokratska Srpanka (DS). In 2022 SNS won the elections. Sources: Službeni List (Grada Sombora), Volume 5 Number 6 (25 May 2012), p. 105; [ЛЮКАЈИНИ ИЗБОРИ 2012.](#), Bureau of Statistics, Republic of Serbia; pp. 11, 45; RadioDunav, Poznati rezultati lokalnih izbora u Apatinu, 15 April 2016, available at: <https://www.radiodunav.com/poznati-rezultati-lokalnih-izbora-u-apatinu-sps-srs-ds-ponovo-vode-apatin/>.

<sup>193</sup> Katolička crkva Uznesenje Marijino, Katolička crkva Srce Isusovo.

<sup>194</sup> Estimation of number of policemen in employed in Vojvodina region. National data has been taken from OSCE Police report (<https://polis.osce.org/country-profiles/serbia>). No official local level is available. An average of the number of police officers per citizen was carried out, then compared with the number of inhabitants of the region.

## Conclusions

In this chapter, I presented the data associated with the newly-created research item of *constrictive memory* as well as socio-political instability. For each case study, I went through the data available and measured the impact of each variable within their contexts. As a matter of fact, through an operationalisation process, I categorised each item with variables. I started by offering a general overview of the region and then proceeded to analyse each selected location.

We promptly observed the lack of transparency regarding what concerns information of public domain: this is why the whole process had to be designed in a way that could possibly remain consistent with research goals while at the same time providing accurate and original answers that have not been presented and combined in this way in any other piece of research yet. Here follows a table with the first results:

	<i>Constrictive memory</i>	<i>Socio-political instability</i>
Stolac	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.37</b>
Prijedor	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.57</b>
Vukovar	<b>0.75</b>	<b>0.55</b>
Apatin	<b>0.12</b>	<b>0.45</b>

Among the case studies chosen for this research, Vukovar proves to be the town with the most impacting rate of constrictive memory: the high proximity to war events and the strong memorialisation put into practice make life in Vukovar still extremely connected to war narratives. For what concerns socio-political instability, the towns that reached the highest levels are Prijedor and Vukovar: both of them suffer from poor economic conditions subjected to strong inequality rates in comparison to other areas of their country. In addition, another common element between the two case studies is the high degree of schooling and urban segregation: these aspects do not certainly favour peaceful coexistence between the communities living in the area. This gives also much space for a widespread sense of fear and hostility.

By watching the results table, it becomes immediate the need to understand the potential presence of patterns that might add relevant considerations about this study. Due to the presence of different case studies located in different countries that are subjected

to different conditions, it already presents itself as something very audacious. Nevertheless, by further elaborating the data, we can understand something more.

The variable “election frequency” reached the same score in all cases and this makes it less significant in the final counts. In addition, the question of the police force present in the areas led the study to become slightly unbalanced: the fact that data is unavailable for Croatia and for the other locations there was not always the opportunity to acquire the specifics for the local level, further problematizes an already contradictory situation. Also, understanding the impact of police force in relationship to security might lead to further discrepancies, in particular if they are actually used as functional scope or as security providers for deterrence. By putting aside these two categories, we reach these second results:

	<i>Constrictive Memory</i>	<i>Socio-Political Instability</i>
Stolac	<b>0,50</b>	<b>0,31</b>
Prijedor	<b>0,60</b>	<b>0,46</b>
Vukovar	<b>0,75</b>	<b>0,50</b>
Apatin	<b>0,12</b>	<b>0,34</b>

Among the majority of cases, we can notice a general trend variation: the higher constrictive memory value, the higher socio-political instability rate. The most affected area is Vukovar while the less problematic one is Stolac. This suggests the idea that the two concepts maintain a form of correlation. However, following this logic, it emerges only one outlier: Apatin. Even if this case might induce to disprove the abovementioned statement, it can be explained by two main considerations:

- *The element of “traumatic event” embedded in the definition of constrictive memory is not applied correctly.* Violent events associated to war such as civilian losses, battles or sieges demonstrated to be not as proximate as in the other cases. In addition, there has been no evident resonance of wartime issues in the public sphere as shown by the lack of commemorative gathering and monuments in the area.

- *Lack of data accessibility.* In comparison with the other cases considered, Apatin resulted being the most challenging in terms of data acquisition. The difficult environment Serbia offers to researcher is bound to affect the outcomes.

With the results acquired in this empirical study, in regard to the initial evaluation offered in chapter two specifically about *constrictive memory* as a new research item, finally we can classify our case studies with the following pattern:

		MEMORIALISATION	
		<i>LOW</i>	<i>HIGH</i>
TRAUMATIC EVENT	<i>LOW</i>	Apatin	Stolac
	<i>HIGH</i>	Prijedor	Vukovar

The table presents the case studies selected in relation to the concept of *constrictive memory*. Apatin, the outlier case in the final evaluation, reflect the categorisation of *low constrictive memory*, as advanced already in the previous paragraph. While Stolac and Vukovar both present high memorialisation processes, their proximity to traumatic events is very different as shown by the number of civilian losses and reported crimes against humanity as well as the length of battles or sieges occurred in their respective areas. On the contrary, Prijedor demonstrated to be strongly impacted on a trauma perspective, but memorialisation processes are very poor. For this reason, it falls within the category of *discarded memory*.

In conclusion, this chapter presented the theoretical elaboration of specific data referred to four specific case studies: Stolac, Prijedor, Vukovar and Apatin. After providing a general overview of both national and local dynamics, *constrictive memory* and socio-political instability have been investigated with the use of operationalisation. Results suggest that there it is observable a trend variation: the more *constrictive memory*, the more socio-political instability. For what concerns the former element, that is one of the most crucial points designed and developed in the whole research, it has been further

segregated into the four concepts already anticipated in chapter two. In this way, it is clear and evident the great importance and the strong divergence of memorialisation approaches and proximity to traumatic events. In the following chapter, empirical data acquired during fieldwork will give a direct voice to individuals thanks to interview processes held with locals.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Life in post-conflict societies: through the eyes of locals**

#### **Introduction**

The aim of this chapter to present very crucial information about first-hand life in post-conflict societies. In particular, my intention is to enrich existing aggregate data with crucial elements coming directly from local populations. By considering people stories, we will be able to achieve two main objectives: first, giving the right space and dignity to people's thoughts, visions and experiences; secondly, creating the opportunity to make real comparisons between the results aroused in the previous chapters and the actual views originated with human resources. Personification thus represents one of the most valuable and impacting strategies to provide the most accurate information about societal vulnerabilities. Finally, aside from being a researcher, I feel it as a personal duty: to give voice to all those who welcomed me as a researcher, as a friend and sometimes even as a family member, and helped me to pursue this huge project, for me definitely represents one of the most honorable gestures I could make in return.

My first approach consisted in establishing contacts with local non-profit organisations. The idea behind this decision was trying to get to know all local dynamics from people who work directly on the field and thus have been able to develop critical thinking about the actual situation in the area, as well as being aware of potential future prospects. In this way, it resulted very easy to deepen my understanding of the most crucial aspects which are affecting the areas where they operate in. After understanding the kind of work the organisation does and which are the services being provided, I was able to connect with further people suggested by my counterparts. In this way, after some time, I managed to develop a very interesting and functioning network.

I will proceed in the following way. For each country, I will start by providing some background information about the country and the municipality of interest that I acquired directly on the field by living in the region. This was mainly obtained through conversations I have had with locals, but not only. As a matter of fact, I included facts and perceptions I found very interesting and relevant as a foreign researcher during my fieldwork experience in on daily. Due to the level of informality during the acquisition of



this content, the structure does not always fully adhere to the formal structure intended for the interview process: questions often expanded or were skipped. Nevertheless, I argue that there is an intrinsic relevance of the information acquired during all the interviews and for this reason they are all worthy being presented. This section will present rich information for better understanding the socio-political context where Bosnians, Croatians and Serbians live in.

After these brief introductory parts, the actual data from the interviews is formally presented. Each interviewee is introduced with a few words on their backgrounds, what they actually decided to share for this research, their roles in their societies and their views originated from their personal or work-related experiences.

## **1. Bosnia and Herzegovina**

### **1.1 Overview**

Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the Western Balkan countries where a great number of governmental and non-governmental organisations, both national and international, still operates. The international community appears to be particularly active: all embassies are very prone to take active part in the society by sponsoring projects on the field concerning education, art, and sustainability. Some other countries, such as Germany, try to create impact on more specific socio-political levels. As a matter of fact, Germany represents one of the strongest countries pursuing this objective with actual political representation in foreign countries. Through the parliamentary proportional system, each party is given a certain amount of funds to be inverted into foundations and NGOs. This unique phenomenon carries the name of *Parteinaher Stiftung* (party political foundation) and corresponds to the actual establishment of an NGO-like organisation focused on German political values following a specific party alignment. According to the composition of the German parliament, the percentages of each party obtained after national elections, means for a party to receive a certain amount of money they can channel into their respective foundations and thus pursuing projects about social and political sensibilisation. Such organisations usually take the name after renowned German politicians and operate both on local and international levels and their aim is to favour specific views concerning civic values, democracy, and national interests.

Apart from external actions, I noticed great efforts coming from private citizens too. As a matter of fact, I met many Bosnians who decided to take the initiative and to create spaces for dialogue about the most crucial aspects they suffer in their societies. As a result, I met many activists who are not actually affiliated to specific organisations but rather operate individually by trying to put a light on certain issues involving their cities.

Aside formal interviews, it was in Bosnia and Herzegovina where I was able to interact with the highest number of people on a daily basis. Even if we are safe to say that the country does not fully represent the most democratic values in the world, people actually demonstrated to be extremely open and willing to communicate their perceptions to a foreigner. Soon I detected that building connections of trust was very easy and feasible even on short periods of stay. It was for this reason that I was able to develop strong networks starting from my very first week. Conversations with locals were many and on a daily basis, and I could not help but notice that there were very common threads emerging from conversations. Among these, certainly post-war dynamics were the most predominant, however, other crucial aspects involving the current socio-political context emerged. Among these, I saw great preoccupations about security, discrimination, and clientelism.

As Ema, a young woman living in Sarajevo said: “I was born in Bosnia, I am Bosnian, soon I will get married but I don’t feel safe starting a family here and letting my children live here”. Another view was offered by Tarik, a young man originally from the northern region of the country who moved to Sarajevo for work:

Here, the majority of people, earn very little money while just a few live in luxury. I was lucky enough to find a job as a teacher in a public school, but still, I can’t figure out how I manage to reach the end of the month with 400 euros. I know an old couple, parents of a friend of mine, both retired, who make only 75 euros per month... together.

As evidenced in these two brief simple conversations, worries about life in Bosnia and Herzegovina is quite substantial and touch on a diverse range of factors involving the everyday life as well as long-term projects.

Nevertheless, not all the attempts to recall war memories were intended to draw separate lines between ethnicities. What was put in practice by the War Childhood

Museum (WCM) is to show that a strongly divisive war can actually be seen using different lenses: a common event with no focus on ideologies or ethno-national interests where people, in this specific case children, simply shared a lot. The purpose of the initial project led by Jasminko Halilović (which soon turned into a proper museum) was to create a place for mutual understanding by presenting a collection of personal belongings describing the act of growing up during the war. The ambition behind this unique format is to create a safe space to overcome past traumatic experiences with a constructive and forward-looking approach.

The collection comprises various objects like toys, photographs and objects used by children on a normal war day with a short description about the reasons why the owner feels so attached to it. Positive feelings are those that emerge most when you walk through the *služba*: even in tragic situations like wars, it seems the childhood times are those that are able to carry bright perspectives. “What we really wanted to do was to prove that memories can be far from being framed only by ethno-national values. Identity involves a much bigger variety of human aspects which cannot be reduced to such an attempt”. said to me a curator. This is why they decided to use the outcomes of this project and to continue their mission outside Bosnia and Herzegovina involving deeper identity characteristics also in other conflictual contexts. For instance, they managed to involve child refugees from the Middle East by creating ad hoc exhibitions (“*Syrian Child Refugees in Lebanon*”, “*Children en Route*”) and establishing a brand-new museum branch in Kyiv (Ukraine).

Instead, for what concerns more local dynamics, the museum contributed to various events to sensibilise the population. On the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, in 2020 the WCM organised with *Humans of Amsterdam* platform and the *Srebrenica Memorial Center* an online campaign and a physical exhibition called *#ChildrenAndGenocide*. In 2021 they managed to put together a temporary exhibition: *Speaking Out*, dedicated and co-produced with survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and children born of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through stories, video testimonies, art therapy and psychological consults, the WCM was able to reach two main objectives: create a platform to reunite CRSV victims and children born within such violence to share their experiences and, at the same time, highlight the manifold issues they continue to face in the everyday life.

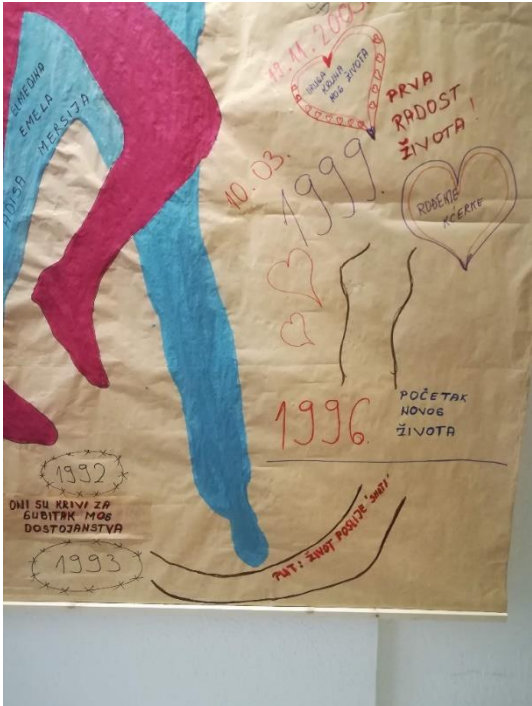


Fig. 1: A drawing representing the process of trauma elaboration of a victim of sexual violence

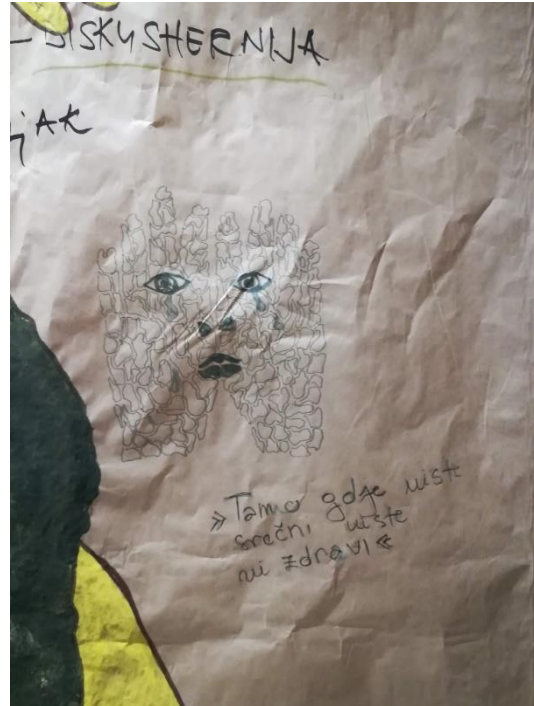


Fig. 2: “When you find the happy, you find the healthy”

Unfortunately, this has been a constant element I encountered throughout my travels around Bosnia and Herzegovina. Apart from the perspectives I was offered by literature, it was thanks to my interactions with locals and the daily life in the country that I could see with my own eyes that still nowadays war traumas continue to affect people’s life not only on a human level but also on a more societal one. This is why TRIAL International (TI) tried to fill in into this void by providing legal assistance to victims and case litigations, developing local capacity and advocating for the advancement of human rights recognition. Their oldest field office was established in the Bosnian context itself and its staff has been delivering services in the country since 2008. They specifically work with a wide range of people to favour access to justice, to end impunity, thus contributing to the establishment of transitional justice features. Among these, they work for reconciliation and reparations. People involved in their projects are generally victims of sexual violence, families of missing persons and survivors of major crimes. In addition,

as part of their activities, they created a bridge between local and international judiciary actors. When talking with TI staff about their work and challenges, two main observations arose. The first one involves that they have always detected constant blockages from the government and the constitutional court. One of the examples I was told was a declaration from 2017 concerning compensations for war victims: on that occasion, TI was told that that action was not something the government had to work on since it did not belong to its real duties. The second element that is worth mentioning is the actual absence of an institutional office supposed to work specifically on dealing with the past issues. They argue that, as a country that is still strongly based on past conflictual dynamics, not having a proper institutional structure focused on solving social interrogations about such relevant events represents a strong barrier for both citizens and NGOs working in this field.

