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**FROM COMBATANTS TO CIVILIANS:
EXPLORING AND RE-THINKING 'NORMAL LIFE'
IN POST-CONFLICT CROATIA (1995-2017)**

By

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics and
International Studies**

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Acknowledgements

For the majority of MPhil/PhD students, writing a thesis is a long and lonely journey which consists of several phases – upgrade, fieldwork, writing, endless supervision meetings, feedback and editing. Mine was a bit different as it started decades ago although I was not aware of it. Just like my previous thesis in history, this one is a result of unfortunate personal circumstances. In my childhood, I was drawn to the distant worlds and seeing the Earth from space, so blissful, peaceful and perfect. While my classmates were going to history competitions, I was going to ones in mathematics. I liked tools and fixing stuff. I was preparing myself to study astronomy and one day to fly into the space. But, fate had a different plan. Because of my visual impairment, it became clear I would never be the one thing I wanted to be. Strangely, but approximately at the same time when my dream died, another one was born. I was lucky to have a dad with a variety of interests, but his greatest love was history. I was 14 years old when he bought me my first history book. It was Nikolai Tolstoy's book *The Minister and the Massacres*. That was a day when my new journey began because that book taught me that declaring a topic 'controversial' is usually done when someone has something to hide, meaning that the right questions have been asked. It also taught me that, as James McPherson stated 'revision is the lifeblood of historical scholarship' and there is no single, eternal, and immutable 'truth' about past events and their meaning. That was in 1991 when the war in Croatia broke out and hardly anyone had time to think about Tolstoy's discoveries. In the following years, my dad kept feeding my newly discovered hunger for modern history, filling our family library with more and more books, and investing everything he ever owned into my research.

In a way, this thesis was a natural progression of the previous one which focused on mass crimes committed against Croatian citizens by the communist regime in the last months of the Second World War and the first months after the end of the war. However, although this thesis explores another conflict of the same nation, it is far more than a 'sequel' as it goes beyond a war itself and explores transformation of people and their society throughout time focusing on their ideal of 'normal' and the vision of the world they fought for and they would like to live in. Unlike the previous thesis which emerged from my curiosity and the interests of those around me, this one emerges from personal experiences as well because the participants in this research experienced the same conflict as I did and at that time many of

them were not much older than me. Strangely, both research projects are rooted in events that took place in 1991.

1991 was supposed to be a year like any other but democratic changes that occurred in 1989/1990 transformed my 'normal life'. In the pre-war period my problems were homework and getting a new album by New Kids On The Block. I was worried about skipping MTV Hits; this was a time when having electricity at home was 'normal' and there was a hot meal on the table. That changed in 1991. When the TV signal was lost, there was no more MTV. During my teenage years I had no idea what was happening in the world of music and I am still catching up by listening to hits from that period, perhaps reliving the final phase of my childhood which was lost. In the early 1990s, listening to music was no longer 'normal' as there was no electricity and my dad declared that batteries for the radio should be used only for listening to the news and emergencies. Silence followed by shootings was a new 'normal'. My new everyday life in 1991 was running to and from school while snipers were shooting at us, studying in the dark with wax candles and being wrapped in several blankets because there was no heating. We were lacking food and eating from tins, we were having a bath perhaps once per week and we were sleepy in the classroom because it was impossible to sleep at night when shooting kept interrupting our sleep. The shift in circumstances completely changed my everyday life and my version of 'normal'. In some areas it was much worse because many people had to leave their homes. Some areas were bombarded incessantly, while others barely felt war at all.

People changed too. Yesterday's friends became enemies, even for me, a mere child. In pre-war society, your position and family history were directly related to your identity and safety. It was us and them with lines sometimes blurred, although not due to reconciliation. Sometimes people simply switched sides for their own wellbeing and benefits. Of course, that included a nice house and holidays too. I saw one of those 'nice houses'. It belonged to one of my classmates who lived near the school. I used to attend kindergarten with her and we went to each other's birthday parties. Her dad was a Yugoslav Army officer. Sometimes my mom worked late and my classmate's mom would take me to their home to wait for my mom to pick me up. I once asked my mom once what makes them so different; why were they privileged. My mom said: 'They go on holidays.' We never did. Also, they did not go to church and did not celebrate Christmas. Only the 'enemies' of the regime did, like us. I was no longer invited to my classmate's birthday after the first democratic elections in Croatia. I did not know why and I was even more confused when in 1991 another classmate told me that that girl would not be joining us for someone else's birthday because her family had departed

for Belgrade, Serbia. I still remember the darkness I felt at that moment, a sense of loss and grief, but most of all betrayal because she had known me for my entire childhood and she never said goodbye. Twenty-nine years later, and I am still waiting for that ‘normal’ goodbye because without it there is no closure, no forgiveness and no moving on to my post-war ‘normal’ regardless of what that should be. Approximately at the same time, another classmate was leaving us as well. She too was the child of a Yugoslav officer. She did not want to go to Belgrade, so she showed up at school just before her trip and cried in the arms of our teacher begging for permission to stay with us. That was not possible as it was obviously her parents’ decision. She bravely stood in front of the entire class and said how much she loved us, how much she wanted to stay with us and how sorry she was for whatever her people would do to us. She cried and begged us for forgiveness although she had done nothing wrong. After that, she approached every single one of us, shook our hands, hugged us and said goodbye with tears in her eyes. We were sad too because she was not our enemy and for her bravery and the respect she showed us, she would never be. I found her online many years ago and discovered that she now has a nice life and a good career. Sometimes I read about her because I want to make sure that the girl who treated us so humanly during the most difficult times is doing well. If I ever met her again, I will shake her hand and be gracious despite the fact that her father is my enemy. On 15 November 1991 his Army bombed my school and his daughter’s former school. There is no forgiveness for something so heinous.

‘If we’re always at war, then we’ll make our country a prison and every one of our citizens will be a prisoner’, is a line from the 2018 movie *Entebbe*. Perhaps this is what people like me are – prisoners who spend their eternity in pursuit of a ‘normal’ which is some sort of a vision quest, a rite of passage in some Native Americans cultures, aiming at finding one’s purpose in life and their role in a community. Perhaps it is not a goal – ‘normal life’ – which is worth living, but the pursuit in itself as it pushes us beyond our comfort zone, challenges our beliefs and routines, and encourages us to transform ourselves and the society we live in. It is an on-going exploration of who we are and what we could become on a very personal level because, as Charles Addams once said, ‘normal is an illusion; what is normal for the spider is chaos for the fly’. And who can understand that better than those of us who are autistic and wired differently? After reading about Stef Jansen’s research that brought to light ‘normal life’ as a main object of hope in post-war Bosnia and Croatia, I felt like I finally found an academic piece which spoke to me and explained why the spider’s world had been so chaotic. This way a central theme of ‘normal life’, or an exploration of it, emerged in my research. This would not have been possible without the constant encouragement from my

supervisors Dr. Briony Jones and Dr. Erzsébet Strausz. I would like to thank them for their suggestions, feedback, patience, and support.

Overcoming obstacles was easier in good company. I would also like to thank to the members of staff at the University of Warwick – Disability Services staff, Dr. Alexandra Homolar, Dr. Louise Gracia, and my former supervisors Dr. Miranda Alison and Dr. Gabrielle Lynch. Huge thanks also go to the Frankopan Fund for the only funding I had on this journey, Dr. Ivan Hrvoić from Toronto, Canada, for all his support without which finishing this PhD would be nearly impossible and other individuals who helped me in the most critical moments I faced during the past five years.

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In the end there are three very special people I would like to thank – my great grandfather Stipe and my grandmother Zorka for passing on to me their words of wisdom; and to my best friend Marinka for being my light. None of them will ever truly know how great and positive an impact their presence has had on my life.

Declaration of authorship

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

The research presented was carried out by the author except in the cases and clearly labelled in the text.

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the exploration of 'normal' in post-conflict societies using an example of Croatia where the war ended in 1995. A new normal significantly differs from the pre-war 'normal' which was 'normal' only because 'we didn't know any better' suggesting there are expectations that a new 'normal' should meet to fulfil people's desires and be the 'normal' they fought for. Therefore, 'normal life' emerges as an ideal enriched by a dynamic and flexible nature which changes according to the external circumstances and inner experiences; thus, it is being actively pursued. If people's expectations are not met, a profound experience of disappointment and dissatisfaction persists, potentially leading to new instabilities and conflict.