Nevertheless, trials and reparations are not considered the only means to achieve peace in the society. Activists such as Luciano Kaluža support the idea that war-related traumas and discrimination can be solved by establishing dialogue between those who once belonged to opposite fronts. This is why in his ten-year experience he committed himself to create a safe and positive environment where former combatants met and shared their perceptions. In this way, not only do people get in touch with “the other”, the so dreaded enemy, but also they notice and comprehend the similar nature of their feelings. By establishing a common ground, war becomes less and less a taboo during daily conversations and communities can experiment emotional closeness due to mutual suffering. By laying the basis of a renewed relationship between former opponents, there seems to be a real chance for trauma and war narratives re-elaboration.

## **1.2. People stories**

### **1.2.1 Stolac**

The first thing I noticed when I arrived in Stolac was silence. Life in the streets is not very present. For much I tried to act normally by walking around to explore the area, I have been promptly identified as an outsider. Many people stared at me with questioning faces and, much more than in other locations where I did research. On that occasion, I realised the community is particularly closed, as I perceived that locals were very interested to

identify my very ethno-national belonging. When walking in the streets, many eyes from the street and from the windows were following me trying to understand my collocation within the community. Since the situation started to become slightly awkward, I decided to wore my camera on me very visibly and kept it around my neck for my entire staying in Stolac. In this way, I could send the message of being just a tourist. Attitudes changed immediately. Stolac soon demonstrated to be a deeply divided city: Croat and Bosniak communities are still nowadays very polarized and, apart from the attitudes of locals, it is particularly visible only in urbanistic terms. The Croat part is very clear: loads of Croatian flags were waving making profound statements even for foreigners. The main square of the town itself is divided: on one side you can find a Bosniak restaurant and a coffee shop while on the other part, facing a Catholic church, Croats gather in another café. The old town is constituted by a path towards the peak of a hill. At the top there are ancient ruins of a castle.



Fig. 3: View of Stolac





Fig.4: Croatian flags - urban segregation in Stolac



Fig. 5: Bosniak signs - Urban segregation in Stolac

After trying very hard to establish contacts before my travel to Stolac, I soon realised the strong difficulty to establish connections with people was visible already by just visiting the city. The community of Stolac proved to be very closed and difficult to enter. Even after having meetings in Sarajevo, Mostar, and many other places, in Stolac I found a wall in terms of creating a network. Most people I got to know told me that they did not know anybody else to suggest me talk to because there were not so many “open-minded” individuals who could accept a meeting with me to talk about collective memories. Some people tried to directly contact some of their acquaintances for me (even in my presence) with no real success: most people declined. Nevertheless, I felt very content to get to know just a few people who demonstrated to be so welcoming and helpful throughout my research. Those people I met come from different worlds: somebody comes from the educational sphere, some others from international organisations, and others are local activists. Many were the elements that came out from the meetings and I will proceed now by presenting each of them through the recounts of people.

During my fieldwork in Stolac, I had the chance to know Aida. She was born in Stolac, but during the war her family managed to send her abroad. She went to the United States and pursued her dream to study political science and get a Ph.D. After all her experiences abroad, she felt like returning to Bosnia and her native place. For a few years she worked in Sarajevo at OSCE and then she transferred to its Mostar branch. For half a year she was part of an observation team in Stolac after 2016 election turbulences. For the purposes of this research, she decided neither to share her full name nor to be recorded: she admitted not trusting Bosnians institutions and to fear handing out information. She

is aware that behind every institution there is a political party watching, and she is not sure how the data is handled. She decided to take part in this research only because I am a foreigner obtaining a PhD in a foreign university institution. For this reason, she agreed to let me take down notes during our conversation.

In terms of memory, she identified many topics that could be discussed in relation with the situation in Stolac. First of all, she argued that memory is a very broad idea. In her opinion, memory comes from the direct experiences a person had in her/his childhood. In particular, how the family is structured, and the place of belonging has still a strong impact on the present life of people. A secondary memory is linked to the past that does not necessarily reflect people's experiences. She argues that most of the memory in the area is conceived as something deeply rooted in the interpretation of history and the war. She also thinks that the political parties and the citizens themselves accept a reality completely trapped in past episode of violence. Parties make the most of such divisions since they contribute to the existing of their own position of power. On the same side, people who did not have the experiences and the opportunities to explore the world without such lenses are those who continue to feed this social structure. As such, the context is completely blocked, and no relevant steps have been made towards a normalisation of relations.

Another question linked to the concept of memory in Stolac is the presence of very ancient historical heritage. The little town has in fact some very interesting archaeological sites. One is even recognised by UNESCO and others from the National Board (stones, achropolis, old town). Even if it seems that there could be common features that involve everybody in the same ancient narratives, this is not really the case. On the contrary, each side has been trying to rewrite the heritage in its own perspective. Catholics put a huge cross on the top of the ancient castle and filled the path from the town to the ruins with Via Crucis stations. In her opinion there has been an attempt to change the already existing identity of the place. In her words:

Historically, there were no churches in the old town... but if you want to put your symbols, that has no reference to the actual past, ok, do it. But in this way, you are both creating a brand new "identity heritage" and excluding people who do not feel belonging to your same group. Thus, you are inventing new "historical facts" and creating discrimination.



In recent years there have been attempts to recreate an atmosphere of dialogue. She directly took part in the mediation process in also other Bosnian towns which experienced almost the same problematics during the war. She didn't organise conferences or huge things (she argues that these are those that only attract interest of nationalist groups) but took smaller actions such having chats and trying to earn trust from locals. She observed that huge results were achieved in all places but Stolac. According to her experience, dialogue platforms were not successful in Stolac because of a strong resistant attitude of both people and the political élite leading the town.



Fig. 6: A Christian cross at the top of the Old Town

For example, she drew attention on a project that OSCE attempted to pursue in the area. They proposed the idea to build a monument to remember the victims of violence occurred in Bleiburg (Austria) in the context of the Second World War. Not even that traumatic, that was supposed to create a common vision and sympathy about the past,

managed to create a unity. A public call was made to ask for proposals about the design of the monument.

Groups of neo-Nazi/fascists used that place to commemorate their own version of history. Even the municipality demonstrated to be against it, as of today it has been impossible to build it... apparently the only place available is next to the acropolis site, which is strongly important for the Croat community. In this way, an ethnic narrative would continue to keep power on it even if it is supposed to be a common historical fact". Same thing has been happening with the festival in honour of Mak Dizdar, a famous poet who has always written about Stolac, nature and feelings. The festival started back in the time of Yugoslavia but recently had to end the initiative: no funds were given by the municipality, parts accused each other to "steal the identity" of the poet (each side claim it either Croat or Bosniak), every year there were people getting offended by the content.

Towards the end of our meetings, we tried to draw some conclusions about the current context and potential future perspectives:

Nobody really wants to think about the past and the trauma in the daily life... but it's the system itself that obliges you to remain always there, think about the same thing. I would love our place to be full of creativity, to be able to build new memories, new common spaces... but if you live here you are stuck in this system. The only way to not be subjected to it is to leave the country. I am that close to doing the same. You could wonder: after my experiences abroad, how come I came back and here I remained? I have always hoped things changed. I see many young people with no opportunities and people who need food. I have been lucky myself to have a good position that allows me to have a good lifestyle, but many people just can't. This is the reality.

A person who could tell me something more about the above-mentioned cancelled poetry festival was Gorčin Dizdar, the grandson of the famous poet to whom the event itself is dedicated. He studied history of art and then pursued a career in tourism. After his father's death, Gorčin took over the role of organiser of the festival made in the honour of his beloved grandfather.

He told me that for many years the festival acquired great prestige in the whole region. However, in recent years, organising this event has increasingly become more and more difficult due to political and economic reasons since “everything here is divided, especially if you are against nationalism and sadly, I will have to stop organising the festival”. The municipality eliminated public funds which once were granted, so it had to become a self-funded event. Somehow, for a few years, he managed to squeeze all the expenses with very little money but now it has become unsustainable. For a long time, this event brought Stolac positive views since young and unknown poets were gathering from the whole region to think and to work together on the same literature landscape. He thinks that Stolac has always been considered relevant for media purposes only when bad things happened. He argues that even if art and poetry should be considered as transversal values that involve everybody, the dominant discourse unfortunately remains about ethnic division.

During Yugoslavia time, until 1974, in the Constitution there was no mention of ethnic communities. Then they introduced “Muslims” with the idea of the ethnic community rather the religion. Afterwards, they substituted it with the term “Bosniak”. Since my grandfather lived and worked throughout these times, he first agreed to consider his work part of Croat literature... you know, if you want to be published, you have to be one or the other. So, in recent years Croats have tried to claim him as part of his community and, from the other side, Bosniaks accused the Croat community to appropriate his identity to raise appreciation towards their community rather than the Bosniak one. Here identity is so hybrid and so instrumentalised at the same time.

He told me and anecdote:

Three years ago we had this young poet from Zenica, a Bosniak majority city. He wrote a little provocative poem about his community. One specific line created huge scandal, and this was: “mosques are appearing like mushrooms after the rain”. He won the award, our juries are always independent, famous poets and university professors... but this was considered a huge offense. A Bosniak intellectual publicly that our festival gives awards to “Islamophobic literature”. You can see how challenging organising and carrying on this festival.

Gorčin is convinced that art can be the only valuable way for improving communication channels; however, he is aware that governments are less and less interested in funding humanities.

When we talked about memorialisation in Stolac, Gorčin brought out some recent historical issues. He argued that for a long time there was a strong Bosniak community living in the area; nevertheless, today the municipality has a Croat majority. He told me that during the war, during the first months, Bosniaks and Croats fought together against Serb-Yugoslav militaries. One day Croats started to arrest all Bosniaks and put them in a concentration camp. Tortures and starvation were put into practice. Then he said, “A few years ago, some people decided to put a commemoration sign right outside that place, but the day after was immediately destroyed”.

Another person who has been working for more than ten years in Stolac is Vernes Voloder, Project Manager at Nansen Dialogue Center, an NGO based in Mostar. “Politicians know very well how to manipulate historical narratives and trigger emotions from people. Nationalist parties claim themselves as the only one who can protect national interests; however, safety and people wellbeing are not priorities and post-war ethnic hostilities remain the focal point of election campaigns”. Talking on a national level, he told me about the huge problem of corruption. Especially in the public sector (but not only), political parties assign job posts to their affiliates. In that way, they always maintain a clear idea of how many votes they have in certain areas. Also, he told me that in cases where they realise, they need more votes to remain in power, they go directly to the people they made hire and ask if they have adult sons or daughters that need a job in exchange of party support. This happens with all ethno-nationalist parties.

Vernes told me his work in Stolac firstly started from local schools. He admitted that, at the beginning, it was extremely difficult to pursue projects about dialogue and inclusion. “Their high school represents a black hole in the whole education system” he admitted. During the returning process after the war, social environment was still deeply wounded, and this resulted also in fights between young people. Originally the school was run by Croats, however, for the local administration, if there is a percentage of more than twenty percent of another “ethnicity”, you have to create another study curricula for those pupils belonging to the other community. So, since then, the school is divided and

young people attend school in different shifts: Croats go to school in the morning, Bosniaks in the afternoon. In 2008 Nansen Dialogue Centre approached the school principal and asked to organise workshops with students to increase opportunities for dialogue and integrated education activities.

The ambition was encouraging schools' actors to transform positive ideas about integration into the community itself on a social perspective. After treating together certain topics and acquiring specific tools about peaceful coexistence, students could go out from school and spread all these values.

Throughout the years, more and more people were involved in the projects and now the school raised very good practices on how to deal with ethnically segregated schools in a fragile context. The project raised so many good practices that the organisation decided to implement them also in other ten Bosnian schools.

Huso Razić is a teacher and deputy director of Stolac high school. He promptly said to be very proud about his school since it cannot be considered as a “two schools under one roof” case. Then he explained me the difference between the actual “two schools under one roof” type and their own settlement: in the first case, there are two different secretaries, therefore two administrations, two different institutional names of the schools and even two different entrances. This is the case, for example, of Stolac's elementary school. In this way, children are intended never to meet the other community, not even when they enter school or leave the building after classes. In his opinion, the case of the high school is much different: the school is just one, it has one name and only one entrance but before enrolling you can decide which curriculum to be enrolled in.

The main differences concern: the use of language, the study of history, and music. When I asked him why music is considered such a sensitive subject that needs to be studied with different perspectives, he said that in Bosnia and Herzegovina music is strictly considered as a strong part of local folklore and is much linked to the cultural spheres of each community. Also in this way, they intend to preserve each community's identity. Nevertheless, he feels very optimistic about the current situation in Stolac. He said that ten years ago, before he started working in that school, he was told that there had been many incidents between students, in particular fights between different communities during the change of shifts. Just before he started to work there, the Head of the School

had to impose one spare hour between the exit and the entrance of the two different curricula in order to avoid confrontations between students belonging to the Croat and Bosniak communities.

In recent years, his school managed to take successful actions to promote inclusivity. Thanks to the determination of staff, and the financial support from various organisations, they were always able to organise workshops and trips in which students have been literally trained to interact with each other. In terms of Bosnian schooling regulations, there is some general control over education from the centralised government, however, most of the things are devolved to cantons. This is why Stolac high school developed a margin of freedom to organise such activities. For what concerns funding, unfortunately, there are no contributions neither from the state nor the municipality. Thus, most of the activities are then carried out with the only support of organisations, both local and foreign.

He then told me an anecdote: the first year he participated in an exchange trip to Norway as an accompanying professor, he was very worried. Only a little time after the last incidents between students had passed and because there was some apparent quietude, he was very scared that bad events could occur on the trip under his supervision. On the very first day, when they had to meet at the airport, he noticed immediately that students from each community were physically standing at a distance, one group from the other. "At that time, I thought "Good, if the trip starts in this way... go figure how will continue for another 7 days!". Then, they all jumped on the flight, and again, they automatically located themselves respectively in the two plain wings.