In this thesis, these ideas will be explored from the perspective of 300 Croatian Army veterans who participated in this study. Using my empirical data collected from their questionnaires and interviews, I argue that we need to rethink 'normal life' as a part of post-conflict recovery and the way it is currently understood in a broader context of peace-building. Although many researchers tackled everyday life and explored various peace-building topics such as reconciliation and truth, 'normal life' has not been analysed in-depth. Thus, it is essential to address this important theoretical gap to understand conflict in a specific context of a local 'normal' and reconsider more nuanced approaches to local post-conflict recovery. Furthermore, I discuss a range of definitions of 'normal life', what this ideal could be and how it links to different understandings of inner peace, another framing concept emerging from the data as closely connected to 'home' and 'normal'. I also look into what is lacking in order to establish 'normal life' in the post-conflict society from different perspectives such as history, security, relationship with the enemy, justice and how desire for establishing 'normal life' can encourage these processes.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Croatian	English
AVNOJ	Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije	Antifascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia
CK SKH	Centralni komitet Saveza komunista Hrvatske	Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia
CK SKS	Centralni komitet Saveza komunista Srbije	Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia
HČSP	Hrvatska čista stranka prava	Croatian Pure Party of Rights
HDA	Hrvatski državni arhiv	Croatian State Archives
HDZ	Hrvatska demokratska zajednica	Croatian Democratic Union
HOS	Hrvatske oružane snage (1944-1945) / Hrvatske obrambene snage (1991)	Croatian Armed Forces (1944-1945) / Croatian Defence Forces (1991)
HSP	Hrvatska stranka prava	Croatian Party of Rights
HV	Hrvatska vojska (since 1991)	Croatian Army (since 1991)
HVO	Hrvatsko vijeće obrane	Croatian Defence Council (1991-1996)
JNA	Jugoslavenska narodna armija	Yugoslav National Army
KOS	Kontraobavještajna služba	Counter-Intelligence Service (Yugoslavia)
KPJ	Komunistička partija Jugoslavije	Communist Party of Yugoslavia
MUP	Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova	Department of Internal Affairs
NDH	Nezavisna Država Hrvatska	Independent State of Croatia
NHR	Neovisni za Hrvatsku	Independents for Croatia
NM	Narodna milicija	People's Militia (Yugoslavia)
PZ	Poljoprivredna zadruga	Agricultural collective
RH	Republika Hrvatska	Republic of Croatia
RSK	Republika Srpska Krajina	Republic of Serbian Krajina
SANU	Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti	Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts
SAO	Srpska autonomna oblast	Serb Autonomous Province

SDP	Socijal-demokratska partija	Social Democratic Party
SDS	Srpska demokratska stranka	Serb Democratic Party
SDSS	Samostalna demokratska srpska stranka	Independent Democratic Serb Party
SFRJ	Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SKH	Savez komunista Hrvatske	League of Communists of Croatia
SKJ	Savez komunista Jugoslavije	League of Communists of Yugoslavia
SNV	Srpsko narodno vijeće	Serb National Council
SOA	Sigurnosno-obavještajna agencija	Security-Intelligence Agency (Croatia)
SPC	Srpska pravoslavna crkva	Serbian Orthodox Church
SRH	Socijalistička republika Hrvatska	Socialist Republic of Croatia
SSRN	Socijalistički savez radnog naroda	Socialist Alliance of Working People
SSZNO	Savezni sekretarijat za narodnu obranu	Federal Secretariat for National Defence (Yugoslavia)
SUP	Sekretarijat za unutrašnje poslove	Secretariat for Internal Affairs (Yugoslavia, occupied Croatian territories)
TO	Teritorijalna obrana	Territorial Defence (Yugoslavia)
UDBA	Uprava državne bezbednosti	State Security Administration (Yugoslav secret police)
ZKRZ	Zemaljska komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača	State Commission for the Determination of Crimes Committed by Occupiers and their Collaborators (Yugoslavia)
ZNG	Zbor narodne garde (1991)	Croatian National Guard (1991)

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION:
RECOVERING FROM VIOLENCE AND PURSUING ‘NORMAL LIFE’

‘There is a thin line between normal and abnormal because what is normal to one person may not be normal to another’, said one of the participants in this research.¹ How hazy this line really is was emphasised by another Croatian Army veteran who stated that he had ‘normal life’ before the war, but that was only because ‘we didn’t know any better’.² During the war ‘normal’ transformed due to new circumstances, but after the war ‘everything that was normal in war was no longer normal’; thus, an adjustment to peaceful life was difficult because the hardest thing was ‘pretending to be a normal person’.³ Tackling the blurred boundaries between war, crime and peace, Duffield also addressed ‘normal’ saying that

contrary to conventional wisdom, if we wish to examine conflict we must begin by analysing what is normal. Or at least, those long-term and embedded social processes that define the conditions of everyday life. The purpose and reasons for conflict are located in these processes. From this perspective, political violence is not different, apart or irrational in relation to the way we live: it is an expression of its inner logic.⁴

What is normal to me may not be normal to another and, whatever ‘normal’ is, it is also an expression of our inner logic and the way we perceive ourselves and the world around us. My personal experience led me to believe that even at a young age humans are capable of rising beyond frames defined by society, upbringing and other influences. Crossing these boundaries where personal space was meant to be designed by something ‘bigger’ than us and reshaping the new ‘normal’ was one of the starting points in this research. In this thesis, I will argue that we need to rethink ‘normal life’ as a part of post-conflict recovery and the way it is currently understood in a broader context of peace-building because, as Duffield argued, to examine conflict we also need to analyse ‘normal’. Although many researchers tackled

¹ OTH010. Note: All empirical data in this thesis were collected from the Croatian Army veterans who participated in this study, 300 in total. All of them completed the questionnaires while 60 were also interviewed. This will be explained in detail in the following chapters. Please see chapter 3 for methodological and ethical information.

² ND025.

³ ND048.

⁴ Quoted in: Patricia M. Thornton, ‘Introduction, Identity Matters’, *Identity Matters, Ethnic and Sectarian Conflict* (New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), ed. by James L. Peacock, Patricia M. Thornton and Patrick B. Inman, p. 10. Originally published: Mark Duffield, ‘Post-modern Conflict: Warlords, Post-adjustment States and Private Protection’, *Civil Wars*, Vol. 1 (1998), No. 1, 65-102.

everyday life and explored various peace-building topics such as reconciliation and community, ‘normal life’ has not been analysed in-depth. The statements at the opening of this thesis reveal that the idea of ‘normal’ is incredibly important in a society where generations suffered from violence and that ‘normal life’ is neither objective nor static. It is something we are producing as it emerges from our day to day; thus, it deserves more intellectual attention in order to understand conflict in a specific context of a local ‘normal’ and reconsider more nuanced approaches to local post-conflict recovery and peace-building.

Some could argue that violence is indeed ‘normal’. Similar to Duffield, Thornton proposed that conflict is not extraordinary and instead grows out of the more quotidian practices and ordinary behaviours that characterise everyday life.⁵ Hobbes went a step further describing a state of war as the natural condition of mankind.⁶ We are violent creatures who seek to destroy each other, and whose lives would be short and deaths brutal if there was no government, no civilization, no laws and no common power to restrain our nature.⁷ ‘Civilization’ is the key element that apparently distinguishes us from beasts. It was used by a participant in this research who described reintegration into civilian life as ‘a basis of civilizing people when transitioning from war to peace’.⁸ When asked to define ‘normal life’, some participants described it as the one before the war⁹; thus, it has nothing in common with conflict and safety was highlighted as one of its basic aspects. Hence, it seems that ‘civilization’ and ‘normal’ seem to share the same denominator as they both oppose to Hobbes’ ‘natural condition of mankind’ although some participants accept violence as a part of life. Or, as William J. Astore¹⁰ said, ‘war should be the realm of the extreme, of the abnormal’ and, therefore, ‘it should be the death of normalcy, not the dreary norm’.¹¹ War implies extreme violence. Throughout the history of mankind this ‘death of normalcy’ was often put to the test leaving behind millions of dead and millions of survivors who tried to continue with their ‘normal’ lives. What was also tested was the human ability to plant the seeds of a successful resolution, overcome differences and build peace although how to

⁵ Thornton, ‘Introduction’, p. 10.

⁶ Stephen Finn, ‘Thomas Hobbes: Methodology’, *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, <<https://www.iep.utm.edu/hobmeth/>> [accessed 4 May 2020].

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ ES040.

⁹ WS013.

¹⁰ Astore is a retired lieutenant colonel of the US Air Force.

¹¹ William Astore, ‘War is the new normal: Seven deadly reasons why America’s wars persist’, *Common Dreams*, 2 February 2015, <<https://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/02/02/war-new-normal-seven-deadly-reasons-why-americas-wars-persist>> [accessed 29 April 2020].

achieve the best results was frequently argued. In the following sections, I briefly tackle these issues using examples of peace-building challenges at the end of the 20th century.

In the past 25 years, a large amount of literature has been published about liberal peace-building and its criticism. Some scholars stress that nearly all current works continue to put ‘the liberal’ or ‘the West’ at the centre of analysis, from the perspective of external actors and their successes and failures.¹² As Schneckener highlighted, when the relationship with local actors is addressed, it is merely conceptualised as an intervening or a contextual variable which explains or evaluates the outcome of peace-building practices.¹³ This approach excludes local actors as active contributors to post-conflict recovery making them players in somebody else’s reality rather than creators of their own and undermines the subjectivity of ‘normal’. Thus, the return to ‘local’ is needed to analyse different shades and aspects of ‘normal’. In this thesis, the ‘local’ are those who experienced violence most acutely – just ‘ordinary people’ who due to unforeseen circumstances in 1990/1991 became the Croatian defenders with the goal to defend their homes, families and their version of ‘normal’.

Despite the criticism, liberal peace-building has been ‘a prominent strategy for third-party intervention in post-war countries since the end of the Cold War’.¹⁴ The Croatian case was no different.¹⁵ In the early 1990s, when the country faced the war¹⁶ and then the long path

¹² Jenny H. Peterson, ‘A Conceptual Unpacking Of Hybridity: Accounting For Notions Of Power, Politics And Progress In Analysis Of Aid-Driven Interfaces’, *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, Vol. 7 (2012), No.2, p. 18. Ulrich Schneckener, ‘Peacebuilding in crisis? Debating peacebuilding paradigms and practices’, *Peacebuilding in Crisis, Rethinking paradigms and practices of transitional cooperation* (London – New York: Routledge, 2016), ed. by Tobias Debiel, Thomas Held and Ulrich Schneckener, p. 12.