Huso and the other professor participating in the exchange realised that for many of them, it was the very first time they were on a plain; thus, they thought to use this common experience to create a communication bridge between students. So, since it was a closed environment and they realised everybody was experiencing the same fears/emotions, they audaciously decided to oblige the students to randomly mix up in order to share with other fellows their perceptions about that experience. The students did it. At first, nobody was even looking at each other but then, thanks to this new situation of being all together on board, they shyly started talking about the trip to each other. That was the way they managed to create a slight sense of unification within the group. In the following days, that was when the students had to meet their fellow Norwegian students,

the group division started to change: on one side Norwegian there were and, on the other, there were all the students coming from Stolac. This made Huso reflect on the actual perception of personal identity, groups, and “the other”: it is always very relative. In the end, the trip went smoothly, and everybody enjoyed it very much.

From that time on, the Stolac high school managed to establish cooperation agreements with various European institutions. At the moment, they have one with Germany, one with Norway and another one with Spain. Apart from trips and meetings with other foreign students, they also managed to organise other activities concerning the urban redevelopment of common urban areas (such as benches, and parks) and theme groups. These always carry the idea of inclusion and contrasting hate speech together.

When I asked him if it is difficult to involve students in such projects, he said that they actually manage to have students participating all the time. In his opinion, the responsiveness of students is high and also families are happy about their sons doing interesting stuff. During the pandemic everything went online, but now projects are re-starting in person and this is creating bridges between communities once again.

Talking with a professor has been particularly relevant for getting a better understanding of local schooling sector. Therefore, I thought it could be interesting to get to know also somebody standing from the other side of teacher’s desk. Luka Džakula is a young man born in Stolac. He soon identified himself as a member of the Croat community and even if in the local schools he has always pursued his studies within the Croatian curricula, he does not believe in ethnic categories. As a matter of fact, most of his friends belong to other communities and he often took part in many projects concerning intercultural dialogues organised by his high school teachers. “People always want to highlight the dark sides of my town. I think that in recent years things has improved” said with frustration when we first approached the topic of memories. In his opinion, the younger generations are those with real tools to go beyond a past of hatred. In particular, he identified the great role sport has had in his life as a Bosnian and citizen of Stolac: “Pursuing my passion for basketball made me know and live with other communities. I would never hurt or hate one of my friends”.

When I asked him how he would define socio-political instability, he promptly pointed out one crucial element:

The problem in this town is not the division between communities but rather the lack of jobs. I know this is a pretty common situation in the whole country but here... very much. Many years ago, this area was full of factories, so everybody was working. You know... now, when you don't have a job, you find yourself all day at home and you can only try to find who to blame for living that condition. Stolac isn't stable because there is no work.

Then, I asked him how powerful memories are in his opinion, he answered that he was only two years old when the war started, so he does not have direct memories of it, however, he argued that politicians are those that "use people and their emotions to be on top for long time". "Knowing the war only through family recounts or documentaries does not turn you into a person who actually lived it and face it every day for years. This means that we can move forward as other European countries did after the Second World War or Czechoslovakia with its peaceful division", he added. The conversation then moved to the potential reasons why people maintain themselves polarised and lack of interaction. He blamed schooling segregation; however, he pointed out the location of residence and current communication tools.

I have been lucky, my neighbourhood is very mixed. Maybe if I lived in another one, I would think differently. Also, the internet connects us in other ways than politicians would like for us. I knew so many people from around the region, even from Serbia. I have this dear friend from there who I met online years ago and soon I'll be attending his wedding.

He identified himself as very open, always very connected to all people, thus different from "the others". When I asked him who are those people he identifies as *the others*, he said that "There are people, especially coming from the neighbouring villages, that are full of hate. Villages were the first to be destroyed, and war crimes were perpetrated so still nowadays are very resentful". At that point I asked him if he ever found himself in the position of not being trusted since he is a friend also of people *from the other side* and he answered "well, not really... but I have been asked "how can you be friend with them?" and I have always answered "tell me, how are they different?".



During my fieldwork in Stolac, I had the opportunity to meet and get to know a very well-known person both on a local and national level. He identifies himself as an activist but for many people, he is considered a controversial personality. As a matter of fact, his name often comes out when referring to the ballot disorders occurred in Stolac during local elections in 2016, and from that time on he is aware he carries a label. For taking part in the action of damage and contrast of the election procedures, he was condemned to one year and a half of prison. His name is Demir Mahmutćehajić. He was very happy to meet me and recount to me his perceptions about the current situation in Stolac.

According to the data he provided, in 1992 all Bosniak inhabitants were expelled. Stolac was completely ethnically cleansed by Croatian armed forces from all non-Croats. Excluding the original Croat composition of the society which was around 60%, fluxes of Croats from central Bosnia finally reached over 75%.

All mosques were levelled to the ground and all men were put into concentration camps. My father was there for eleven months out of which he was put in solitary confinement for another four months in a place. There, he had his legs in the water up high to his knees. Everything that resembled the Muslim religion was destroyed, firstly with dynamites and later with fire. It was a ghost town and still today is a root of tensions.

Then he told me the story behind the main Catholic church that stands out when walking in the streets of the town. He told me that, in pre-war times, it never existed in that specific place, that is next to the main square of the city. At a certain point, the municipality started a process of privatisation of public places. In that location there was a supermarket: a private citizen acquired it but after being subjected to certain contract obligations. After five years, since this person did not respect any of them, he could do nothing but give it as a gift to the Catholic Church, which then decided to turn it into its main dioceses. Then, they also built a huge cross on the top of the hill and recently created all the stations of a via crucis. “What they have been doing in recent years is falsifying history” he argued. In his view, the general Catholic idea in the area is that they believe Muslims were responsible for killings them during the Ottoman Empire.

Truth is that it was an Empire and that meant strong behaviours towards everybody, it was not a question of religious fight. So, also today, they still think that Muslims are against every other religion that is not theirs but it's not true. Like every other empire, Ottomans wanted you to pay taxes, to obey to rules, get your harvest and strengthen the empire. My own ancestors fought with other Bosnians against the Ottoman rule, it was not a question of religion. Very high-ranking individuals were not even Muslim but here what counts for current nationalists is finding a narrative that would trap the members of their community and this works perfectly.



*Fig. 8 and Fig. 9: Via Crucis stations along the path to the Old Town*

When I asked him if division existed before the war he said:

This kind of situation was non-existent because there was no democracy. The previous system was running in a completely different way. What we live today is the exact result of war and today peace is only apparent, we are just in a ceasefire. War is carrying on without guns, every community is keeping its territory and tries to find the opportunity for ruling it with political power.

Then he added that, in his opinion, there is no unifying approach to democracy in the whole Bosnia and Herzegovina. So, we proceed talking about the electoral systems, and he highlighted some deficiencies, especially when it comes to managing ballots. He argues that those are particularly subjected to corruptive actions since everything is in the

hand of the commission at the ballot stations: if the majority of it is affiliated with HDZ and you are not, you won't be able to access documentation and see transparently the practices in use. This means that they can choose and assign how many votes they want, and this is why they keep having the majority.

In terms of memorialisation, he affirms that...

Before the war, there were many monuments dedicated to antifascism but most of them were blown up during the war and that time could be actually considered as unifying the peoples. The municipality decided to remove all past heritage regarding totalitarianism, this is why they do not exist anymore. We have new monuments. One about the commemoration of Croat and Bosniak soldiers respectively but this is more a competition, there is no healing process.”

### **1.2.2 Prijedor**

Like in other locations, it was very difficult to find connections who could feel open to talk. Eventually, thanks to some contacts I made between Sarajevo and Mostar, I managed to arrange a few meetings with locals. I was pre-emptively advised not to stay directly in Prijedor for the strong closure of its society but to find accommodation in Banja Luka and commute by bus. The very first element I noticed about the city before even jumping off the bus the first time I visited the town was a very high number of graffiti and murals. In fact, I later discovered that Prijedor is also called the *City of Murals*. While some of them represent very beautiful artistic drawings, many others instead refer to war-time narratives, in particular from Serb perspectives.

A massive drawing (see below) welcomes everybody who enters the city: a celebrative map of Republika Srpska with the term “Bastion sprstva” in Cyrillic alphabet espousing the ideas of territorial nationalism and Serbianism. Murals appear to be much more linked to memorialisation in comparison to the presence of actual monuments. As a matter of fact, just by walking in the street, it becomes clear that official memorial sites are very few and those that have been approved on a municipal level and exist are very biased or consider only a one-way historical narrative.

The first people I managed to interact with were Nikolija and Isidora from KVART and Edin Ramulić, a local activist focused on gathering information about war events and organising projects strengthening dealing with the past issues. They were the first ones to introduce me to local dynamics and to provide me with general background information about the local context. They told me that the local situation is not among the best ones in Bosnia Herzegovina as people perceive a strong lack of freedom of expression. They usually organise projects for youth, and they told me that many of the young people they worked with asked them for total discretion as they fear their families and other people to discover they had been attending workshops on peace and human rights.



*Fig. 10: Graffiti at the entrance of Prijedor*

They also confessed to me that KVART staff has been repeatedly subjected to numerous threats by nationalist groups as well as private citizens. Nevertheless, they continue with their work. They hope that working for the society and being publicly exposed might

produce deterrence in case somebody intends to do something bad against them and the organisation.

Another crucial meeting I had in the area was with Sudbin Musić. He was born in Prijedor (Čarakovo) and for our interview, he welcomed me at his house while he and his family were having a gathering with friends. He is a Bosniak peace activist and during the war, he lost forty-four members of his large family. When not taking care of his sick mother, he is committed to raising awareness and to creating public discussions on the topic of human rights in Bosnia and, more specifically in Republika Srpska. He considers his country a “black hole in the heart of Europe, the graveyard of Western democracies” but apart from his deeply destabilising life experiences, somehow, he managed to find the strength to remain in his town “because I see potentialities in this place and I know that deep down Bosnians are good people”.

When talking about people’s insecurity and social perceptions he said:

Nobody feels free in Bosnia and Herzegovina, not even Serbs of Republika Srpska. Sometimes I have the feeling that Serbs are even more afraid we, the other Bosnians. They are more dependent; they must follow all the rules if they want to have a job and live a normal life in that society.

We went on talking about the level of resilience of Bosnian society: “If you don’t have money, you don’t go in streets to fight for ethnic integration, human rights or any other idea such as like gender equality... many people will continue to be discriminated because of this lack of resources that make people interested only on their daily needs”. When referring to collective memories, he said that memory is a misused political tool:

An example of this was when in 2012 Marko Pavić was running for mayor and he needed something to increase the number of votes. He decided to attack us [Bosniaks] because it was useful for his political campaign: he gave public statements denying the genocide in Srebrenica, something like ‘Republika Srpska never had genocides on its territories etc. etc...’.

Instead, when talking about monuments in Prijedor he mentioned two peculiar situations: one is Omarska camp, which was among the most horrific concentration camps in Europe,

now is private property owned by Mittal Steel: “If I want to go there and pay respect to my killed family members, I have to ask for the permission.”; the other is *Tomašica*, one of the largest mass graves in Europe: “It doesn’t have any sign outside the area. Here everything is very closed, you have empty places that try to tell you stories from the past”. Talking about the present situation, he proved to be very worried and hopeless. He mentioned the crisis started by Milorad Dodik, who advanced the first steps toward secession:

They said something about a peaceful independence... I don’t know how peaceful it could be. We really don’t know what to do but I am sure that, if clashes start again, I will be among the first ones to be attacked... we are afraid, I have always been very active, people know me, visibility is not positive in this society.

After our meeting, Sudbin made me a tour of the village. Originally it counted around 2,400 citizens people living there, today is completely desolate.

In one day, we lost 413 of them in one day. Me and my brother were the only two male survivors of this place... I was seventeen years old at that time and, in a two-month time, when I turned eighteen, I was in a concentration camp. I officially became an adult at that time but still, all I thought about was that all my schoolmates were killed.

For what concerns other local organisations, I managed to establish contact with Sladja who works for *Progetto Prijedor*. Before visiting her office, she showed me around the city centre and, more specifically, the results of the projects brought about by funds from the association, an Italian NGO based in Trentino – Alto Adige region giving funds for activities in the area and supporting Prijedor’s society. She told me their main aim is maintaining communication between Trento and Prijedor institutions with various strategies. The most common is working on student and worker exchanges and emissions of microcredit and lost funds to local farms. However, the most important type of activity they carry on is a programme of remote trust. When we talked, she told me that in that moment, they had a hundred and fifty Italian donors who, every four months, were giving money to support families from Prijedor.

Before Coronavirus, the director used to travel to Prijedor once every month accompanied by some of the people who were participating in the programme to assign the funds and organising side activities. This money directly went to families not just for food or other primary needs but also for home remodeling projects. Another project involved cooperation with local women: they used to sew and make handmade objects which would then be sold in the markets in Trento. Their choice is to avoid war-talks but rather work on poverty reduction and societal development.

We actually spoke in Italian the whole time, since she knows it very well and it resulted to be the most comfortable language to use, especially when walking in the streets and talking about war issues. She thinks that no project like urban redevelopment, art, and financial aid to families can really help a divided society. She does not give much credit to all those kinds of activities *to make people talk to each other and force dialogue*. In her opinion, these activities do not really help wounded societies since trauma continues to resurface in a repeated ways and no real success emerges from them: “At the end of the day, people just want to live happily in a nice place and do not have worries about putting together lunch and dinner”.

After showing me a few murals made by local artists financed, she brought me to a green area called *Park Oslobođenja* (Park of Freedom) to show me the results of another project: the restoration of an ancient well whose origins are still nowadays very clear. She told me “Even if today wells are not in use anymore, it symbolises the origins of this city and, by extension, the fact that there were people who have always lived here from very old times”. While she was talking to me, my attention was drawn to also a huge granite block in the shape of a cross a few meters from us.

Right when she was telling me about the story of how the association managed to give funds for the renovation, it occurred a peculiar situation. Sladja received a phone call, she switched to Bosnian, but thanks to my language skills, I was able to understand what was actually happening. Somebody called her out of curiosity since this person could see her, at that exact moment, talking to somebody who was not from Prijedor. She answered, “Yes, it’s a friend of mine from Italy so I am showing her the city”. They said goodbye to each other and turned off the phone call. Then she told me very calmly “I am so sorry, it was a person I know who called me to know whom I was with... since he works for the municipality, that building over there, he recognised me through the



window and saw we were talking. What a good eye he has!”. The building was on the opposite side of the Park, at about a hundred meters from where we were.

After this odd situation, we returned to our topic: the ancient well. At that point, I remembered my curiosity about the other monument laying a couple of meters further from us. She told me that was a very important and solemn monument for the Serb community since it remembers the soldiers who lost their life for the creation of Republika Srpska during the war. So, I thought I could walk and stop in front of it to take a picture but she took my arm to point me in another direction. Very quietly she said, “*We don’t want people to know what we think... what’s our alignment...*”. After some later research, I discovered the monument is named “*For the Holy Cross*” and, as she said, it forms part of a strong nationalist memorial for all the fallen Serb soldiers in the Prijedor area during the latest conflict. I manage to take a picture anyway from a bit further away.



Fig. 10: A close-up view of Prijedor ancient well and the Serb nationalist monument on the background



After these two interesting moments of our meeting, everything else went very smoothly. We continued our tour of the city and she decided to share with me some personal views. I asked her about the division of communities: the city centre is more mixed while outer areas are more ethnically segregated. She said that in the last few years, she noticed a “*going back to origins*” approach. On one hand, some people say that communism ruined the country so it is necessary to go back and live in a more religious way, on the other hand, it is visible that there are more veils on women than in Yugoslavia:

In the 80’ you weren’t used to see anybody wearing it, now instead everybody is very religious. It’s true that at that time there was communism, but religion was not formally prohibited. It was a limitation in case you wanted to pursue a full career in politics or reach high ranks level... otherwise nobody cared if you were religious or not. There were many criticalities during the Yugoslav era but now it’s a complete disaster.

She is very against the “intercultural” approach in Bosnia and Herzegovina because she assumes that everybody is exactly the same and religious diversities do not mean being “culturally different”. “Our Muslim are not, for example, Arabs... they are just Bosnian like everybody else here”.

She briefly talked about her origins. She was born in Sanski Most, a town thirty kilometers from Prijedor. She and her family arrived in Prijedor during the war but then decided to settle.

My father found a job here, my brother wanted to attend an electrotechnical school, so it was more comfortable here... then also, in our old house, all neighbours changed. They all came from different parts of Bosnia, so it was a completely different city at that point... but let’s say, Muslims did not prohibit us to go back to our home, it was more a question of opportunities. It’s true that also politics changed: Muslims aimed at returning to their homes, Serbs went on with the idea of going all to RS.

Then she added some personal perceptions:

When the war broke, I was fourteen years old. At that time, I felt I was grown up. Now thinking back to that time, I absolutely say I was not grown up at all, I was still a kid. I can say I started living when we settled here in Prijedor. I don't even have any picture of me before my fourteen years old... it's like I had never lived before that time.

Then, she went back to telling me about the activities pursued by the association where she works. Their first aim is maintaining communication between Trento and Prijedor through different perspectives: student and worker exchanges, emissions of microcredit and lost funds to local farms. However, the most important activities they carry on are remote trust programmes:

Currently we have a hundred and fifty people who give 140 euro every four month to support families from Prijedor. Before Coronavirus, the director used to travel to Prijedor once every month accompanied with some of the people who was participating in the programme to assign the funds and organising side activities”.

The money is directly given to families not only for food or other primary needs but also for home remodeling projects. Another project was about cooperation with local women: handmade objects made by them are sold in the markets in Trento.

Zoran was born in 1987 in Lamovica, a small village 20 km from Prijedor. He is a Ph.D. candidate in Memory Studies at Justus Liebig University Giessen and his project is focused on memory and labour within the context of post-socialist transformation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Talking about memories and socio-political instability for him represents one of the constants in his work as well as in his life as a Bosnian citizen. He argues that Prijedor represents a deeply iconic site for memories and dealing with the past issues: the use of excessive violence (which constituted over 3000 thousand killed in just a couple of months), the widespread destruction, and all forms of imprisonment. Prijedor's community was deeply scattered in all possible ways, but somehow it managed to rebuild itself. He highlighted the high number of registered returnees in comparison to other Bosnian realities. Nevertheless, even if it proved to be a very good example of reintegration, in the past five-six years, the context has started to deteriorate again. Many

people now feel insecure: pro-Serb politics of Republika Srpska and nationalist commemorative practices are fomenting toward polarised war time narratives.

“There is a strong denial and censorship culture within Bosnian Serb political élites” and this did not favour the a serene environment. “Serb politicians try to keep a one-sided narrative of war”, so fights over monuments persist in Kozarac, a little village right outside Prijedor; they have to build their own monument celebrating Serb paramilitaries; the construction of other two remembering the victims in Omarska camp and child victims were not allowed. The former mayor always made coalitions with Bosnjaks or SDA so he showed to be cooperative between the Serb and Bosniak communities, both on a daily and institutional level.

When I asked him about socio-political instability in the Prijedor area he advanced the idea of a two-phase situation: some achievements were reached during Marko Pavić administration who ruled the city for over a decade. Somehow, he managed to create a stable alliance with other minorities. “During his era, a lot of business opened, Bosniak diaspora came back... they were able to raise awareness about what happened in Prijedor, there was open discussion”. On the contrary, he argues that there has always been instability on other fronts. “When Tomašica was discovered, he went to the place and said that he claimed he didn’t know anything about it. At that point an appearance of instability started again”. He created a commission for the investigation of war crimes in the area. However, in Zoran’s opinion, that action was intended only to create a platform in order to publicly justify or neglect certain violent episodes that occurred in the past.

When Pavić finally left his office, a group of young chetniks/Serb nationalists formed in Prijedor and settled there. Ultras and children of veterans, radical right-wing, mostly Serbs who are active in denying. This pact was broken when Pavić retired and the struggle for power continued.

Now Dodik has the majority in the Assembly, people misread war events, and people started being vocal going in Bosniak communities. This escalated on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2022, when they organised a military parade in the streets of Banja Luka and a demonstration in Prijedor singing out loud in honour of war criminals: As Zoran recalls, “On that day I felt disgusted by their actions. People are being retraumatised and feels

insecure”. When talking about socio-political instability, Zoran brought attention to the nationalistic tendencies of Milorad Dodik’s political strategies:

Now the country is deeply unstable... not because the Bosniak community does not cooperate with the Serb majority but it’s because of a lack of a general sense of security, ongoing retraumatisation processes and the mere fact of reliving again negative things belonging to the past. Milorad Dodik’s regime has invested so much in revisionism: the ‘Commission for Srebrenica’ was an apologetic document for what happened and to make people aware of what happened in the past. He and his entourage managed to publicly deny it. Then, another issue is the 9<sup>th</sup> of January: before it was just a regular “party” but from 2012 Dodik started to arrange proper parades and brought more and more attention to it. He started going against the Constitutional Court, he is now pursuing secession. Yes, there is wartime discourse on the actual instability. There has been escalation on many levels but the attempt to rewrite history and proposing Serb-only narratives is causing general distress.

As a researcher in the field of social sciences and a Bosnian citizen, he added a few considerations on what steps could be taken to improve the society: “The problem it’s not that there are the same people in politics but rather that there are always the same ideas and dialectics from last time. We would definitely need a reorganisation of Bosnia, a new electoral law, modifications to the constitutions”. He added that Bosnians were now living through one of biggest crises post-war. In his opinion, there are real concerns about security and safety of citizens:

I am worried about potential escalations starting from ultras occupying street. I am worried about Bosniaks and Croats living in RS. Everything is so volatile these days... I am mostly worried about individuals who haven’t much support from the institutions, I am worried about the very divisive discourses and rhetoric that are taking over in every aspect of the daily life. It’s like a disease: it managed to affect all levels of the society and provoked high polarisation in the political life of the country. I know people are really worried since most of the people I know are starting to think where to move in the other parts of the country or even abroad.

During my fieldwork in the area, I managed to arrange a meeting also with two other individuals who are based in Banja Luka, but working or having some relationship with Prijedor. The first one, Aleksander Žolja, works at the Helsinki Parliament and for many years he has been in the field of peacebuilding and human rights in Republika Srpska. Most of the activities and project pursued by his organisation are outside Banja Luka: he said there is no real response in that city. The most difficult issue is to access is the educational sphere:

It's very tough to find responsive teachers as well as schools willing to provide the authorisation to operate on topics related to intercultural dialogue and peaceful coexistence. Also, local institutions are difficult to approach and projects are usually not approved.

One of the most interesting aspects that I noticed during our interview, held in a local coffee shop, was the presence of a huge line outside the Serbian Embassy. He explained to me that all citizens of RS have the opportunity to request Serbian citizenship. By having that, they can access to grants, financial aid, and other social supports just for being Serbs living in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Being Bosnians do not make them less Serbs for Serbian politics

One of their latest projects about dealing with the past is called *living library*. It involved the presence of a few people belonging to different communities who decided to share their life experiences with the aim of fighting discrimination and prejudices. All communities were involved and participated in a visual interview, so everybody can autonomously access it. The selected participants fall into the following categories: a guy who lost 29 family members, war prisoner, war veteran, former drug addicted, a woman who lost a brother, a war veteran, a cancer survivor. All these stories are intended to raise awareness of common issues that happened during the war to let people feel unified. He admitted that this project was impossible to bring it in schools and public places in Republika Srpska but only in the Federation.

All funds come from abroad, no money is offered by national resources. This causes consequences on a local level:

We are always accused to be betrayers, foreign cheaters.

When I asked him about memory and socio-political instability, he told me that war memories are constant elements in the country and there is not so much you can do about it as a citizen. However, he thinks that the main problem is the use people make of such memories. In his own words:

...it is once again being used by political élites and media to reach their own interests to divert the attention from more important things such as corruption and the actual wellbeing of people.

He thinks that people who fall for these “traps” are those without a job or a role in the society:

All the others just work together, and live normally without problems... it’s just politics and media that want blood, definitely not positive news.

He also added that people are afraid about potential escalation in the country. He does not expect military confrontations like 1992 something less impacting but still conflictual such as riots or minor incidents. Also, people do not feel secure since police does not truly protect citizens and institutions misuse citizens’ information. It is very hard to accuse misbehaviour of policemen or any other institutional actors as they are all connected to each other, and they will always win on every trial.

The other person I met chose not to be personally identified in this research. She was born in Istočno Sarajevo (a part of Sarajevo inhabited mainly by Serbs and formally located in Republika Srpska), she graduated and had her PhD at the University of Sarajevo. She worked for the Human Rights university department of the same university as project assistant but then moved to Banja Luka. She is said she is technically Serb but consider herself completely different from the mainstream: she isn’t nationalist, she is politically left-wing oriented, and she is atheist.

She argues that post-conflict memories shape the behaviour of societies. She identified both positive and negative effects of it. On one hand, there is a willingness to remedy past issues and work to improve things; on the other hand, there is the production of fear by media and political actors, especially the three major nationalist parties:

They have always worked on policies based on fear. They started this in the immediate post-war until today. They made war to continue without actual guns to keep their positions and money flows.

When we approached the topic on instability, she told me that one of its causes is clientelism: to access most of public offices and get a job, you must have a political party affiliation. Eventually you are assigned there to pursue the interests of that party. Practically all of them act following this pattern but the most common link for affiliation is ethnicity of belonging. She told me she is among the rare cases of public employed citizens without a structured political back-up, and this is why she feared repercussions for being fully identified through this interview. Another aspect she mentioned when referring to instability is what she called *the invented crisis*: these represent ad-hoc escalations that are needed to feed political campaigns, such is the case of a potential secession of Republika Srpska.

She showed strong preoccupations about the militarisation of the police force. After the wave of protests from the 2014 (the *Justice for David*<sup>195</sup> case), municipalities have increasingly added funds for police equipment. Consequently, people are less incentivised to participate in public gatherings. Police has proved to be very violent towards protesters, so people are more and more afraid to take part in public actions.

Then, we moved to financial inequality as a source of instability. She told me that the reason why prices are very high for Bosnians. That is mainly given by two reasons: the first one is the corruption bubble, the second is the presence of a rural economy. As a matter of fact, even if a family does not receive a proper salary, if they work the land they receive “products” that anyway have a monetary value that impact of the overall economic system.

Finally, I met another person, whose full identity will be adapted pseudonym of Adnan. He was born in Prijedor and spent his own life in constant migration, firstly within Bosnia and later on also in other European countries. He said:

...maybe this has represented a way to escape from traumas and sufferance.

---

<sup>195</sup> See Danijela Majstorović “*Justice for David, Justice for All of Us: A Story of Two Bodies*”, in *Discourse and Affect in Postsocialist Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Palgrave, 2021, pp. 147-183

Eight members of his closest family were killed during the war, included his father. He and his brother were just boys and managed to be part of an exchange of prisoners with Serbs. His grandfather was a *hadži*, a person that back in the time went on a pilgrimage to La Mecca. This gave him an important status within his community. In addition, he owned a popular bakery in the town. Unfortunately, these two aspects gave him and his family too much visibility and consequences were soon negative: they were among the first victims. With typical Bosnian humour, he said:

If there was a World Guinness for the number of processed people for war crimes, Prijedor would certainly win the first prize.

At that point, I asked him how important is prosecuting perpetrators to reach conciliation. His answer was as follows:

For much I care about finding my father and his remains, since I am a believer, I am convinced I can reach him through praying God. This is the most effective way to connect with him, and this is why I avoid considering the mourning process as the main engine. For this reason, I think it is essential to find a connection with the legal aspect of our societies, thus prosecuting criminals. This won't bring my father back nor will give me a connection with him, I already have it through prayers... but it will create a precedent that will help to prevent other people to commit the same crime.

Aside his main profession, for many years he has been working in the field of peacebuilding. He observed that in Bosnia communities are still strongly biased and each of them behold their main narrative. One of the strongest examples he could think of is the monument for the children victims in the siege of Sarajevo (*Spomenik ubijenoj djeci Sarajeva*). At least two of them belonged to the local Serb community were killed, however, their names were not included in the monument erected in the centre of Sarajevo, a city that should represent values of interculturality, very often aligns itself with Bosniak values only. Also, in other cases inclusive monuments were not welcomed not by the local community neither the municipality. That is the case of Prijedor where some activists, working together in a consortium with a number of organisations, tried to



carry on a petition to create a similar monument dedicated to all child victims of the area. Years have passed and political obstructions never ended.

I remained in touch with Adnan. In August 2022, he was happy to share with me the news that he managed to have a huge part in organising a very important initiative for Prijedor. Called “Where are they?” (*Gdje je?*), it was conceived to bring attention to the topic of missing persons. Thanks to the contributions of the ICRC delegation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he managed to access to the official and verified number of missing people and create an event far from rhetorical manipulations. The event took the shape of an exhibition: without ethnical discrimination, all names of people that still nowadays have not been found have been projected on the wall of the main square in Banja Luka and for every name there was one minute of silence. In this way, the projection went on for five and a half days and this sent the powerful of how big the problem is. He added:

If we remained in silence for one minute for every name, we would not speak for almost a whole week.

In this initiative there has been also the attempt to solve the existence of a strong dualism between the victim and the perpetrator. As a matter of fact, remembering soldiers is often associated with the role of a hero, while civilians do not carry this further identification.

When it comes to remembering missing persons this duality doesn't work because a person can have multiple roles in a conflict, even at the same time. A soldier, at some point, is a hero and saves lives... but at another, this person can be a war criminal. The exhibition “Gdje je” went beyond this. It was not about someone's role in the war but rather a confrontation with the public and a call to solve missing person's cases.

When I asked him how difficult was putting together this project and his life experiences he said:

To work on the 'humanitarian level' and transcend the duality of someone's role in the war was a painful process for me having in mind that members of my family are still missing. This trauma will be present in my family for generation to come. I

know that I have to accept the trauma and take it as something for my personal grow, an opportunity to choose what to do with this experience.

## **2. Croatia**

### **2.1 Overview**

The Croatian fieldwork experience resulted being particularly smooth, since access to communities was much easier than in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Even if people were equally open and helpful, it was immediately clear that in Croatia individuals have less fear of any social, political and work repercussion for taking part in this project. This ensured more freedom of expression, more contributions and overall data accessibility. Finding people to talk to was very easy, even on a short time notice - in Bosnia I had to work harder to draw attention for the project. As usual, my aim was getting in touch with people working for non-profit organisations as well as people from academia and private citizens. Travels were easier too and more secure both on a personal and logical points of view.