¹³ Schneckener, ‘Peacebuilding in crisis?’, p. 12.

¹⁴ Idrissa Tamba Bindi and Ozgur Tufekci, ‘Liberal Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: A critical exploration’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 53 (2018), No. 8, 1158-1172.

¹⁵ This was even reflected in one of the most famous anti-war Croatian songs *Stop the war in Croatia* which was written in English and broadcasted by the BBC, CNN and many others in August 1991. The song equally promoted peace and the cause of Croatian independence on the global stage. The lyrics included this verse: ‘We want to share the European dream, We want democracy and peace, Let Croatia be one of Europe’s stars, Europe, you can stop the war’. This is a clear message about Croats wanting to be a part of what was perceived as the West with the emphasis on one of the key elements of the liberal peace-building – the Western-style democracy. The song also included an appeal to the top level actors in the political arena as those who have power to stop the war. Another element of the song is a reference to some aspects of ‘normal life’ such as love, God and children (as identified by the participants in this research) as the author was asking to stop the war in the name of those values. In the video, the war footage is shown with those of the top level actors (for example, the White House, the European capitals, the Vatican, and Croatia’s president Franjo Tuđman) and ‘ordinary people’ in their everyday lives with reference to traditions, culture, history, national identity and peaceful everyday living. One scene from the footage shows a red Zastava 750, (known as a ‘Fićo’), Yugoslav-made car which was common among the citizens at that time. Its owner parked it in the middle of the street in the Croatian town Osijek in an attempt to block the path of Yugoslav tanks in June 1991. This event remained in the collective memory of the Croatian people and in 2011 a monument was erected to celebrate it as a symbol of the resistance of ‘ordinary people’ against violence and aggression. More about this event is available at <https://www.24sata.hr/news/dan-kad-je-crveni-fico-usao-u-legendu-on-je-nas-maleni-heroj-579783> [accessed 3 January 2020]. The song is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_Bb_4PUe8g [accessed 2 January 2020].

¹⁶ This later became known as the Homeland War or the Croatian War for Independence.

of post-conflict recovery, development of a new democracy was strongly encouraged by Western nations which recognised Croatia's independence.¹⁷ Moving away from Yugoslav socialism was followed by economic reforms, human rights protection, development of civil society and the introduction of new actors which influenced public opinion. Shortly afterwards, Croatia found itself grasping towards EU membership¹⁸. Meanwhile, new challenges concerning justice and law emerged, but above all, the concept that probably every adult Croat remembers as the main theme of the late 1990s – reconciliation.

The first Croatian president Franjo Tuđman¹⁹ used that word often, but the understanding of reconciliation was portrayed by Croatian journalist Milan Ivkošić in a 2015 article describing the meeting between Tuđman and a group of journalists. During the meeting, Ivkošić warned a German journalist Carl Gustaf Ströhm that in Croatia nobody could be an editor-in-chief unless they had been a member of the Yugoslav Communist Party²⁰. According to Ivkošić, Tuđman replied: 'God damn it, Ivkošić, and what about reconciliation?'²¹. Ivkošić replied: 'Mr. President, I suppose that reconciliation should also include those who have never been communists'²². Tuđman laughed, but Ivkošić claimed that this episode revealed Tuđman's vision of reconciliation as he preferred people who had a similar life journey which included a path from an orthodox Yugoslav communist to a determinate Croatian nationalist. Ivkošić concluded that Tuđman made peace between a communist and a Croat in his heart wishing to apply an example of his own fate to the entire nation and hoping that descendants of the warring parties in the Second World War – Ustasha and Partisans – would be free of the heritage of their ancestors. Ivkošić argued that in Tuđman's era, reconciliation was 'the biological imperative for the survival of the nation and the country in the face of pernicious ideological exclusivity'.²³

Tuđman believed that setting aside differences among Croats was the only way to ensure unity and victory against Greater-Serbia politics. In the final year of the Homeland War, when Croatia liberated larger parts of its territory, he applied the same approach. The

¹⁷ Iceland was the first country to recognise Croatia on 19 December 1991. All members of the European Community (EC) recognised it on 15 January 1992 which is today celebrated as the Day of International Recognition of the Republic of Croatia.

¹⁸ Croatia became an EU candidate in 2004 and it joined the EU on 1 July 2013.

¹⁹ Tuđman became a president in 1990 and ruled until his death in December 1999.

²⁰ Abbreviated KPJ – Komunistička partija Jugoslavije. Since 1952, SKJ – Savez komunista Jugoslavije (English: League of Communists of Yugoslavia).

²¹ Milan Ivkošić, 'Tuđman me prekinuo: Boga mu Ivkošiću, a pomirba?!', *Večernji list*, 2 July 2015, <<https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/tudman-me-prekinuo-boga-mu-ivkosicu-a-pomirba-1012849>> [accessed 4 April 2020].

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Croatian government ensured humane treatment and human rights to the Serbian minority²⁴, and in 1996 members of the Serbian paramilitary units were guaranteed protection under the General Amnesty²⁵ Act²⁶. If reconciliation among Croats was necessary for survival during the war, reconciliation with the enemy was needed for the post-war development of a modern country.²⁷ Or at least this was Tuđman's conclusion. For many others, this approach was not so welcome and a larger number of participants in this research directly linked Tuđman's version of reconciliation, which included both communists and Greater-Serbia ideology sympathisers, to some of the main problems Croatia faces today. Instead of setting aside previous differences, it appears that 'forced' reconciliation created more scores to be settled leading to anger and frustration with one participant describing amnesty and a lack of lustration as 'two biggest disgraces of the Croatian administration'²⁸. The impact of these past issues on today's life in Croatia is so relevant that participants identified them as the main threats to safety and, consequently, to an ideal of 'normal life' which emerged as the main priority for most participants. As a result, 'ordinary people' ended up in a situation where they were expected to play roles in a reality created for them, instead of with them. However, as I explore in this thesis, such reality does not meet their expectations resulting in dissatisfaction and disappointment while they simultaneously pursue their vision of 'normal life' in everyday living which is very dynamic, constructed in an individual way and subject to constant change. This rift between reality and desires serves as a disturbance to inner peace as 'a basis for normal life'²⁹ and prolongs conflict on a deeply personal level.

²⁴ *Chronology of the Homeland War (With the review of certain events 1945 – 1990)* (Zagreb: Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata, undated), p. 47. This file is available at <https://centardomovinskograta.hr/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Domovinski-Rat-Kronologija-eng.pdf> [accessed 23 September 2018]. A video footage available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCvBjrbw3JM> [accessed 4 February 2020].

²⁵ In the Croatian language this law is known as *Zakon o općem oprost* (English: General Forgiveness Law). Although the title is translated as the General Amnesty Law, some participants in this research (for example, FO043) argued that in the Croatian language the word 'amnesty' would imply that the rebels against Croatia, including perpetrators of war crimes, would be pardoned after standing trial which would give the opportunity to provide evidence against them for the purpose of establishing historical truth. They added that what Croatia actually did was an 'abolition' which in the Croatian language means that the rebels did not face trials and they were all pardoned by default which in practice denied people from finding out as much as possible about the committed acts of violence preventing society from facing the truth, dealing with the past, healing and moving on.

²⁶ The full text in English available at http://www.vsrh.hr/CustomPages/Static/HRV/Files/Legislation_General-Amnesty-Act_1996.pdf [accessed 23 March 2020].

²⁷ Franjo Tuđman, 'Vlak mira – Govor u Vukovaru', *Dr. Franjo Tuđman – Prvi hrvatski predsjednik*, 8 June 1997, <<https://www.tudjman.hr/govori/vlak-mira-govor-u-vukovaru>> [accessed 20 March 2020].

²⁸ FO043.

²⁹ ND019.

1.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE WAR IN CROATIA: A CONFLICT THAT KEEPS KILLING

In September 2019, Jakov Sedlar³⁰ released a new documentary film simply titled *3069*. One may ask what this number means; the answer is – people. This was the number of Croatian veterans who committed suicide by the time filming started.³¹ By the time it had finished, this number had increased to 3,269.³² One of them cut his throat, another one set himself on fire, the third one shot himself in the head, the fourth one hanged himself near his house, and the fifth one killed himself with a chainsaw.³³ The list goes on. It is estimated that at least 19,500 Croatian citizens were killed or went missing in the Homeland War³⁴ including 12,500 on the Croatian side.³⁵ However, the 3,269 who committed suicide are also victims of the war they survived and the subsequent peace where they could not find their happiness. As a mother of one of them explained, ‘my son was killed by the war; he continued with his life, but he was ill and unhappy; he always spoke of that war’.³⁶ The number of suicides speaks of traumas that continue to live in one’s soul; this number is also a reason to tell a story about ‘normal life’ of army veterans – or the lack of it.

At the time of writing this thesis, 3,269 already belongs to the past because the number certainly increased since the documentary was shown.³⁷ ‘Normal life’ those veterans were searching for was interrupted by the horrors of war they experienced. However, the roots of the conflict are much deeper and to understand its complexities, an in-depth analysis of the past 100 years³⁸ would be needed. The relevant events and processes during that period could

³⁰ He is a Croatian movie director and producer.