Nevertheless, even though the country appears to be more open and less subjected to war memories, you just need make a little scratch on the surface to see the existence of strong legacies. As a matter of fact, nowadays war continue to have impacts on the current Croatian society. The country has increasingly given space to nationalistic ideologies within their democratic system, visible already in the term “homeland war” (*domovinski rat*) that is what they use to identify the Nineties’ conflict. When watching TV, at all times of the day, you can come across programs about Croatian war veterans’ experiences, mostly pointing the finger against Serbs and Serb paramilitaries and condemning their actions.

There is a considerable number of commemorations that take place to remember Croat soldiers who lost their life during the war, and it is very easy to find monuments about that part of the Croatian history when walking in the streets. Neither the relatively different war dynamics with Bosnia and Herzegovina nor the entrance in the European Union that somehow managed to mitigate the raise of nationalism and ethnic segregation in the country. As a matter of fact, in the last two decades, life of minorities in Croatia, in

particular Serbs and Roma, has increasingly become more and more difficult. Discrimination and hate speech are commonplace in daily life and, as a consequence, a considerable number of NGOs started operating in the field of human rights, dealing with the past issues, and reconciliation. These social dynamics involve many parts of the country, not just the “contentious territories” of Eastern Slavonia.

Branka, from the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR), admitted being very worried for the raise on nationalism in the country. In her opinion the European context did not succeed in diverting the nationalistic trend Croatia developed since the end of the latest conflict. She sees some resemblance with the ambiguous role of Hungary in Europe and its tendency for illiberal politics. Then, she mentioned to me a very peculiar case happened a few years ago. On the occasion of the unveiling of a statue representing Franjo Tuđman in Zagreb, a former combatant was arrested and incarcerated after he shouted from the crowd that Franjo Tuđman was a war criminal<sup>196</sup>. “This is very worrying, because this is supposed to be a liberal democracy where the respect of human right and freedom of expression should be at its foundations” she said.

Since its foundation in 2003, YIHR has been fighting for these values besides justice, accountability, equality and peace through the power of youth and the strengthening of its network in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. She added:

Even if it seems a peaceful society, there are still a lot of work to do.

Croatian war narratives represent the dominant aspect of national politics, and this creates direct consequences on the approaches of citizens towards minorities, especially those coming from a Serbian background. This is why a conspicuous number of civil society organisations started to operate in area with the purpose of preserving Serbian culture and

---

<sup>196</sup> See IndexHR, Čovjek koji je vikao da je Tuđman zločinac ispričao svoju stranu priče, 12th of December 2018, available at: <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/covjek-koji-je-vikao-da-je-tudjman-zlocinac-ispricao-svoju-stranu-price/2049423.aspx>; Oslobodjenje, Čovjek koji je napadnut jer je rekao “Tuđman zločinac” Plankoviću uzviknuo: Kako te nije sram dizati spomenik ovome zločinu?, 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2018, available at: <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/region/covjek-koji-je-napadnut-jer-je-rekao-tudman-zlocinac-plenkovicu-uzviknuo-kako-te-nije-sram-dizati-spomenik-ovome-zlocincu-sram-vas-bilo-416139>; Liberties, Man Jailed After Calling Former Croatian President a War Criminal, 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2019, available at: <https://www.liberties.eu/en/stories/man-jailed-after-calling-former-croatian-president-a-war-criminal/16825>

offering free legal aid for cases of discrimination and hate speech<sup>197</sup>. Among these, the *Serb National Council*<sup>198</sup> is the most active as it has always been able to access public debate, has many branches nationwide and provide support services on big numbers. Other organisations present of the Croatian territory are for example the *Serb Cultural Association Prosvjeta*, the *Serbian Business Association Privrednik*, and the Joint Council of Municipalities. Also, in line with the Law on election of Members of the Croatian Parliament and the Constitutional Law on National Minorities, national minorities are to be represented in the Parliament. According to national law, members of national minorities who represent more than 1,5 percent of the total population of the country are guaranteed a maximum of three seats in the parliament<sup>199</sup>.

In terms of transitional justice and dealing with the past, a huge contribution is given by the work of Documenta – Centre for Dealing with the Past (*Centar za součavanje s prošlošću*). With the joint forces of the Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights Osijek, the Centre for Peace Studies, the Civic Committee for Human Rights and the Croatian Helsinki Committee, the center focuses its work on collecting knowledge about war-related events, war crimes and violation of human rights. However, one of their most important roles concern monitoring processes of war crimes trials (current and finalised), both on the local and as well as regional level. In addition, they design activities aimed at strengthening sustainable peace in Croatia and the whole Western Balkan region. By publishing research results, deepening dialogue programmes and taking part in the public debate on public policies they aim at encouraging actions to face and solve issues connected to ethnic distrust and social prejudices.

## 2.2 People stories

### 2.2.1 Vukovar

---

<sup>197</sup> See Council of Europe's report on "*Croatia: Despite progress, discrimination persists against national minorities such as Serbs and Roma, says national minorities committee*", 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2021, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/croatia-despite-progress-discrimination-persists-against-national-minorities-such-as-serbs-and-roma-says-national-minorities-committee>

<sup>198</sup> See website: <https://snv.hr/en/>

<sup>199</sup> Zakon HR, Zakon o izborima zastupnika U Hrvatski sabor, available (in Croatian) at: <https://www.zakon.hr/download.htm?id=355>

Historically, it was the Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights of Osijek who started with peacebuilding activities to build trust between Croats and Serbs living in Eastern Slavonia. Among the initiators, Katarina Kruhonja has always had a great role and still nowadays represents the backbone of peace activism in the whole region. Well known in the local society, continue operating in a great variety of projects. She decided to start the interview by telling me her personal story and how her life took the direction of peace activism.

She studied medicine and, at that time, she had never been interested in the social environment in Yugoslavia:

When you are born into a socialist regime, you do not acquire the real meaning of being a citizen.

When war started, she became aware of the personal responsibility she carried as an individual living and working in a society and that was her first step towards her interest in the social work. She started with activities aimed at stopping the war even if, in her opinion, it was already too late. She met with other people with the same alignment of giving contributions to heal the local society and they started to think how to improve the post-war context. She said:

Trying to solve divisions between people, which is a very tough aspect of war, it's not just a question of solidarity or willing to be brave... it meant trying to solve something very destructive for the society and for the institutional structure of our region.

After the war, there was a real need to have a proper space where to discuss on how to rebuild their cities, what to expect and to aim for, how to deal with problems and try to solve them. She admitted they did not know how to do that on a practical level, so they started with workshops based on dialogue. Refugees, displaced people, local teachers, children and orphans were the first ones to be addressed in the project. They asked people from abroad to visit and support them with the use of diverse methodology on how to deal with a social movement throughout war times.

She reminded me again that during Yugoslavia:

...what nowadays we call 'civil society' was not conceived. Nobody had any real idea of what it was for as well as the concept of 'citizen' as an active individual interested in the construction and the protection of his or her socio-political community.

During their first years of activity, a strong sense of distrust spread within the society, which also involved peace workers:

...as we were considered betrayers, because we were working with both sides. Especially at the beginning, I must say, it was very challenging.

Originally, they intended to focus only on human rights education; instead, people needed help in relation to a variety of other situations. So, they started taking actions in the field of protection of people and advocacy against human rights abuses.

It was very dangerous; we were not prepared for all of that... but we managed to go on and continue our work until today.

Later they became part of RECOM network and started to cooperate with Documenta. All the activities that were brought about by this initial small group of peace workers soon became visible at both local and regional institutional levels. This generates an enormous impact, and they became active parts during the Peaceful Reintegration. She decided to put all contributions and results from the very first peacebuilding projects implemented in the region in a book: called *I Choose Life*<sup>200</sup>.

When I asked her about socio-political instability in Croatia, she said that the main problem is that:

political élites have not offered clear positions on peace with our previous enemy, it doesn't seem part of the national political agenda.

---

<sup>200</sup> Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights Osijek, *I Choose Life: Post-war Peace Building in Eastern Croatia*, ed. Katarina Kruhonja, 2001

She said that normalising the relations with Serbia was supposedly part of the objectives for European integration but “still nothing valuable has been done”. However, these kinds of situations do not involve only the national or institutional level:

There is no peace agenda not even with Serbians living in Croatia. It would be necessary to have good rules on a national level to tackle the cooperation with all minorities, especially the Serbian one.

Then, she mentioned the case of Vukovar by saying that they are still facing difficult times, even today after more than two decades from the end of the war. Until a few years ago, the mayor was supposed to be Croat and the vice-mayor from the Serb minority but, for some reason, he was not allowed to attend the official meetings held at the municipality:

the missing of peace policy created a strong culture of memorialisation which is not based on peace but the enmity against the other.

Dijana Lazić is the director of Vukovar Evropski Dom, a local NGO founded in 2000 and focused on European integration values such as the respect of human rights, dialogue, tolerance, solidarity and sustainable peace. They aim at creating a space for citizens where they could pursue dialogue through public panels about all those issues concerning their society. Citizens and their freedom of expression is the most important aspect they intend to highlight with their work, especially in a society where it is very common that people do not interact with each other. In their first years of activity, they managed to create crucial moments where locals talked with each other for the very first time after the war. They noticed that by trying to disseminate European values about tolerance and human right they observed an increase of communication and openness between Croats and Serbs.

In the first ten years they faced some challenges to find young people to participate in the workshops they were organising. Families were not particularly interested in letting their children participating in their activities focused on dialogue. After some time, they managed to establish a sense of trust and young people started attending these events: it was the first time that Croat and Serb teenagers were together in the same room. As a

matter of fact, they had always been used to go to school in different shifts or even in different schools, so sharing space was not something they were and still are very used to. She added:

War personal baggage is strong in families, and this is why young people still today suffer from war consequences.

Apart from a general lack of participation in the projects, especially at the beginning, people started talking very negatively around Vukovar:

...people were saying we were betrayals since we were working on both sides, or that we were taking suspicious money from abroad...it was very difficult to work in that context.

Dijana thinks that the most impacting element in local socio-political instability is the impossibility for people not to express and identify themselves freely. As a secondary factor, she exhibits strong episodes of inequality, especially in the job market:

Positive discrimination is to be regulated by law but it is not. Everything remains on the paper, and nothing is done or checked by authorities so, if you are part of a minority, you have very little possibilities to find a job here particularly in Vukovar but also in the rest of the country. The only way to survive is moving away to another country.

When I asked her which elements contribute to even stronger socio-political instability in the area, she said that according to her experience as a peacebuilder, she observed that what is publicly done and said by political élites and media are the most crucial and contribute to worsen the situation. Politics is particularly focused on the concept of protection of Croatian identity, thus avoids taking into consideration the remaining parts of the society and builds its political consensus. On the other hand, media are used to report and to focus only on negative events involving this society. This is why, she says, the rest of the country thinks that they are still in war. An example of this is a typical bar fight: instead of investigating on the actual motives that led two groups of young people



to act so violently, media immediately write big and impacting titles about the aggressivity between Serbs and Croats on this borderland.

For all these reasons, the Evropski Dom of Vukovar decided to implement projects to foster dialogue and to create a sense of unity, not only on a local level but also national and even international. Among their most important projects there is one they have been working for more than 10 years. Financed by the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid of Germany, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia have been receiving grants to organise workshops for young people belonging to these countries. They gather them every year in a different location (usually somewhere on the Croatian coast) and organize activities to make them know each other and exchange views on post-conflict issues. As organisers, they have to act very cautiously: never taking sides, never pointing fingers. They just need to send the message that violence is a very negative aspect of societies in the most neutral way. The most important aspect they want to convey is recognising violent signals in their societies that could bring a renewal of conflictual escalation. In her opinion, those moments are particularly important since, for many of them, it is the first time they actually realise they are really all the same: young people with the same interests, problems and dreams even if they come from different cities and countries.

Another important project they pursue is an online platform for Vukovar residents only. It involves art and photography, and the aim is bringing together different groups of people from the same divided city by inclusive aspects such as art rather than direct war narratives.

Lana Mayer was born in Vukovar, had developed a broad experience in the field of peacebuilding, and has recently moved with her family to Germany. When she thinks about memory in her hometown, she immediately wonders “which memory?”. She argues that memory has a strong influence on everyday life of all citizens, and it is...

...definitely not inclusive at all. As a citizen and as a mother I could feel that memory was passed on and dealt in a way that eventually led us to leave our city and our country. Memory became way too oppressive. There was no consent from all sides of society but rather the profusion of just a dominant one with a strong nationalist approach. That started to influence our older son who is still only a child. Let me give you an example... yesterday we went to a demonstration here in Stuttgart, a

gathering to protest against the war in Ukraine. I was holding a flag, like many other people. My son, who is thirteen years old, said “It’s so embarrassing, I am not holding any flag, I don’t feel comfortable” and I said to him “Back in Vukovar I thought you would be wearing a Croatian flag and march with football hooligans, how come you managed to feel different here?”. When we were in Vukovar, he started to behave very aggressively, and we started to be very worried about his strong nationalist views and attitudes. At home, with us, he was not receiving any of these inputs for sure. His acts are definitely the results of social and school pressures that shaped him in this way. At the end, we kind of fled here to Germany... to show him what it’s a real multicultural environment and that there are places where everyone is accepted. In Vukovar, communities do not share memories, and this has become a huge problem.

She argues that all spheres of society are affected by divisive tendencies. Memory plays a big role even in kindergartens and she decided to share an anecdote from her direct personal experience:

Around the day of Vukovar annual commemoration<sup>201</sup>, usually teachers give some tasks related to the celebrations such as drawing something together on the topics of war and commemorations. Crosses, water towers, groups of people in the streets start to appear on papers in the form of drawings of four-years old children... I mean, you teacher... are you really qualified to do that? I participated in loads of workshops about dealing with the past and I can say I don’t feel myself qualified to talk about difficult memories. How can teachers do that so easily? At this point, I question Croatian education system and what is offered to our children.

When the conflict in Ukraine began, I started having flashbacks of what I lived as a child... I am afraid war veterans and other civilians like me are developing flashbacks of unresolved traumas too.

Despite the phenomenon of re-traumatisation, she said she discovered a new perspective on war veterans in Croatia and, more specifically, in Vukovar.

---

<sup>201</sup> Here she refers to the Remembrance Day on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November.

This already started a few years ago when I visited Srebrenica but became much stronger now when seeing what's happening in Ukraine. I could see myself from outside and comprehend why certain communities develop hatred towards the other community, such for example Serbs in Vukovar... which is completely wrong, but now I can see why Ukrainians are celebrated and seen as strong and brave citizens to take up arms and fight against the Russians. Not until now I could truly understand the Croatian perspective in Vukovar whereas, having been in that conflict, I didn't see it in that way. It's just a multifaceted problem and phenomenon and as such has to be dealt with.

All perspectives should be taken into account otherwise an unresolved conflict is bound to perpetuate within a post-conflict society: "there is not such things like one truth and one memory". She argues that the rise of nationalism and populism did nothing else but narrowing down memory to the creation of just one accepted side of it. In terms of socio-political instability, she points to the "lack of consensus" about past war narratives. "Pushing grief and emotions under the carpet of an entire community... cannot do anything good", she said. At a certain point, she mentioned a very interesting fact involving the life in Vukovar. She denotes the existence of an actual parallel society, a Croat and a Serb one, never intersecting on with the other.

It's all about the Croatian narrative and not vice versa. The Croatian one can only presume what's going on in the Serbian one, they just won't listen. The Serbian community builds up its pride, the spite is growing as well as animosity because nobody will listen to them. Ten-eight years ago the situation was better but not has gotten worst and worst, impossible to live in it nowadays.

Slobodan Vlakovljević is one of the founders of the Association of the Serb Families and his main duty was to help and support Serb civilian war victims living in the territory of Croatia who experienced violence and losses perpetrated by Croats during the war. In the past, he was very active and managed to keep the association floating thanks local and national funds. However, in the last few years, he left office,

...because of the weak support of the Serbian leadership in Croatia, I gave up my involvement in the association. In Croatia, being a Serbian victim is a very delicate

issue. I can ask you one very simple question. Have you heard of anybody in Vukovar, or from Vukovar, because of the events of 1991, was sentenced in Croatia, and was a Croat? So, have you ever heard that any Croat was convicted for crimes against Serbian civilians in 1991? I tell you that it is not, and you can very easily check it.

Slobodan felt open enough to tell me his story: in June 1991 he was at home with his family when Croatian militias broke into their house. His father was shot in the head and died on the doorstep of their main entrance. “It is very difficult for us, here, to come up with any possibility to present our side of suffering”, he added.

My family had lived here for centuries but since 1991 it is not welcome anymore. What I have is the fact that I survived, and that is a cross on my back. The State of Croatia kills us here every day, in the following way: they didn't respect our right to go after who killed my father. Nobody went to prison for that. Those who did these kinds of things here in Vukovar are still freely walking in the streets today. And I, who suffered, must remain in the mouse hole.

When we started to talk about memorialisation in Vukovar, he said that monuments dedicated to Serb victims are impossible to erect. He tried many times to ask the municipality but every time he was turned down. Two years ago, through the work of the association, he finally managed to create a monument in memory of Serb victims but after five months all the names inscribed on it were erased. Nevertheless, he did not surrender: “We went the mayor of Vukovar, again, to ask for a new monument and he didn't authorised. He told us to lay a wreath at the hospital... I don't think that is the right place where Serbs should lay a wreath...”. For these reasons Slobodan does not have much faith for the future. As he told me: “I have only one wish – that my daughter does not experience what I have. In everything there must be a conversation – one side cannot always be at fault, and this is definitely what happens here in Vukovar all the time”.

Veselinka is originally from Osijek and she has been working with victims of sexual violence in the context of the “Homeland War”, especially in the area of Vukovar but not only. As a matter of fact, her background in law and human rights has led her to become the legal advisor for multiple cases not only in that specific area but also on a

national and international level such as Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Along with her law-wise expertise, she plays a crucial role in connecting victims to a net of psychological support in their respective countries. Due to her experience, she noticed that governmental institutions are particularly absent when it comes to helping such kinds of victims, not only in Croatia but also in the other countries where she operated.

Among the criticalities, she detected that crimes committed by paramilitaries are often left aside and not investigated. The mere fact that during the war people voluntarily decided to join forces constitutes a limitation for the initiation of criminal proceedings. She decided to mention two cases she personally handled and represented in court which, for her, are the most critical and explicative ones of a broader problem:

...I had two women that experienced rape multiple times... by several perpetrators only at the age of sixteen. For twenty years they had not so ever support. They first tried to report the crime in Serbia since those crimes were committed by members of Serbian paramilitary formations but there was no reaction. Then they took refuge in Hungary and decided not to report it again. When they returned to Baranja, I managed to get in touch with them and I was able to finally report the issue to the state attorney's office. However, as of today, no criminal proceedings have been initiated: criminals are unknown, and the system is not at all favourable to them.

When I asked her why the investigation procedures seem not to have a particular effect, she explained me, according to her experience in the field, that this is how the Croatian system works:

The greatest limitation remains the fact that a lot of time passed since crimes were committed and we have fewer and fewer witnesses and less as well as less material evidence. Apart from this, something else matters even more: we do not have quality personnel. They totally lack professionalism as investigative bodies such as police, prosecutors, and courts are appointed according to political criteria. In addition, there is a widespread sense of prejudice, especially in relation to cases of sexual violence. Such individuals make the work of the people doing the investigation even more difficult than it already is.

She then explained to me that Croatian law limitations and the lack of institutional support have tragic consequences on the human level:

Generally, victims continue to live their lives in the past. Most of them did not get married, they do not have children. In the case of the two women I mentioned before, they sought support within their families and, when their parents died, they basically started vegetating. Today they look like old women, and they are just waiting for their death. They literally live from today to tomorrow.

Veselinka added that the profound wounds these people experience internally had direct consequences the broader social level. Two are the main risks: the promotion of a message of uncertainty and distrust. The fact that certain perpetrators do not have a clear name and surname encourage the idea that when there is no identity behind a crime it did not really happen. In terms of distrust, this becomes very clear: victims confided only in their families, so also the family itself has been exposed to an indirect trauma:

The crime lives on, especially in the female part. A woman once told me that since her cousin experienced sexual violence and for this reason she does not trust any man. By only looking at her every day, she recognises she cannot have a normal life approaching the society in a less scared way. These are all terrible messages, especially for the future of this country.

She also added that the problem in Croatia is that there is no public space that favours dialogue about these problems affect an important part of the society. No institutional memory is favoured and there are still prejudices eradicated in the society. It is common to hear cases of blame against victims rather than perpetrators and this community has the tendency to judge them. It is often said that women provoked rapists”.

When I asked her about how she interprets the idea of socio-political instability in the region, she surprisingly mentioned the great role of Coronavirus in settling things between Croats and Serbs:

This may sound ugly, but I think that coronavirus saved us from the eternal story of war... at least, for some time... I am pretty sure the story of dealing with the past is

not over yet but the universal enemy finally switched from Serbia to a virus which impacted on all of us equally. Otherwise, war narratives would have continued as usual impacting on the local society.

### **3. Serbia**

#### **3.1. Overview**

The Serbian cases stands out in this work as the most difficult one in terms of fieldwork experience. As a matter of fact, it was extremely hard to get to know people and establish contacts in the country. This challenge affected not only the actual amount of data I was able to collect but also the methodology I initially advanced for this research. Having a limited numbers of interviewees and limited access to the country created a problem in terms of comparability with other cases. Nevertheless, instead of seeing this as an insuperable deficiency, I started considering it as an actual tangible result, especially in a project focused on the relationship between post-conflict memories and socio-political instability. If my main objective was acquiring information in the area, getting to know and talk with people who could feel comfortable to speak with me and potentially feeling open to share part of their life experiences and personal views, the mere fact that it was impossible to reach this aim gave me a very significant perspective on the actual levels of freedom of expression in Serbia and the approach towards the elaboration of war memories in the country.

Selecting a viable way to approach this area was extremely difficult. Due to the difficulty in finding availability (both in terms of people but also public information), I had to change case study multiple times. Nevertheless, my firm intention was to remain focused on the Serbian frontier territory with Croatia. After trying to contact many organisations and establish a functioning network, I managed to have only one local contribution, and one from Belgrade. Due to a sense of insecurity about talking about these topics in public places, I had to set the local interview at this person's house while I managed to hold the other online. For what concerns all the other people and organisations I tried to contact, they all mostly remained unresponsive.

In recent years the country has been experiencing a strong democratic backsliding. Even if Serbia started its path toward European integration, the government led by

Aleksandar Vučić proved to pursue a series of illiberal political choices that it has done nothing but silencing human rights and peacebuilding sector and making peace work difficult.

## **3.2. People stories**

### **3.2.1. Apatin**

Marko Milosavljević works at the Youth Initiative for Human Rights based in Belgrade, the Serbian branch of its regional network. The focus of the organisation is strengthening the cooperation between young people in the region and the institutions of their countries, especially for what concerns transitional justice and human rights abuses (even on a current daily life basis). Activities are designed pressing on a double-faceted approach: advocacy and acknowledge components related to war crimes and citizens' social and political rights, oriented on the local context. The most important projects involve student exchanges, but great part of their work is also dedicated to the development of dossiers and reports.

Due to their activities, they have continuous connections with the topic of post-conflict memories. For what concerns the Serbian context, the organization has been trying to advocate for an “alternative policy of cultural remembrance of war”. Through workshops and seminars, they aim at presenting unbiased facts about the war, which of course include also unpleasant information and data that might arise opposition from certain individuals, especially those belonging to the Serb community. They wanted to give proper space to families of war veterans, missing persons and atrocity survivors. In 2020 they launched a website<sup>202</sup> because they wanted to offer people clear facts and stories about war crimes trials, personal stories of victims, maps, images, interviews, and information about monuments.

The topic of memorialisation became extremely interesting as Marko told me that no more than 10 monuments in the entire country are dedicated to victims of other nationalities, not even in the Preševo Valley and Sandžak area, the places that were most subjected to violent events such as deportations, fights and killings. The monuments were made by local authorities several years ago, when the opposition parties still had some

---

<sup>202</sup> Available at: <https://ratusrbiji.rs/en/knowledge-database/>



voice opportunity. “Since then, the central government totally monopolised the act of remembrance” he said. On national level, the government of Serbia, has increasingly started to implement policies of denial of war crimes perpetrated during the last conflicts. Only in very small communities it has been possible to create some monuments to remember minorities, in other cases there was no possibility to pursue this mission. “Part of our job is also trying to remind the government of Serbia to give space to all these types of remembrance and to give a chance to make memorialisation more inclusive”.

In 2018, the government created a new law that worsened the situation by adding more discriminatory acts in relation to war memories.

If you see the criteria requested if you want to dedicate a monument to a war event, they are incredibly harsh and impossible to put into practice. Unless you want to highlight a nationalistic history. If you had relatives in Kosovo, you cannot build monuments dedicated to them and the tragic part of history they had to go through. This is a very discriminatory law that still is in power and nobody, not even from the opposition, has seen it as a problem. We didn't get any clear voice from the political opponent that want to lead policies to recognize “other” victims”.

In 2012, Belgrade finally decided to dedicate a monument for all the *defenders* (veterans) of the country and all the victims. Even if it may appear as a new opening towards more inclusive policies, it was only a surface impression: they placed orthodox crosses all over that monument and this implicated that only Serbs were brave enough to defend the country and victims. No signs of consideration towards other communities. When the mayor of the city left office and became part of the opposition, the monument was completely forgotten. Soon it became in very bad shape, was damaged and then was moved to a not frequented area of Belgrade because of some urban redevelopment along the city riverside:

This was a trick before the election campaign. You see that they want to represent themselves as inclusive but, with small signs, you see that they keep a nationalistic monopole of how the country should remember the war.

As part of their work, they recently issued a regional report<sup>203</sup> about commemoration practices during 2021, a handbook about state policy on commemorations<sup>204</sup>, and an article about laws on war memorials in Serbia<sup>205</sup>.

According to Marko's experience in the field, he argues that's oppression of memories goes along with the social-political instability of the country. Memories around war veterans are the most exploited ones and the Serbian government make use of it to build nationalist cohesion. "One of the usual explanations about the past is that in the 90's there was a defending war in which Serbia was not participating but many people wanted to "defend" the country, so they autonomously took action". Another tragic perspective is the lack of recognition of victims and their families:

Every 4<sup>th</sup> August there is a state ceremony, and it is always full of hate speeches towards the Croats, their government, and the supposed victims during Operation Storm. If it wasn't for micro communities, memories were completely silenced and forgotten.

Marko did not demonstrate much faith in current government:

There is a proclaimed stability from Vučić but observing the context from an internal point of view you see that we are living in a stabilocracy made by authoritarian ruling and pressures on people to vote for them in unlawful ways. We all know that everybody within the political élite is preparing people for the next war through daily propaganda. We know already who's gonna be our enemy, again.

Zdravko Marijanović used to work at the The Society for the Tolerance (*Društvo za toleranciju*) based in Bačka Palanka. Later, he started to cooperate with the Friendship Bridge (*Most prijateljstva*) where now he is still active. The association turned into a regional forum and, even if it is not legally registered in Serbia, it continues to exist in

---

<sup>203</sup> YIHR, Commemorative practices in the region and attitudes towards the 1990s war crimes, available at: [https://www.yihr.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/YIHR-Izve%C5%A1taj-o-komemoracijama-ratnih-zlo%C4%8Dina-u-Srbiji-Bosni-i-Hercegovini-Kosovu-i-Crnoj-Gori-2021\\_FHD\\_01.pdf](https://www.yihr.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/YIHR-Izve%C5%A1taj-o-komemoracijama-ratnih-zlo%C4%8Dina-u-Srbiji-Bosni-i-Hercegovini-Kosovu-i-Crnoj-Gori-2021_FHD_01.pdf).

<sup>204</sup> YIHR, Izveštaj o komemoracijama ratnih zločina u Srbiji, Bosni I Hercegovini, Kosovu I Crnoj Gori, available at: [https://www.yihr.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/YIHR-Priru%C4%8Dnik-o-komemorativnim-praksama-2021\\_A5\\_01-1.pdf](https://www.yihr.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/YIHR-Priru%C4%8Dnik-o-komemorativnim-praksama-2021_A5_01-1.pdf).

<sup>205</sup> ForumZFD, Balkan Perspectives: A magazine on Dealing with the Past, No. 11, June 2019, p. 18, available at: <https://www.forumzfd.de/system/files/document/11%20BP%20Memorialisation%20-%20ENG%20-%20FINAL%20WEB.pdf>.

the form of a non-formal association. He has been engaged in peacebuilding activities and projects with people and organisations all across ex-Yugoslav region.

When I asked him about the forum, he said that it is based on the idea that peace must be built by people, individually with no outer interventions. He added very clearly:

Each of us needs to learn on our own, and only then can there be peace. Everything else that is done by force, it's violence. And that's not good... That's why peace always lasts for a short time. I have to teach myself, not you. What NGOs are doing is a bit of violence. Because we impose, we want them to think like us. And everyone has to come to such opinion on their own – not under pressure from others. That's the idea of the forum.

In regards to the non-registration in his country he answered:

We are just people who want the world to reach final peace. We have people in Sarajevo who share these ideas, we have people in Croatia who also accept this idea, we have people in Montenegro, in Macedonia. And in Serbia, there is us. Also, we have a group in Germany that has been working with us for years, but these are individuals, these are people. We will not even think about the law, to be registered somewhere because that is violence, again. We want the man to be completely free. That's the idea of the forum. This means that a person is completely, absolutely free - both from the state and from everything else. And in order to achieve that, people must change their head, they must change their heart.

After a brief presentation about the forum, the conversation diverted to the concept of intolerance and the origins of conflict. He argues that hostility between people is fomented by the governments who rule their countries and have all the interests to keep up the profit:

War in Yugoslavia was a search for the profit. World War II was the same thing. Every war is about the profit. Western democracy is a key problem for peace. Your democracy in Italy or the one in Germany are the main problem. Because they keep world profits. And for profit, I mean: as much as possible for me, and nothing for

you. That's why everything is destroyed in order to make money, and they need money to be able to rule.