³¹ This number should be updated with the number of veterans’ wives and children who also committed suicides. By the end of 2017, 156 wives and 52 veterans’ children killed themselves. Jakov Sedlar, ‘Dosad se ubilo 3017 branitelja, 156 njihovih žena i 52 njihove djece, jer su izdani ideali za koje su se borili’, *Hrvatski tjednik*, 14 December 2017, <<https://www.hkv.hr/hrvatski-tjednik/28259-j-sedlar-dosad-se-ubilo-3017-branitelja-156-njihovih-zena-i-52-njihove-djece-jer-su-izdani-ideali-za-koje-su-se-borili.html>> [accessed 2 April 2020].

³² Renata Rašović, ‘Suicidi branitelja više nisu vijest, nego društvena pošast’, *Večernji list*, 25 September 2019, <<https://www.vecernji.hr/premium/suicidi-branitelja-vise-nisu-vijest-nego-drustvena-posast-1347684>> [accessed 5 March 2020].

³³ Snježana Šetka, ‘Snimljen dokumentarac o 3069 suicida branitelja, redatelj govori o razlozima njihovih samoubojstava’, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 22 September 2019, <<https://zadarski.slobodnadalmacija.hr/zadar/regional/snimljen-dokumentarac-o-3069-suicida-branitelja-redatelj-govori-o-razlozima-njihovih-samoubojstava-624455>> [accessed 6 March 2020].

³⁴ *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 52.

³⁵ This is based on incomplete data collected by the end of 2009. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 52.

³⁶ Snježana Vučković, ‘Samoubojstva branitelja ne prestaju! Brojka je stravična: Složio je uniformu i propucao se pištoljem’, *Dnevno.hr*, 21 January 2020, <<https://www.dnevno.hr/domovina/samoubojstva-branitelja-ne-prestaju-brojka-je-stravicna-slozio-je-uniformu-i-propucao-se-pistoljem-1421812/>> [accessed 2 February 2020].

³⁷ At the time of writing this thesis, the most recent data are not available.

³⁸ This refers to the period between 1918 when Croatia joined the future Kingdom of Yugoslavia and 2017 when this research was conducted. This was strongly emphasised by a veteran from Eastern Slavonia who stated that ‘ever since England came to power in our region in 1918, we have always had some problems because the Serbs

explain feelings of the participants in this research, their approaches to the post-conflict issues that Croatian society is still facing, and their understanding of potential spoilers of peace and 'normal life' in Croatia. For the purpose of this thesis, I provide a brief timeline of the Homeland War and the post-war period. These sections will contribute to the better understanding of the conflict, current issues of safety as an obstacle to 'normal life', challenges the veterans faced after the war and injustices they spoke about as a focal point of their unsuccessful 'reintegration' into civilian life, which I explore in empirical chapters.

As the literature for the pre-war period is incredibly rich and diverse, I listed key additional sources in the footnotes starting from the literature focused on repression in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia³⁹ and the Second World War⁴⁰, particularly war losses⁴¹ which have been the focus of political and historical debates since the mid-1980s as one of the central themes of the Greater-Serbia ideology⁴². I also included literature focused on the mass killings of Croats⁴³ which had been denied by the Yugoslav authorities for 45 years⁴⁴. This topic is

are their angry dog that has always been kept on their chain, but every now and then it's been released little by little whether it is England or Russia as they both have their interests'. (ES037) This statement demonstrates that some of the participants have been preoccupied by political turmoil that has been happening since the end of the First World War, and, moreover, they have been putting these events in a broader context of world politics, dynasty connections and different spheres of interests.

³⁹ For further reading see: Bosiljka Janjatović, *Politički teror u Hrvatskoj od 1918. do 1935.* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2002).

⁴⁰ For further reading see: Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (London: Bodley Head, 2009), Philip J. Cohen, *Tajni rat Srbije* (Zagreb: Ceres, 1997), Alexander Korb, 'Nation-building and mass violence: The Independent State of Croatia, 1941–45', *The Routledge History of the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 2011) ed. by Jonathan C. Friedman, Hrvoje Matković, *Povijest Nezavisne Države Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 2002), Hrvoje Matković, *Povijest Jugoslavije* (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 2003), Jerca Vodušek Starič, 'Stalinist and anti-Stalinist repression in Yugoslavia, 1944 – 1953', *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe, Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) ed. by Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, pp. 160-179, Mark C. Wheeler, *Britain and the war for Yugoslavia 1940 – 1943* (Boulder: Eastern European Monographs, 1980).

⁴¹ For further reading see: Bogoljub Kočović, *Sahrana jednog mita. Žrtve Drugog svetskog rata u Jugoslaviji* (Beograd: Otkrovenje, 2005), Vladimir Žerjavić, *Opsesije i megalomanije oko Jasenovca i Bleiburga* (Zagreb: Globus, 1992), Vladimir Geiger, 'Ljudski gubici Hrvatske u Drugom svjetskom ratu koje su prouzročili okupatori i njihovi pomagači'. Brojdbeni pokazatelji (procjene, izračuni, popisi)', *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, No. 3 (2011), 699-749.

⁴² The concentration camp Jasenovac (Croatia) as its focal point served as the key element of the anti-Croatian propaganda which successfully fuelled the conflict in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, and this continues even today while Croatian society still struggles with coming to terms with that part of history. For further reading see: Vladimir Geiger, 'Brojdbeni pokazatelji o žrtvama logora Jasenovac, 1941 – 1945', *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, No. 2 (2013), 211-242, Željko Krušelj, 'Kako je Živanović 284 kostura pretvorio u 700.000 žrtava', *Vjesnik*, 23 April 2005, Željko Krušelj and Đuro Zagorac, 'Sporna knjiga mrtvih. Aktualne kontroverze u istraživanju broja poginulih i umrlih Jugoslavena naprosto tjeraju na analizu zbivanja oko popisa iz 1964. godine', *Danas*, No. 405 (21 November 1989), 24-25, Stipo Pilić and Blanka Matković, 'Poslijeratni zarobljenički logor Jasenovac prema svjedočanstvima i novim arhivskim izvorima', *Radovi*, No. 56 (2014), 323-408, Vladeta Vučković, 'Sahrana jednog mita', *Naša Reč*, No. 368 (1985).

⁴³ This was a topic of my MPhil thesis in the Department of History at the University of Warwick defended in October 2015. The thesis was published by BrownWalker Press (USA) in October 2017 and titled *Croatia and Slovenia at the end and after the Second World War (1944 – 1945): Mass crimes and human rights violations committed by the communist regime.* Available at <http://www.universal-publishers.com/book.php?method=ISBN&book=1627346910> [accessed 23 September 2019].

still being openly voiced in Croatian society because the truth behind the thousands of missing and murdered has not been revealed yet looms large in the memory of the entire nation and highlights divisions within society, and even families. Not only are these wounds still fresh in many individuals, but they also serve as a reminder of similarities between war crimes that occurred during the Second World War and those in the Homeland War. Moreover, many of those crimes were committed by units with identical insignia – the Chetniks' eagle and the communist red star – thus for many families the Homeland War was a new conflict, but the enemy remained the same. Consequently, some participants in this research stated that the Homeland War is a sequel to the Second World War⁴⁵, an aspect I explore in the empirical chapters. Bar-Tal described this as a normalised conflicted life⁴⁶ because over time people continue to live their 'normal' lives within the conflict that does not end. As I discuss in the following chapters, searching for truth as an important part of healing and peace-building⁴⁷, remains a common topic in that life, and participants in this research directly linked it to their priorities after the war in attempt to build a new 'normal life'.

1.1.1. THE RISE OF THE GREATER-SERBIA IDEOLOGY AND THE HOMELAND WAR

After Tito's death in 1980, economic, political and religious difficulties in the former Yugoslavia started to mount and the federal government began to crumble, particularly after

For further reading also see: Nicholas Bethell, *The Last Secret* (London: Penguin, 1995), John Corsellis and Marcus Ferrar, *Slovenija 1945., Smrt in preživetje po Drugi svetovni vojni* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2007), Jože Dežman (ed.), *Poročilo Komisije Vlade Republike Slovenije za reševanje vprašanj prikritih grobišč 2005 – 2008* (Ljubljana: Družina, 2008), Zdravko Dizdar, Vladimir Geiger, Milan Pojić and Mate Rupić (eds), *Partizanska i komunistička represija i zločini u Hrvatskoj 1944. – 1946., Dokumenti* (Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institute za povijest – Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2005), Zdravko Dizdar, 'Prilog istraživanju problema Bleiburga i križnih puteva (u povodu 60. obljetnice)', *Senjski zbornik*, 32 (1), Borivoje Karapandžić, *Kočevje, Titov najkrvaviji zločin* (Beograd: Knjižarnica Obradović, 1990), Vinko Nikolić (ed.), *Bleiburška tragedija hrvatskog naroda* (Zagreb: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije i Agencija za marketing – Azinović, 1993), Franc Perme, Anton Žitnik et al. (eds), *Slovenija 1941 – 1948 – 1952, Tudi mi smo umrli za domovino. Zamolčani grobovi in njihove žrtve* (Ljubljana – Grosuplje: Društvo za ureditev zamolčanih grobov, 2000), J. Ivan Prcela, *Hrvatski holokaust II., Dokumenti i svjedočanstva o poratnim pokoljima u Jugoslaviji* (Zagreb: Hrvatsko žrtvoslovno društvo, 2005), Nikolai Tolstoy, *Ministar i pokolji, Bleiburg i Kočevski Rog 1945* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, 1991), Boris Vlašić and Aleksandar Vojinović, *Križni put* (Zagreb: Start, 1991).

⁴⁴ In 1945, Croatia became one of Yugoslavia's six republics ruled by the Communist leader Josip Broz Tito. This was known as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (abbreviated SFRJ – Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija).

⁴⁵ OTH055. WS004. WS009.

⁴⁶ Daniel Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts, Socio-Psychological Foundations and Dynamics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 46.

⁴⁷ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1997), p. 30. Elisabeth Porter, *Peacebuilding, Women in international perspective* (London – New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 183.

the emergence of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia in 1986.⁴⁸ That same year, the text later known as the *Memorandum of SANU*⁴⁹ was published, reviving the Greater-Serbia programme which started to shape in 1844 and argued for Serbian territorial expansion.⁵⁰ Understanding the relevance of this ideology is essential. Its influence in Croatia today is explored in the empirical chapters in the context of new potential instabilities and a lack of safety as an obstacle to ‘normal life’.

Meanwhile, communist hegemony was challenged throughout Eastern Europe, and in Yugoslavia calls for free multiparty elections were becoming louder. The first multiparty elections in Croatia since 1938 were held in the spring of 1990. Former communist and retired Yugoslav National Army⁵¹ general Dr. Franjo Tuđman, led the Croatian Democratic Union⁵² to a victory⁵³, prompting the Serb Democratic Party⁵⁴ led by Jovan Rašković⁵⁵ to suspend relations with the Croatian Parliament. The Federal Secretariat for National Defence⁵⁶ in Belgrade seized the weapons of the Croatian Territorial Defence⁵⁷ from the Croatian authority and placed them in the JNA warehouses effectively disarming Croatia and rendering it unable to defend itself when a war broke out.⁵⁸ The political climate escalated and on the 25 July 1990 a Serbian National Council was established in Srb⁵⁹ and declared ‘sovereignty and autonomy of the Serb people in Croatia’.⁶⁰ On 17 August, the Serbian leadership established a number of paramilitary militias, declared a ‘state of war’ and a blockade of traffic was

⁴⁸ Imad A. Moosa, *Quantitative Easing As A Highway To Hyperinflation* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2013), p. 219.

⁴⁹ Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (abbreviated SANU – Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti).

⁵⁰ A prominent Croatian historian Stjepan Lozo argues that ‘the Greater-Serbia genocide against Croats started as early as the summer of 1941, and was carried out by both Chetniks and Partisans’. He believes that after the Second World War ‘along with the communist dictatorship, a kind of Serbian hegemony was established over Croats’. One of the participants (ES034) in this research expressed an identical idea claiming that Chetniks and the Partisans ‘through totalitarian rule and constant threat kept the Croatian national charge under control and used repression to suppress every expression of national pride’. According to Lozo, the Greater-Serbia forces met the fall of communism in 1989 and collapse of Yugoslavia ready, and between 1990 and 1995 Croatia had to face the Greater-Serbia aggression suffering more destruction and death. Stjepan Lozo, *Ideologija i propaganda velikosrpskog genocida nad Hrvatima, Projekt ‘Homogena Srbija’ 1941*. (Split: Naklada Bošković, 2017), p. 732.

⁵¹ Abbreviated JNA – Jugoslavenska narodna armija.

⁵² Abbreviated HDZ – Hrvatska demokratska zajednica.

⁵³ Tuđman was elected as the President of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (Abbreviated SRH – Socijalistička republika Hrvatska) Presidency. Croatian: Predsjednik Predsjedništva.

⁵⁴ Abbreviated SDS – Srpska demokratska stranka.

⁵⁵ He was one of the future leaders of the Serbian rebellion in Croatia.

⁵⁶ Abbreviated SSZNO – Savezni sekretarijat za narodnu obranu.

⁵⁷ Abbreviated TO – Teritorijalna obrana.

⁵⁸ *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 10.

⁵⁹ This is a village north of the Croatian town Knin.

⁶⁰ *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 10.

organised throughout Northern Dalmatia.⁶¹ In early 1991, some police stations renounced the authority of Croatia's Department of Internal Affairs⁶², and joined the so-called Krajina Secretariat for Internal Affairs⁶³. In March 1991, the first major armed conflict between the Croatian police and Serb extremists occurred in Pakrac.⁶⁴ Dr. Ivan Šreter, a physician from Pakrac known today as the 'Croatian Ghandi'⁶⁵, promoted non-violence stating that 'all people of good will equally desire peace, equality and happiness' and urging local Serbs to denounce extremists and Chetniks, and 'to focus on work because if there is work, there will be a good life'.⁶⁶ Despite his appeals, the killing of the first Croatian defender⁶⁷ in Plitvice, known as Bloody Easter, showed that Croatia was on the road to full-scale war.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, the so-called executive council of 'SAO Krajina' reached a decision on the unification with the Republic of Serbia⁶⁹ while Croats in those areas were threatened by Serb politicians.⁷⁰

⁶¹ This so-called log revolution marked the beginning of the armed insurgency of Serbs in Croatia against the democratically elected Croatian authorities and very soon it spread to other areas. Its ultimate objective was to annex part of Croatia's territory to Serbia hence creating an expanded ethnically homogenous Serbian state. On 21 December the so-called Serb Autonomous Province (Abbreviated SAO – Srpska autonomna oblast) of Krajina was declared in Knin; the same happened in other municipalities in Croatia with a larger Serb population: SAO Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (26 February 1991) and SAO Western Slavonia (12 August 1991). The Constitutional Court declared such decisions as illegal, anti-constitutional, null and void. Furthermore, on 19 December 1991 the insurgent Serbs in Knin proclaimed the 'Republic of Serbian Krajina' (Abbreviated RSK – Republika Srpska Krajina.) whose territory comprised the Serbian regions of Krajina, Slavonia, Baranja, Western Sirmium and Western Slavonia. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, pp. 10-30.

⁶² Abbreviated MUP – Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova.

⁶³ Abbreviated SUP – Sekretarijat za unutrašnje poslove.

⁶⁴ On 22 February 1991, the Croatian parliament adopted the Resolution on Disassociation from SFRJ and the Resolution on Protection of the Constitutional Order of the Republic of Croatia, emphasising that in case of conflicts with federal laws republic laws would prevail. (Abbreviated RH – Republika Hrvatska).

Serbian extremists replied on 28 February when they adopted a Declaration on Disassociation from Croatia. 24 hours later policemen of the Serb ethnicity employed in the Croatian MUP, together with mobilised reservists stormed the police station in Pakrac, Western Slavonia disarming all Croatian policemen. The media spread rumours on the persecution and slaughter of Serbs in Pakrac and its vicinity; these false rumours were denied even by the Federal SUP in Belgrade. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 13.

⁶⁵ Vlatka Polšak Palatinuš, 'Gdje su posmrtni ostaci hrvatskog Gandhija, čija je sudbina i danas obavijena velom tajne?', *Tportal.hr*, 15 January 2018, <<https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/gdje-su-posmrtni-ostaci-hrvatskog-gandhija-cija-je-sudbina-i-danas-obavijena-velom-tajne-foto-20180112>> [accessed 19 March 2020].

⁶⁶ This speech by Dr. Ivan Šreter in Pakrac on 30 May 1991 is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZS3OMJx4z3Q> [accessed 19 March 2020].

⁶⁷ This was Josip Jović who was murdered in Plitvička Jezera (Lika) on 31 March 1991.

⁶⁸ JNA deployed its forces in the Plitvice area, taking control of the territory that Serb rebels planned to include into Serb 'Krajina'; Coordination of Serb rebels and the JNA continued in the months that followed. The generals demanded authorization for a JNA intervention, and Croatia was forced to accept the decision on the deployment of pro-Serb oriented JNA in crisis areas between the Serb rebels and Croatian police forces; the JNA assumed the duty of protecting and helping Serb rebels in Croatia. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 14.

⁶⁹ According to Greater-Serbia plans, SAO Krajina was supposed to encompass the municipalities of Knin, Benkovac, Obrovac, Gračac, Donji Lapac, Korenica, Vojnić, Vrginmost, Glina, Dvor Na Uni, Kostajnica, Petrinja and Pakrac, and 'all Serb towns annexed to one of these municipalities and those that in the future decide to join in the demarcation process'. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 15.

⁷⁰ This includes the Chetnik *vojvoda* Vojislav Šešelj in Borovo Selo, a village near Vukovar (Eastern Slavonia), and the Serb representative Milan Paroški in Jagodnjak, a village in Baranja, who stated that 'this is Serb territory and they (i.e. Croats) must realise that they are outsiders; therefore, whoever comes here and says

Map 1: Croatia's occupied territories (1991-1995)⁷¹



The referendum for Croatian independence was held in mid-May; 93.24 per cent of voters supported independence and sovereignty⁷² both of which were proclaimed on 25 June 1991.⁷³ The JNA responded with tanks entering Baranja and Eastern Slavonia⁷⁴. In July⁷⁵, after Croatian forces pushed back extremists from Stara Tenja, the JNA openly joined the war

that this is his land, he is a usurper, he came here to kill and you have the right to murder him like a dog by the fence!'. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 14.

⁷¹ This map is available at <https://inavukic.com/2014/02/17/a-brief-history-of-the-war-in-croatia-background-battlefields-and-outcomes/> [accessed 18 April 2021].

⁷² Turnout was 80 per cent. From 17 August 1990 until May 1991, more than 200 cases of planting explosives and more than 100 armed attacks by Serb extremists were recorded in Croatia; sixteen people (including 15 policemen; 12 of them were ambushed in Borovo Selo near Vukovar (Eastern Slavonia), captured and massacred on 2 May 1991) died in these incidents, and 56 people (including 40 policemen) were wounded. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 15.