In his opinion, another root for conflict is the fact that individuals search for divisions even if everybody is just human. He said that all people in the Balkans have no differences but it was religion that imposed divisions where in reality does not exist:

Man is not capable of knowing himself as a human. For instance, he says that to himself first: I am a Serb, I am an Orthodox... but he never says about himself: I am a human. We have made countless identities, none referring to being a man. The only inclusive idea was made by Karl Marx: we are all workers. This was the only common identity that society tried to adopt so far.

Then, when we talked about socio-political instability he reflected on the very essence of power:

Some time ago I wrote a short article where I said that power belongs to the devil. Power belongs to the devil – it is written in the Bible. And all those who rule are actually his servants. And there is this instability. Metaphorically speaking (not directly), that is the essence. There is no good government. They are the ones who create instability.

He works at the forum for free, no compensation comes with the job. Neither local municipality nor the Serbian government offer money for projects related to peace. He said that he works for the passion to create a peaceful environment around him and in his society.

## **Conclusions**

Pursuing fieldwork in the region presented multiple challenges. Where there have been no logistical problems, inaccessibility to communities and a general sense of insecurity have arisen. Nevertheless, what surprised me most was the level of reception and openness of people always reserved to me despite being yet another researcher trying to investigate war matters, regardless of the community they belonged to. Demonstrating

tact, sensitivity and sympathy towards local dynamics was always the best choice and this for certainly gave its fruits.

By analysing the content of the meetings, the correspondence between certain experiences becomes clear, even in different locations. When reflecting on war memories and socio-political instability in the region, these are the most impacting ones:

- Nationalist tendencies, regardless the political system in place
- Persistent right-wing political orientations on a political level
- Phenomena connected to hate speech and discrimination
- Lack of consensus in relation to memories of war
- Ethnic segregation, especially in schools but including other elements such as the layout of neighbourhoods, bars, restaurants, sport clubs etc. etc.
- Clientelism in multiple layers of society
- Idealisation of war veterans
- Poor job market

As for the differences, on a practical level, the one that stood out the most was accessibility to countries. Croatia was the most open country, where working resulted being extremely easy and comfortable. I could not feel any social or security-related pressure, even if I was treating crucial and a bit controversial topics. The less accessible was Serbia and this can certainly raise food for thought: even if part of this research has showed that the country shows no concrete signs of instability (no strong urban or schooling segregation, little party changes, good GDP values...), the mere fact that it was impossible to find locals who are not afraid to talk about collective memories from the war proves that something is truly not working in the elaboration of the past, nationalistic narratives fuels political confrontations and make the sufferance of victims and whoever do not adhere to mainstream visions to remain temporarily dormant.

On the contrary, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, although strong dysfunctionalities remain on of a political, institutional and social level, freedom of expression is more guaranteed; so, it was possible to analyse the local context there in a more accurate way, thus receiving pre-warning signals more easily. Attempts to solve post-conflict critical issues have demonstrated to be extremely fligid: on one hand this means there are

unsolved problems that have to be tackled by civil society organisations; on the other hand, information flows about the current national and local status quo are functioning permitting to better monitor and intercept weaknesses and intervene. In terms of actual interview point, among the differences was the perception of security: it was in Republika Srpska where the concept emerged as a recurrent element. Fear for police militarisation and even personal attacks were repeated several times by different categories of people. In other locations, this did not represent a major life preoccupation. Nevertheless, scholars might argue the concept of socio-political instability in that area.

Due to much higher ethnic homogeneity, the lack of extensive incidents and poor political opposition acts, it may call for a much more stable society, in comparison to other case studies. Nevertheless, it within the memory of people and their perceptions in their daily lives that such sense of distress easily surfaced: Prijedor was among the most affected areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina where ethnic cleansing practices, such as torture, imprisonment, forced displacement converse with current states of social intimidations, public hate speeches and impossibilities to enter in the job market only if you are Muslim. Due to the lack of reassurance from institutional actors, perception of instability is particularly high. That was not the case in other places, not even in Herzegovina itself: even if there was a common idea of a continued conflict without weapons, nobody seemed to fear for their own safety.

This chapter has been crucial since it offered essential insights from locals in relationship to the topics of this research. Some incongruences with the previous data results have started to materialise: through the lense of past war experiences, certain ideas of socio-political stability do not match the actual perceptions of people who very often live the consequences of memory suppression. In the final chapter, a more thorough evaluation of results will be offered combining the results emerged in these last few chapters.

## **Research Results and Conclusions**

In this research, we investigated a number of concepts related to memory and socio-political instability. Initially, we went through current literature that offers explanations about the role of war traumas and collective memory in societies with their specific role in political spheres. Then we considered the tools that have been developed and used in recent years by governments as well as international and non-profit organisations working on dealing with the past and peaceful coexistence in post-conflict societies. We tried to learn some transitional justice practices and how these related to the question of war memories such as court trials as well as restorative and informational measures. This research aimed at offering new contributions by developing the concept of memory itself and putting it on the same levels as socio-political instability. As a matter of fact, there are endless literature contributions discussing the value and the characteristics of memory, however, there are no studies linking together the impact of memory, traumatic events and socio-political instability. For this reason, I decided to advance this new format and try to establish a pattern to analyse and acquire answers from post-conflict societies.

Constrictive memory is thus a state-of-the-art research item developed in this dissertation and, as already mentioned, intended to unify two elements: the presence of memorialization processes and the presence of traumatic events in certain areas. These have been subsequently divided into further categories, and in order to explain the impact of such element according to the weight of its components, its results are associated with four different types: low constrictive memory, discarded memory, overemphasized memory and high constrictive memory. For what concerns the concept of instability instead, what it is important to mention is that as of today, scholars in the field of political sciences did not manage to reach a common view on this aspect. As much clear and vivid as it may appear in the mind of each of us, from an empirical point of view socio-political instability raises numerous problems in its definition. Even more if we wanted to measure its level or impact in the society.

For all these reasons I decided to focus my dissertation on these theoretical aspects and proceed with an operationalization process in order to reach two goals: explaining

such research items and measure their impacts in post-conflict contexts. To do so, I declined the two objects of analysis respectively operationalized with six and ten variables. Constrictive memory has been categorised as follows: number of civilian losses during the war, demographic variation of the minoritarian community, presence of commemorative monuments, recurrence of commemorations, presence of relevant fights or battles in the area, and the number of reported crimes in the context of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. For what concerns socio-political instability instead, I divided the variables into four categories: “economic conditions” included regional GDP and GDP inequality values (in comparison with the rest of the country), “governance” referred to election frequency, frequency in party changes, current presence of ethnic minorities in the government; “social conciliation” presented as schooling segregation, urban segregation and worship distribution; finally, “security” involved data related to national crime rate and the number of staff at the Ministry of the Interior. Each of them was given a range of scores in order to determine whether a certain variable was low, low to mid, mid, mid to high and high impact on the society. Finally, the area I chose for this study comprised the Western Balkan region, more specifically I respectively selected three countries and four case studies on a municipal level: Stolac and Prijedor for Bosnia and Herzegovina; Vukovar for Croatia; Apatin for Serbia.

The third chapter thus represented the actual work on variables and data acquisition. Firstly, I provided a brief contextualisation both on a national and local levels. Subsequently, I provided the necessary pieces of information to help us determine the relevance of the variables and their essence. The results that emerged proved to be extremely significant.

From this study the town of Vukovar proved to be the most subjected to both constrictive memory and socio-political instability. The big number of monuments, a strong demographic variation, and a large number of ICTY cases turned Vukovar into a case of strong oppression of both war-related legacies as well as its extreme proximity events occurred during the war. The most interesting aspect was confronting the results with the data emerged by the interviews held on the field. According to the testimonies of people living and working in the area, the most crucial aspect is the lack of recognition toward war experiences faced by the minoritarian groups. Croatian governments demonstrated to be very committed to the creation of a strong national narrative, however,



to the detriment of an entire historic community which lives completely segregated and in total frustration. The second case study which presented similar conditions as Vukovar, is Prijedor: also, the little town situated in Republika Srpska suffers the legacy of tragic memories that took place in the area. However, as emerged in the interviews, a lower rate of constrictive memory level does not mean that communities live more happily together. On the contrary, as we noticed in the fieldwork experience, the local minoritarian community is not exempt from daily social hardships.

Less surprisingly Apatin presented much fewer criticalities regarding study subjects. In comparison to other locations, ethnic composition showed to be definitely more homogenous, so issues related to the interpretation of historical war events proved not to be a priority in the local political agenda. Moreover, the fact that no significant military operation or violent event occurred specifically in the municipality, resulted in much more detachment of collective memories. However, results need to be further analysed, especially on the basis of the contributions offered by the two interviewees. The very fact that it was so difficult to find people available to talk to in country, specifically nobody originally from Apatin and only with two people who I managed to get in touch with thanks to other connections made in Osijek (Croatia), give rise to many reflections on the true transparency of the Serbian context. The fear of going against the national historical version produced by the government is easily detectable. This is the direct result of the lack of freedom of expression, as confirmed by those who are trying to work on these specific issues and the law response late to take part in this research project. The case of Apatin is strongly symptomatic of a silenced society which brood worries and doubts about their institutions. If restrictive memory focus more on a hyper presence of memorialisation processes, silence, denial and historical revisionism promoted by Serbian institutions is definitely an issue that should be further investigated.

For what concerns the town of Stolac, results from the evaluations gave the idea that there is still so much to do to improve both constrictive memory and socio-political instability. However, an interesting element became evident in both data analysis and the interviews' content: the strong demographic increase of Croat populations is not just a social "perception" but something actually happening in robust terms. This, *per se*, would not be a big deal, however, the strong e continuous presence of Croat community in power

leave little space for the rest of the society to participate and give active contributions to support the interests of the whole society.

## Annex

### Questions to organisations:

<u>Questions</u>	<u>Research purposes</u>
<i>What is the focus of your work within civil society?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understanding criticalities of the society: what people need, what the government is not providing to its citizens and what is still needed to be done</li> </ul>
<i>According to the activities organised by your organisation, to what extent memories of war affect social and political behaviours of the local population?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discerning the objectivity of the organisation concerning post-conflict issues which still affect local society</li> </ul>
<i>Do you think the area (country or/and municipality) is subjected to socio-political instability? If yes, in which terms?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Studying perceptions about socio-political instability in the area.</li> <li>▪ In case of a positive response, grasping the connection to the variables of the operationalised research item</li> </ul>
<i>Which have been the activities brought about by your organisation to support civil society?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understanding the most immediate exigencies in the area</li> </ul>
<i>Which actions/episodes do you think affect socio-political instability?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Connecting perceptions with actual empirical occurrences</li> </ul>
<i>Do you see a connection between post-conflict memories and socio-political instability? If yes, to what extent?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Presenting interviewees with my hypothesis and listening to their thoughts</li> <li>▪ Analysing their reaction to this logical proposition</li> </ul>

**Questions to private citizens:**

<u>Questions</u>	<u>Research purposes</u>
<i>How would you define social instability?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Investigating about people’s perception about this variable. Results are to comprise an evaluation based on their personal views and experiences</li> </ul>
<i>Now, how would you define political instability?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extending the comprehension of the same variable from a more political point of view</li> </ul>
<i>Do you think these situations are present in the society you live in?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Empirical verification of interviewees’ perceptions about the place where they live</li> </ul>
<i>How powerful are war memories for you? And for the society?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ By discussing the importance of war memories, crucial aspects of the society are expected to emerge through the eyes of locals</li> </ul>
<i>What do you think about official memorialisation of war? (e.g., monuments, commemorations, public events...)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understanding people’s level of awareness for what concerns the interests of political élites in shaping narratives and make use of policies of memory</li> </ul>
<i>Do you feel comfortable in the society you live in? Are there any issues that worry you?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Investigating about security and discrimination perceptions</li> <li>▪ Seeking empirical cases</li> </ul>



## Bibliography

AlJazeera, *UN raises concerns over hate speech in Bosnia*, 14 January 2022, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/14/un-raises-concerns-over-hate-speech-in-bosnia-serbia>

ALMOND Gabriel Abraham, VERBA Sidney, *The Civic Culture*, Little Brown, Boston, 1965.

ANDERSON Richiard C., SPIRO Rand, MMONTAGUE William E., *Schooling and the Acquisition of Knowledge*, London, Routledge, 1977.

ANTWEILER Katrin, *Memory as a means of governability*, *Memory Studies*, 2023, pp. 1-18

ASSMAN Aleida, *Штыри формы памяти*, *Rocznik Ruskij Bursy*, 2017, vol. 13, No. 13

ASSMAN Aleida, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, Fordham University Press, 2015

BARKEY Karen, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008

BARTLETT Frederic Charles, *Remembering: A Study in experimental and social psychology*, Cambridge University Press, 1932

BAUMGARTNER Elisabeth, OTT Lisa, *'Determining the fate of missing persons: The importance of archives for "dealing with the past" mechanisms*, in *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 99, No. 2

BEN-ZEE'EV, LOMSKY-FEDER EDNA, *The intergenerational hero: Carrier of a bonding memory*, *Memory Studies*, 2022

BIEBER Florian, *Local Institutional Engineering: A Tale of Two Cities, Mostar and Brčko*, *Intenational Peacekeeping*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2003, pp. 420-433

BLACK Peter, *"Identities," in Conflict: From Analysis to Intervention* eds., Sandra Cheldelin, Daniel Druckman, and Larissa Fast, Continuum, London, 2003

BLANUŠA Nejboša, KULENOVIĆ Enes, *Hate Speech, Contentious Symbols and Politics of Memory: Survey Research on Croatian Citizens' Attitudes*, in *Politička misao*, Zagreb, Vol. 12, No. 28, 2018, pp. 176-202

BOND Lucy, CRAPS Stef, VERMEULEN Pieter (eds.), *Memory Unbound: tracing the dynamics of memory studies*, Berghan Books Inc., 2016

BOYARIN Jonathan, TILLY Charles, *Remapping Memory: The Politics of Time Space*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994

BREUILLY John, Approaches to nationalism, in BALAKRISHNAN Gopal (ed.), *Mapping the Nation*, Verso, London, 1996, pp. 146-174

BRUBAKER Rogers, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996

BUDRYTE Dovil, RESENDE Erica, BECKER Douglas, 'Defending Memory': Exploring the Relationship Between Mnemonical in/Security and Crisis in Global Politics, *Interdisciplinary Political Studies*, July 2020, Vol. 6, No. 1

CAIRNS E., ROE M. D, Introduction: Why memories in conflict? In *The role of memory in ethnic conflict*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan

Centralna Izborna Komisija BiH, online portal available at: <https://www.izbori.ba/Default.aspx?Lang=3>

ČEPO Dario, *Structural weaknesses and the role of the dominant political party: democratic backsliding in Croatia since EU accession*, in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 2020, pp. 141-159

CHANDLER David, *Empire in Denial: The Politics of State-building*, London: Pluto Press, 2006

CLARK Janine, Reconciliation through Remembrance? War Memorials and the Victims of Vukovar, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2013

COENDERS Marcel, LUBBERS Marcel, SCHEEPERS Peer, *Nationalism in Europe: Trends and Cross-national Differences in Public Opinion*, in *European Review*, Vol. 29, No 4, Cambridge University Press, 2020