⁷³ On that date, Croatian Parliament adopted the Declaration on the Creation of a Sovereign and Independent Republic of Croatia with a delay of three months for its coming into force. Independence and sovereignty was also declared by Slovenia which was almost immediately attacked by the JNA. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 17.

⁷⁴ Another convoy of JNA vehicles was deployed around Šid, a town in Serbia, ready to attack Croatia. Meanwhile, Serb extremists began destroying Croatian towns; individual incidents and attacks grew into an all-out war of Serbia, Montenegro, JNA and Serb rebels from Croatia (and Bosnia-Herzegovina) against Croatia. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 17.

⁷⁵ At this point European Community (EC) imposed an embargo on importing weapons into Yugoslavia which significantly weakened Croatia's position given that it had no TO weapons. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 18.

on the Serb side by attacking Osijek.⁷⁶ During the summer of 1991, many towns and villages were destroyed and burnt to the ground, and Serbian forces expelled Croats, committed a number of crimes, including the first mass executions of civilians⁷⁷.

It is difficult to pinpoint when exactly the war started. Its beginning could be divided in several phases. The first phase started in August 1990 and ended in February 1991, when incidents took place resulting in harassment and injuries. During the second phase, between March and August 1991, the Yugoslav Army and Chetniks were focused on defeating poorly armed Croatian policemen and expelling them from the affected areas leaving the Croatian population unprotected.⁷⁸ It was in October 1991, when the JNA and Chetniks initiated an all-out offensive on Croatian frontlines with the aim to quickly break the Croatian defence.⁷⁹ November 1991 was a period of extremely difficult battles and losses, particularly at the

⁷⁶ Four days later, the first European monitors arrived in Croatia, but this did little good. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 18.

⁷⁷ For example, The Yugoslav Army also occupied Baranja and burned the Croatian village of Čelije where mass graves were later located. Furthermore, on 1 August 1991, Dalj in Eastern Slavonia was occupied as well which resulted with a mass exodus and killing of the Croatian population. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 28. Some people were abducted, among them was peacemaker Dr. Ivan Šreter who was last seen alive on 29 August 1991 and whose remains have never been found. Ivan Zvonimir Ivančić, 'Domovinski rat na području bivše općine Pakrac', *Essehist: časopis studenata povijesti i drugih društveno-humanističkih znanosti*, Vol. 7 (2015), No. 7, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id_clanak_jezik=233091> [accessed 23 May 2020].

By the end of August 1991, Croatia lost control of 11 municipalities where ethnic Serbs were a majority, and of 18 municipalities where ethnic Serbs represented 10 to 15 per cent of the population, while fighting was going on in another nine municipalities. In total, there were 115 municipalities in Croatia. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 19.

⁷⁸ During this time, the operational basis for the future Croatian Army was created. The Croatian National Guard (abbreviated ZNG – Zbor narodne garde, from 3 November 1991 the Croatian Army – HV) was founded in the spring of 1991 and was fully formed with four brigades by August 1991. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, pp. 15-17.

They were supported by numerous volunteers, including the members of the Croatian Party of Rights (abbreviated HSP – Hrvatska stranka prava) who were organised into the Croatian Defence Forces (abbreviated HOS – Hrvatske obrambene snage) in June 1991. During the war, members of HOS and HSP were often targets of assassinations that largely remained unsolved. On 21 September 1991, vice-president of HSP Ante Paradžik was murdered by Croatian police officers at a checkpoint near Zagreb when he was coming back from a political rally in Križevci. His killers were pardoned by Franjo Tuđman.

For further reading see various articles available at https://blazkraljevic.jimdofree.com/glavna/ante-paradzik%20C5%BEik/?fbclid=IwAR0NqBRxa9hSQQhklQwemzP9f8SPvyR3_u_oFKWwsA5BZHGdbtC62AgC_-0 [accessed, 15 July 2020].

On 1 March 1992, a bomb was planted at the HOS Headquarters in Vinkovci killing 3 members of HOS and wounding 11 of them. This happened only minutes before Dobroslav Paraga, president of HSP, was supposed to arrive. Vinkovačka TV, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yhRompep-g>> [accessed 10 April 2020]. On 9 August 1992, a HOS general Blaž Kraljević and 8 members of HOS were assassinated by the members of the HVO near Kruševo (Mostar). A collection of articles about this event is available at www.croatiarediviva.com ('26 obljetnica ubojstva Blaža Kraljevića i osmorice hosovaca', *Croatia Rediviva*, 9 August 2018, <<http://croatiarediviva.com/2018/08/09/26-obljetnica-ubojstva-blaza-kraljevica-i-osmorice-hosovaca/>> [accessed 11 April 2020].

⁷⁹ At this point, NATO estimated that Croatian defenders would not be able to resist longer than two weeks. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 23.

Eastern-Slavonian battlefield⁸⁰, although the situation was slowly changing in Croatia's favour due to the seizing of weapons from the JNA.⁸¹

Meanwhile, an agreement was signed in Geneva on discontinuing the siege of JNA military barracks and on the JNA withdrawal from Croatia.⁸² Also, the UN Security Council reached a decision⁸³ to send peace forces (UNPROFOR)⁸⁴ to Croatia which was recognised as an independent and sovereign state by the EC on 15 January 1992.⁸⁵ In August 1992, the UN Security Council expanded its mandate in Croatia⁸⁶; apart from monitoring the UNPA zones, peace forces also monitored Croatian international borders.⁸⁷ Peace-making efforts yielded

⁸⁰ On 18 November 1991, active resistance of Croatian forces stopped in Vukovar which became the symbol of Croatian resistance to the Serb aggression. By the end of 1991, it was estimated that there were 500,000 displaced persons and refugees in Croatia. In combined artillery attacks and air raids, JNA and Serb forces systematically destroyed 45 per cent of Croatia; out of all targets, 95 per cent were civilian. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 30.

⁸¹ In September 1991, when the JNA barracks in Ploče were conquered, blockades and the seizing of other JNA barracks, weapons warehouses and different military facilities began throughout Croatia. This was known as 'War for the Barracks'. This was decisive in Croatia's defence since the seized war gains were several times bigger than the total amount of weapons Croatia had at its disposal until then and it influenced the situation on the battlefields despite the fact that Croatia was still losing territories. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 21.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸³ Resolution 721. Full text available at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/721> [accessed 20 June 2020].

⁸⁴ Based on Resolution 743 (full text available at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/743>, accessed 20 June 2020) the UN Security Council initiated the deployment of international protection forces to Croatia for a period of 12 months (see the so-called 'Vance Plan' when the deployment of UN forces was agreed to; it is available at <https://www.peaceagreements.org/view/1173>, accessed 20 June 2020). UN Forces were to assume control of four protection areas (UNPA) covering 22 per cent of Croatia's territory. This included the territory of 18 municipalities where Serbs were a majority or a significant minority and where mutual tensions recently resulted in armed conflicts. The aim of this operation was fulfilled only partially: the JNA left Croatia, while heavy weaponry of Serb rebels was placed in warehouses under joint control of UNPROFOR and the Serbs, but the return of refugees, protection of the remaining Croatian population in UNPA zones, reopening of traffic communications and the return under Croatian rule of the so-called Pink Zones were not fulfilled. 'Pink zones' referred to the territories that Serbs invaded but did not live in. From the remaining Croatian population in UNPA zones, an exodus of several thousand occurred and several hundreds were killed. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 33.

⁸⁵ This date was taken as the end date of the Croatian defence war, or 'defence of sovereignty', which was the phrase used by the Croatian government in the Law on the Rights of Croatian War Veterans and Members of Their Family in 2017. Full text is available at <https://www.zakon.hr/z/325/Zakon-o-pravima-hrvatskih-branitelja-iz-Domovinskog-rata-i-%C4%8Dlanova-njihovih-obitelji> [accessed 24 June 2020]. At approximately the same time when Croatia was recognised by the EC members, a cease-fire between Croatia and the Yugoslav Army was signed and the newly elected UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, sent to the former Yugoslavia a group of 50 military liaison officers, with the task to promote maintenance of the cease-fire by facilitating communication between the two sides and by helping them to resolve difficulties that might arise. More about this is available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/past/unprof_b.htm [accessed 20 June 2020]. Shortly afterwards, UNPROFOR was deployed creating a barrier between the occupied Croatian territory and the rest of the country.

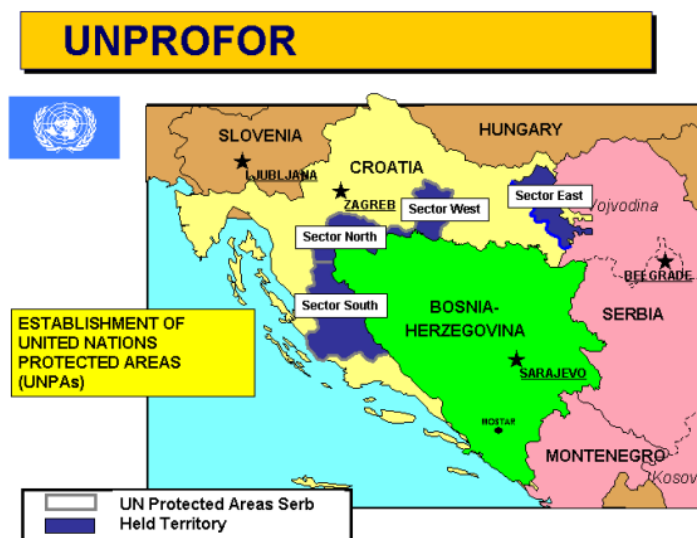
⁸⁶ This was Resolution 769. Full text is available at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/769> [accessed 20 June 2020].