CONNERTON Paul, *How societies remember*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992

CONNERTON Paul, *How Modernity Forgets*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 99

Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, available at: [https://www.constituteproject.org/countries/Europe/Bosnia\\_and\\_Herzegovina?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/countries/Europe/Bosnia_and_Herzegovina?lang=en)

COUNCIL OF EUROPE, “*Croatia: Despite progress, discrimination persists against national minorities such as Serbs and Roma, says national minorities committee*”, 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2021, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/croatia-despite-progress-discrimination-persists-against-national-minorities-such-as-serbs-and-roma-says-national-minorities-committee>

DARBY John, MAC GINTY Roger eds, *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Peace Processes and Post-War Reconstruction*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2008

DEŽULOVIC Boris, *Vukovar: A Life-Size Monument to the Dead City*, Globus, 2013

DIEHL Paul F., ‘Paths to Peacebuilding: The Transformation of Peace Operations’, in Mason and Meernik (eds)

DOWDING Keith M., KIMBER Richard, *The Meaning and Use of ‘Political Stability*, in *European Journal of Political Research*, No. 11, 1983

DOYLE Michael W., ‘*Three Pillars of the Liberal Peace*’, in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 99, No. 3, August 2005

DRAKULIC Aleksandar, *Balkan Insight*, *New Neo-Nazi Graffiti Painted on Walls in Prijedor*, 13 January 2022, available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/01/13/new-neo-nazi-graffiti-painted-on-walls-in-prijedor-bosnia/>

Državni zavod za statistiku, *Population of Croatia*, available at: <https://dzs.gov.hr/vijesti/objavljeni-konacni-rezultati-popisa-2021/1270>

DURKHEIM Emile, *The Rules of Sociological Method: And Selected Texts on Sociology and Its Method*, Free Pr, 2014

DUROY Quentin, *The Rise of Neo-Nationalism in Europe: A Veblenian Perspective*, *Journal of Economic Issues*, Vol. 54, No. 4, 2020



ECKSTEIN Harry, *A Theory of Stable Democracy*, ed. Little Brown, Boston, 1965, in “Division and Cohesion in Democracy”, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1966

EKIERT Grzegorz, KUBIK Jan, VACHUDOVA Milada Anna, “*Democracy in the Postcommunist World: An Unending Quest?*”, in *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2007

EUROPEAN COMMISSION, Serbia Membership status, available at: [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/serbia\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/serbia_en)

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, Regulation (EU) 2016/679, 27 April 2016, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32016R0679>

EVANS R. J., *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy 1550-1700*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979

FBiH Police Administration (<https://polis.osce.org/country-profiles/bosnia-and-herzegovina#fbih-police-administration-9972>).

Fond za humanitarno pravo, *Politika sećanja na ratove devedesetih u Srbiji: istotijski revizionizam i izazovi memorijalizacije*, Beograd, October 2021

ForumZFD, *Law on War Memorials in Serbia: Nationalistic Monopoly Over Memory*, in *Balkan Perspectives: A magazine on Dealing with the Past*, No. 11, June 2019, p. 18

GALTUNG Johan, “Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding”, in *Impact of Science on Society*, No 1, Vol. 2, 1976

GELPI Christopher F., GRIESDORFT Michael, ‘*Winners of Losers? Democracies in International Crisis, 1918-94*’, in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95, No. 3, September 2001

GOMULICKI Bronislaw R., *Recall as an abstractive process*, *Acts Psychologica*, Vol. 12, 1956, pp. 77-94

Grada Sombora, *Službeni List*, Vol. 5, No. 6, 25 May 2012

GREIG J. Michael, *The Peacekeeping-Peacemaking Dilemma*, in *International Studies Quarterly*, No 49, 2005

GURR Ted Rober, *Persistence and Change in Political Systems 1800-1971*, in American Political Science Review, Vol. 68

HALBWACHS Maurice, *On Collective Memory*, University of Chicago Press, 1992

HAZEN Jennifer M., "Can Peacekeepers Be Peacbuilders?" in International Peacekeeping, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2007

HERTZ Jhon, *Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma*, in World Politics, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1950, pp. 157-180

Hrvoje CVIJANOVIĆ, *On Memory Politics and Memory Wars: A Critical Analysis of the Croatian Dialogue Document*, Croatian Political Science Review, Vol. 55, No. 4, 2018

HUTCHINSON John, SMITH Antony (eds.), *Ethnicity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996

EUROSTAT, Police, court and prison personnel statistics, June 2022, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Police,\\_court\\_and\\_prison\\_personnel\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Police,_court_and_prison_personnel_statistics)

HUNT Nigel C., *Memory, War and Trauma*, Cambridge University Press, 2010

HURWITZ Leon, *An Index of Democratic Political Stability: A Methodological Note*, in Comparative Political Studies, Vol. 4, No. 1, April 1971

ICTY, banović; Brđanin; Karadžić; Kranjišnik; Kvočka et al.; Mejakić et al.; Milošević; Mladić; Mrđa; Plavšić; Sikirica et al.; Stakić; Tadić; Talić; Stanišić and Župljanin. List of cases available on: <https://www.icty.org/en/cases/interactive-map>

ICTY, cases: Milošević; Dokmanović; Hadžić; Mrkšić et al.; Šešelj. List available on: <https://www.icty.org/en/cases/interactive-map>

ICTY, Prlić et al. case available at: <https://www.icty.org/case/prlic>

INDEXHR, *Čovjek koji je vikao da je Tuđman zločinac ispričao svoju stranu priče*, 12th of December 2018, available at: <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/covjek-koji-je-vikao-da-je-tudjman-zlocinac-ispricao-svoju-stranu-price/2049423.aspx>

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, available at: [rome\\_statute\\_english.pdf \(icc-cpi.int\)](https://www.ictj.org/rome-statute-english.pdf)

International Crisis Group, *Minority Return of Mass Relocation?*, May 1998, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a6eb0.html>

IRWIN-ZARECKA Iwona, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory*, Taylor & Francis, 2007

KRUHONJA Katarina (ed.), *I Choose Life: Post-war Peace Building in Eastern Croatia*, Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights Osijek, 2001.

JANET Pierre, *Psychological healing: A Historical and Clinical Study*, Vol. 1, London, Allen & Unwin, 1925

JO Eun A, *Memory, Institutions, and the Domestic Politics of South Korean-Japanese Relations*, International Organisation, 2022

JOSEP Stephen, LINLEY Alex, *Growth following adversity: theoretical perspectives and implications for clinical practice*, *Clinical Psychology Review*, Vol. 26, No. 8, 2006, 1041-1053

JUDSON Pieter M., *The Habsburg Empire: A New History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2016

KANT Immanuel, *To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, Hackett Publishing Co. & Inc, 2003

KAPIDŽIĆ Damir, *Subnational competitive authoritarianism and power-sharing in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2020

KAPIDŽIĆ, Damir *The rise of illiberal politics in Southeast Europe*, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2020

KAUFMAN Stuart J., *Modern Hatreds: They Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001

KIHLSTROM John F., *Memory, Autobiography, History*, in *Proteus: A Journal of Ideas*, Berkeley, 2002

KINNVALL Catarina, MITZEN Jennifer, *Anxiety, fear, and ontological security in world politics: thinking with and beyond Giddens*, *International Theory*, 2020, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 240-256

KOSIC Anika, TAUBER Charles David, *The Perspectives of Reconciliation and Healing among Young People in Vukovar (Croatia)*, in *International Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2010

KLIMENKO Lina, SIDDI Marco, *Exploring the link between historical memory and foreign policy: an introduction*, *International Politics*, Vol. 57, 2020, pp. 945-953

LEVINE S., URSIN H., "What is stress?", in *Neurobiology and Neuroendocrinology of Stress*, New York, Marcel Dekker, 1991, pp. 3-21

LIBERTIES, Man Jailed After Calling Former Croatian President a War Criminal, 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2019, available at: <https://www.liberties.eu/en/stories/man-jailed-after-calling-former-croatian-president-a-war-criminal/16825>

ŁUCZAK Czesław, *Polska I Polacy w drugiej wojnie światowej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznan, 1993

ŁUKIANOW Malrozada, WELLS Clhoe, Territorial phantom pains: Third-generation postmemories of territorial changes, *Memory Studies*, 2022

McGRATTAN Cilian, HOPKINS Stephen, *Memory in Post-conflict Societies: From Contention to Integration*, in *Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 16, No. 5, pp. 488-499

MELANDON P. H., KING L. R., *Theory in Comparative Politics: A Critical Appraisal*, in "Comparative Political Studies", Vol. 4

NESS Graham J., MACASKILL Norman, *Preventing PTSD: the value of inner resourcefulness and a sense of personal control of a situation. Is it a matter of problem-solving or anxiety management?*, in *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2003, pp. 463-466

NORA Pierre, *Les lieux de mémoire*, Editions Gallimard, 2002

OSCE, <https://polis.osce.org/country-profiles/serbia>

OSLOBOĐENJE, Čovjek koji je napadnut jer je rekao "Tuđman zločinac" Plankoviću uzviknuo: Kako te nije sram dizati spomenik ovome zločinu?, 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2018, available at: <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/region/covjek-koji-je-napadnut-jer-je-rekao-tudman-zlocinac-plenkovicu-uzviknuo-kako-te-nije-sram-dizati-spomenik-ovome-zlocincu-sram-vas-bilo-416139>

PARIS Roland, *At War's End*, Cambridge University Press, 2004

PENNEBACKER J.W., *Collective Memory of Political Events: Reflection on the Relationship Between Past and Present*, Palgrave Macmillan

PIACENTINI Arianna, *The Weight of Ethnic Collectivism: Youth, Identifications, and Boundaries in Post-conflict Bosnia Herzegovina*, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2018

PLOKY Serhii, *Lost Kingdom: The Quest for Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation*, Basic Books, New York, 2017

POOLE Ross, *Memory, history and the claims of the past*, in *Memory Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, SAGE Publications, Los Angeles, 2008, pp. 149-166

POPOV Anton, DEÁK Dušan, *Making sense of the 'difficult' past: transmission of political heritage and memory-work among young people across Europe*, in *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2, 2015, PP. 36-52

Prometej, “*Pojedinačan popis broja ratnih žrtava u svim općinama BiH*” available at: <http://www.prometej.ba/clanak/drustvo-i-znanost/pojedinacan-popis-broja-ratnih-zrtava-u-svim-opcinama-bih-997>

RADIODUNAV, *Poznati rezultati lokalnih izbora u Apatinu*, 15 April 2016, available at: <https://www.radiodunav.com/poznati-rezultati-lokalnih-izbora-u-apatinu-sps-srs-ds-ponovo-vode-apatin/>

REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, Bureau of Statistics, [ЛОКАЛНИ ИЗБОРИ 2012.](#), Republic of Serbia;

Republički zavod za statistiku, *Population of Serbia*, available at: <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-Latn/oblasti/stanovnistvo/procene-stanovnistva>

REUTERS, *Bosnian Serb pro-Russian leader renews secession threat*, 10 October 2022, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/bosnian-serb-pro-russian-leader-renews-secession-threat-2022-10-10/>

SANDERS David, *Patterns of Political Instability*, London, Macmillan, 1981

ŠARIĆ Ljiljana, FELBERG Tatjana Radanović, “*Cyrillic does not kill*”: *Symbols, Identity, and Memory in Croatian Public Discourse*, in *Družbodlovne razprave*, Vol. 13, 2017

SAVANOVIĆ Aleksandar, VRANJŠ Aleksandar, VRANJEŠ Nevenko, BUDMIR Željko, *Izvori, geneza I priroda secesionističke retorike u Republici Srpskoj*, *Političa Misao*, Vol. 57, No. 1, 2020

SCHIRCH Lisa, *Civilian Peacekeeping: Preventing Violence and Making Space for Democracy*, Uppsala: Life and Peace Institute, 2006

Sevez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata, *Република Српска је наш завет* (promotional video about the 9<sup>th</sup> of January parade), video available on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gFKtxBv0-s>

SIMIĆ Olivera (ed.), *An Introduction to Transitional Justice*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016

SIRIPURAPU Anshu, *The U.S. Inequality Debate*, 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2022, available at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-inequality-debate>

SMITH Anthony D., Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986

SNYDER Timothy, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, Basic Books, New York, 2010

Statistička.ba, Population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, available at: <http://www.statistika.ba/?show=12&id=49800>

STEELE Brent J., Ontological security in international relations: self-identity in the IR state, *The new international relations*, 2008, pp. 191-207

SUBOTIĆ Jelena, *Hijacked Justice: Dealing with the Past in the Balkans*, Ithaca, Cornell university Press, 2009

ŠULIGOJ Metod, RUDAN Elena, Media-generated characteristics of Homeland War-related commemorations in Croatia, *Memory Studies*, 2022

SVOB Connie, BROWN Norman R., TAKSIĆ Vladimir, KATULIĆ Katarina, ŽAUHAR Valnea, *Intergenerational transmission of historical memories and social-distance attitudes in post-war second-generation Croatians*, *Memory Cognition*, Vol. 3, No. 29, 2016, pp. 846-855

TAJFEL Henri, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology*, Cambridge University Press, 1981

TOKAČA Mirsad, *Bosansk knjige mrtvih: ljudski gunci u Bosni I Hercegovini 1991-1995, Sarajevo, Istraživačko dokumentacioni centar, 2012*

TORE Rose, 'Reflections on Peacebuilding and the UN Development Assistance Framework', *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, Vol.2, No.3, 2006

TSCHIRGI Necla, *Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Revisited: Achievements, Limitations, Challenges*, conference report, New York: International Peace Academy, Oct. 2004, pp. 2–4.

UDAYAKUMAR, S. P. *Handcuffed to History: Narratives, Pathologies, and Violence in South Asia*, London, Praeger, 2001.

UNITED NATIONS, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping*, Security Council, 31st January 1992

UNITED NATIONS, *Guidance Note of the Secretary-General: United Nations Approach to Transitional Justice*”, 10 March 2010

UNITED NATIONS, *peacekeeping definition*, available at: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/terminology>

UNITED NATIONS, *Report of the Secretary-General: The rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies*, 23 August 2004

VELIKONJA Mitja, *Religious Separation and Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Texas A&M University Press, 2003

VOLKAN Vamik, *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*, Basic Books, 1998

WANG Zheng, *Memory Politics, Identity and Conflict: Historical Memory as a Variable*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018

War in Serbia database, available at: <https://ratusrbiji.rs/en/knowledge-database/>

WEINREICH Peter, BACOVA Vera, ROUGIER Nathalie, *Basic primordialism in ethnic and national identity*, in “Analysing Identity”: Cross-Cultural, Societal and Clinical Contexts, Routledge, 2002

World Population Review, available at: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/income-inequality-by-country>

YIHR, *Commemorative practices in the region and attitudes towards the 1990s war crimes*, Draslar List, Belgrade, 2022

YIHR, *Izveštaj o komemoracijama ratnih zločina u Srbiji, Bosni I Hercegovini, Kosovu I Crnoj Gori*, Belgrade, 2022

Zakon HR, Zakon o izborima zastupnika U Hrvatski sabor, available at:  
<https://www.zakon.hr/download.htm?id=355>

ZANGWILL O. L., Remembering Revisited, in Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology, Vol. 24, No.2, 1972, pp. 123-138