⁸⁷ Meanwhile, Serb forces had about 70 per cent of Bosnia-Herzegovina's territory in their control. The largest number of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina was accepted by Croatia – over 400,000 people, and the total number of displaced persons and refugees in Croatia was about 700,000 people. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 38.

In October, the UN Security Council explicitly confirmed that UNPA zones were an integral part of the Republic of Croatia although earlier that year Croatia refused to extend its mandate under the same inefficient conditions.

some results in March 1994 when Croatian authorities met Serb rebels at the Russian embassy in Zagreb and signed an agreement on permanent peace, the establishment of economic relations and a political solution.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, in September, the UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali confirmed that the resolutions⁸⁹ were not implemented due to resistance by Serb rebels in the UNPA zones.⁹⁰ Consequently, the Croatian parliament determined to cancel the UNPROFOR mandate, unless they enabled the return of occupied areas.⁹¹ In January 1995, the Z-4 Plan⁹² was unsuccessfully presented as a political solution to the war in Croatia.⁹³

Map 2: UNPA zones in Croatia⁹⁴



Resolution 871 is available at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/871> [accessed 20 June 2020]. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 41.

⁸⁸ This was the so-called ‘Zagreb Agreement’. As a result, in December 1994 highway Zagreb – Lipovac reopened for traffic through occupied Okučani (UNPA Sector West). *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 45.

⁸⁹ Apart from the decision on cessation of armed conflicts.

⁹⁰ *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 45.

⁹¹ Several days later, the UN Security Council adopted a new Resolution which encompassed and confirmed all previous resolutions, emphasised that all countries in the territory of the former Yugoslavia were sovereign both politically and territorially; the mandate of UNPROFOR was extended until 31 March 1995, on the condition that the UN General Secretary submits a report at the latest by 20 January 1995 about the progress achieved, which comprised the beginning of the return of displaced persons. On this date, by the decision of the UN Security Council (Resolution 981), UNPROFOR became UNCRO and assumed the obligation of monitoring the internationally recognised borders of the Republic of Croatia. More about the UNCRO role is available at <https://undocs.org/S/1995/320> [accessed 21 June 2020]. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 45.

⁹² It was prepared by the USA, Russia, Germany, and the UK.

⁹³ It emphasised the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Croatia, but offered an exceptionally extensive autonomy for Serbs in the UNPA Zones North and South. This included autonomous legislation and government, autonomous police, currency, coats-of-arms, flags and insignia as well as the judicial system, tax regulations etc. Croatia had serious objections to the Plan, while Serbs refused to even debate it. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 46.

⁹⁴ This map is available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:UNPROFOR_Areas.PNG [accessed 18 April 2021]. Sector East was located in Eastern Slavonia, Sector West in Western Slavonia and Sector South included Northern Dalmatia and Lika. See appendices 5, 6 and 7 for the population details in these regions.

In May 1995⁹⁵, Croatia launched liberation operation *Flash*.⁹⁶ Furthermore, in July, Croatian forces liberated about 1600 km² of Bosnia-Herzegovina's territory which created the preconditions to liberate occupied Croatian territories.⁹⁷ In August, Croatia embarked on Operation *Storm* and within four days the Croatian Army liberated most of the occupied territories. This victory was one of the most important events in Croatian history because it ensured Croatia's territorial integrity and freedom of its citizens.⁹⁸ Today, the 5 August is celebrated as Victory Day⁹⁹ when the Croatian Army liberated Knin, the town where the rebellion started. This date is usually perceived as the end of the Homeland War. However, in September of that year the Croatian Army unsuccessfully engaged in conflict with the Serbian Army in Western Bosnia.¹⁰⁰ The final battles of the Croatian Army took place in the same area in October 1995.¹⁰¹ Based on these facts, it can be concluded that the armed conflict began in August 1990 and ended five years and two months later, although its intensity differed through different phases.

In late 1995, the remaining part of the former so-called 'Krajina' in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium negotiated a peaceful reintegration process with the Croatian government¹⁰² which was achieved on 15 January 1998. In December 1999, Tuđman died and in 2000 HDZ lost the election to six major opposition parties, including SDP¹⁰³. This was the beginning of the so-called detudjmanisation, a process of political changes in Croatian society

⁹⁵ Approximately at the same time the UN Expert Committee submitted a report to the UN Security Council. According to this report, by early April 1995 some 200,000 people were killed in the former Yugoslavia, 800 concentration camps were formed with 500,000 prisoners (of which 50,000 were tortured, and 20,000 women and girls raped); Serb extremists and their forces committed by far the most crimes. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 46

⁹⁶ About 600 km² of the remaining occupied territory of Western Slavonia were liberated and in only two days the resistance of Serbian units was crushed. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, p. 47. During this operation, the Croatian capital Zagreb where I was an undergraduate student of history (at the University of Zagreb) was bombed. Several people were killed or badly wounded. Among the dead was a first-year undergraduate student in film studies.

⁹⁷ This is known as operation *Summer '95*. Several days later, talks were held on Brijuni between Tuđman and foreign ambassadors in Croatia about ways to solve the crisis. Due to the non-cooperation of Serb rebels, Tuđman announced the possibility of a military operation. Serb rebels were given another chance on 3 August 1995 when they met Croatian representatives in Genthod near Geneva, but they turned down the proposal for a peaceful reintegration. *Chronology of the Homeland War*, pp. 47-48.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁹⁹ This holiday is officially called The Victory Day and the Day of Homeland Gratitude. The Day of Croatian Defenders is also celebrated on the same date.

¹⁰⁰ This is known as Operation *Una 95*. It was launched to prevent artillery strikes on the Croatian territory and to increase the safety of the population living near the Croatian-Bosnian border.

¹⁰¹ This is known as Operation *Southern Move*.

¹⁰² The so-called Erdut Agreement (available at <https://peacemaker.un.org/croatia-erdutagreement95>, accessed 21 June 2020) made the area a temporary protectorate of the UN Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES), founded on 15 January 1996. This was UN Resolution 1037. Full text is available at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1037> [accessed 23 June 2020].

¹⁰³ Social-Democratic Party. Former Communist Party.

after Tuđman's death. In the empirical chapters, I discuss how these events marked a new era of modern Croatian history which saw a rise of former communists in Croatian politics and a return of former enemies to the political arena, both of which were described by the participants in this research as major threats to safety and 'normalisation'.¹⁰⁴

1.1.2. AFTERMATH: EVERY 72 HOURS ONE CROATIAN ARMY VETERAN COMMITS SUICIDE

According to available data, 508,605 people have the status of Croatian defender¹⁰⁵ because they somehow participated in the Homeland War. When we compare this number to the entire Croatian population of approximately 4,300,000 (2011)¹⁰⁶, it can be assumed that the majority of Croatian families have a member with that status and, consequently, they have been affected by war or other problems veterans faced. 438,262 defenders are still alive and 190,408 work.¹⁰⁷ 70,343 died, including 8,397 who were killed at war and 437 who are still missing.¹⁰⁸ Thus, 61,509 veterans died after the war ended, and over 3,000 committed suicide. Every 72 hours another veteran kills himself.¹⁰⁹

Sedlar concluded that 'there are a number of reasons' for veteran's actions, but 'first and foremost, it's about the attitude of society towards them, the insults by a large part of the media who proclaim them drug addicts, alcoholics, and non-workers' leaving them feeling 'thrown away after being taken advantage of'.¹¹⁰ This belief was supported by Croatian psychiatrist¹¹¹ Dr. Davor Lasić who argued the main reason behind the suicides is injustice and unfulfilled expectations.¹¹² The author of the article published in the Croatian daily *Večernji list* emphasised that

on average, our soldiers experienced as many as 15 traumatic events during the war, suggesting it was expected that after the war veterans would become a highly

¹⁰⁴ This will be broadly discussed in chapter 5.

¹⁰⁵ I. Ba, 'Objavljeni najnoviji podaci o braniteljima: Koliko ih je, kolika im je mirovina, koliko ih radi....', *Tportal.hr*, 9 October 2019, <<https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/objavljeni-najnoviji-podaci-o-braniteljima-koliko-ih-je-kolika-im-je-mirovina-koliko-ih-radi-20191009>> [accessed 23 January 2020].

¹⁰⁶ This is the most recent population census. The next one will take place in 2021.

¹⁰⁷ I. Ba, 'Objavljeni najnoviji podaci o braniteljima: Koliko ih je, kolika im je mirovina, koliko ih radi....'.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Rašović, 'Suicidi branitelja više nisu vijest, nego društvena pošast'.

¹¹⁰ Šetka, 'Snimljen dokumentarac o 3069 suicida branitelja, redatelj govori o razlozima njihovih samoubojstava'.

¹¹¹ He was also a Croatian defender.

¹¹² Šetka, 'Snimljen dokumentarac o 3069 suicida branitelja, redatelj govori o razlozima njihovih samoubojstava'.

vulnerable social group, with weakened mechanisms of coping with life challenges, and living in a social context far from ideal.¹¹³

Additionally, the state failed because after the war it did not provide a systematic programme of care that would focus on veterans' reintegration into civilian life. The author further highlighted that official politics kept manipulating veterans with monetary donations to their associations or rewarding chosen veterans with different positions. Society failed as well because due to lack of information, it stigmatises veterans systematically putting them on the pillar of shame for their alleged privileges. Veterans associations failed too because instead of (re)socialisation of their members, they have persisted in the pursuit of politics. Finally, the media kept avoiding reports about suicides and, thus, failed to tackle the severe problems of the veteran population.¹¹⁴

The failure of the state to provide a systematic programme of veteran reintegration presented a serious problem for writing this thesis as the sources on this topic are scarce. The official website of the Department of Croatian Defenders did not reveal enough insight to make final conclusions, but from the published data it can be concluded that the focus of government activities is on psycho-social and health care, professional training and employment, and housing.¹¹⁵ However, this is happening 25 years after the end of the war and, therefore, a question about any opportunities for veterans in the second half of the 1990s remains. Despite a wide sphere of rights, the numbers of unemployed veterans and those with unresolved housing problems are as much worrying as the lack of evaluation of the existing aid programmes and development of various integration programs.¹¹⁶ Some of these issues are explored in-depth in the empirical chapters as the majority of participants in this research highlighted them as major obstacles they faced while trying to rebuild their 'normal lives'. Furthermore, these problems created a rift between veterans and the rest of society, and, as another psychiatrist Dr. Nikola Jelovac argued, stigmatised them and distanced them from life.¹¹⁷ Also, the emphasis of government programmes on specific aspects of life leaves out

¹¹³ Rašović, 'Suicidi branitelja više nisu vijest, nego društvena pošast'.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ These programmes include the national psycho-social and health care programme focused on mental and physical health, then support to agriculture collectives with the aim of encouraging work as a form of therapy, and the programme for further education and employment of Croatian defenders to support their job opportunities. Available at <https://branitelji.gov.hr/istaknute-teme/11> [accessed 24 May 2020].

¹¹⁶ Ivana Dobrotić, 'Sustav skrbi za branitelje iz Domovinskog rata', *Revija za socijalnu politiku*, 1 (2008), 57-83, <<http://www.rsp.hr/ojs2/index.php/rsp/article/viewFile/712/687>> [accessed 24 May 2020].

¹¹⁷ PSD, 'Nikola Jelovac: 95 posto branitelja nema sve simptome PTSP-a', *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 20 March 2010, <<https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/nikola-jelovac-95-posto-branitelja-nema-sve-simptome-ptsp-a-92725>> [accessed 24 May 2020].

other areas of ‘normal’ living, as identified by the participants in this research. As I discuss later, social aspects of living, such as having hobbies, being active members of society, creating and contributing to society are all relevant to establishing ‘normal life’.

Veterans’ problems were partially tackled by NGOs. Some veterans founded several ‘collectives of Croatian defenders’ with the aim of rehabilitating and reintegrating ex-combatants into civilian life, as well as ensuring livelihood and existence for veterans and their families and supporting economic recovery in under-developed Croatian regions with high unemployment.¹¹⁸ Another example is the Croatian Army Veterans association which has been carrying out a project called ‘Warriors in Peace’ which focuses on handwork and art as occupational therapy and a source of income for unemployed veterans. The goal of the project is to involve veterans in everyday life and provide psycho-social assistance to members so they do not feel alienated, alone and betrayed by the state, society and citizens.¹¹⁹ The Centre for Peace, Non-violence and Human Rights in Osijek and the Peace Team in Okučani supported veterans who approached them asking for help. Over the years, they organised a series of workshops ‘Trauma and Self-help’ where veterans learned about non-violent communication, relaxation, dealing with trauma, creative solutions to conflict and encouraging positive changes in their lives. Art therapy, such as music and dance, was explored, while specialised workshops for their wives and children were also held.¹²⁰

These were some of the rare examples of a more systematic approach to the veterans’ reintegration into civilian life where space for their personal and professional growth was created providing support in the exploration of new opportunities, making future plans and shaping a post-war reality that could lead to ‘normal life’. However, the statistics discussed in the opening of this subchapter serve as a reminder that even 25 years after the end of the war there is still a lot to be done on the journey towards a more ‘normal’, meaningful and fulfilling life in which the values the participants in this research fought for will be cherished and, thus, life will be worth living.

¹¹⁸ Petar Grubišić, ‘11 priča hrvatskih branitelja koji su pobijedili i uspjeli u životu’, *Večernji list*, 4 August 2010, <<http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/11-prica-hrvatskih-branitelja-koji-su-pobijedili-i-uspjeli-u-zivotu-175345>> [accessed 29 March 2020].

¹¹⁹ Branka Sobodić, ‘Gradonačelnik Antun Korošec podržao rad projekta Ratnici u miru’, *Bjelovar.info*, 13 April 2017, <<https://bjelovar.info/drustvo/gradonacelnik-antun-korusec-podrzao-rad-projekta-ratnici-u-miru/>> [accessed 21 January 2020].

Suzana Balen, ‘Ratnici u miru’, *HRT*, 5 February 2017, <<https://magazin.hrt.hr/372835/ratnici-u-miru>> [accessed 21 January 2020].

¹²⁰ Centar za mir, nenasilje i ljudska prava – Osijek, Mirovni tim – Okučani, ‘Izgradnja zajednice i mira u Općini Okučani, Rad s braniteljima i njihovim obiteljima’. This report is available at http://www.centar-za-mir.hr/uploads/dokumenti/izvjesca/rad_s_braniteljima.pdf [accessed 22 February 2020].

1.1.3. WHAT ‘WE’ FOUGHT FOR: THE SANCTITY OF ‘HOME’ AS A WAY OF CREATING SPACE FOR ‘NORMAL’

The fieldwork for this research took place between April and December 2017, during which a number of events relevant to this study were on-going in Croatian society. Although they will be featured in the following chapters, here I elaborate on one specific event that occurred in late 2016 and highlighted political disputes that characterised Croatian politics and society in 2017 and revealed how contested a sense of ‘home’ is while emerging as a requirement to ‘normal life’. This emotionally difficult event also had an impact on people I approached. Some refused to participate in this research while many of those who agreed to participate, expressed anger and frustrations. Thus, it is important to understand the meaning of this event as it potentially influenced answers related to ‘normal life’. Although the content of ‘normal life’ might be based on our understanding of the past, present and future, and our personal experiences, expectations and goals, a seemingly small event can have a large impact. Or, as the participant from the beginning of this introduction put it, what is normal to me may not be normal to another.¹²¹ In this particular context, this is also related to the specific understanding of a symbol and words which can also mean one thing to me, but something completely different to someone else which further emphasises the understanding of local ‘normal’ and its complexity.

In November 2016, the HOS Volunteer Association erected a memorial plaque in Jasenovac¹²² for eleven members of the HOS Company ‘Ante Paradžik’¹²³. This included the HOS emblem with a first-field-white variant of the Croatian coat of arms¹²⁴, which in the

¹²¹ OTH010.

¹²² This is a village in Slavonia.

¹²³ The majority of them were killed in the area near Jasenovac in 1991, and among them were one Slovene, one Serb and nine Croats. UDHOS – Zagreb, ‘Tko su bili dragovoljci HOS-a kojima je podignut spomenik u Jasenovcu’, 22 December 2016, <<http://www.udhos-zagreb.hr/archives/4516>> [accessed 23 January 2020].

As explained earlier in footnote 75, HOS was organised by the Croatian Party of Rights as its military wing. However, this was in early 1991 when the Croatian Army did not exist and Croatian defence largely depended on police units and armed volunteers. The Croatian National Guard (ZNG) as a new armed force was founded in May 1991, and in November that year it was renamed the Croatian Army (HV). After the November 1991 mobilization in Croatia and the January 1992 cease-fire, HOS was absorbed by the HV and HOS volunteers participated in the Army’s most famous operations. However, its role in the Croatian war for independence was often disputed due to some historical reasons. The abbreviation HOS was identical to the abbreviation for the Croatian Armed Forces (HOS) of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) during the Second World War although there is a linguistic difference. As both words – ‘defence’ and ‘armed’ – begin with the letter O in the Croatian language, the abbreviations are identical.

¹²⁴ The HOS units kept an original 1990 first-field-white variant Croatian coat of arms although the government officially changed it to the first-field-red variant in late 1990. Both variants of the Croatian coat of arms were used throughout history and experts agree that both are historically relevant. Vlatka Polšak Palatinuš, ‘Bijelo ili crveno polje? Stručnjaci složni: Obje varijante su povijesne, ali...’, *Tportal.hr*, 2 May 2019, <<https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/bijelo-ili-crveno-polje-strucnjaci-slozni-obje-varijante-su-povijesne-ali-20190502>> [accessed 24 January 2020].

media is often linked to ‘promoting fascism’¹²⁵ and the inscription ‘Za dom spremni’ which translates as ‘For Home(land) Ready!’, and is visible on their flags and insignia. Once the memorial plaque appeared in Jasenovac, Serbia’s minister Aleksandar Vulin complained that ‘fascism rages on in Croatia and Europe is unresponsive’, adding that it was in Jasenovac where ‘hundreds of thousands of Serbs were killed’ during the Second World War.¹²⁶ The HOS veterans replied that this was ‘an old Croatian salute under which they fought a Greater-

The first known example of the Croatian chequered pattern was found in Austria and it originates from 1495. Also, a first-field-white variant was used in the Habsburg Monarchy and in the NDH, while a first-field-red variant was used in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and in Communist Yugoslavia. Due to repression Croats suffered in both Yugoslav states, the memory of the first white field remained in the memory of some Croats, such as my family who explained this to me in 1990, as a symbol of times when Croats lived in freedom and it was more commonly used in different periods of Croatia’s past. Images of different versions of the Croatian coat of arms are available here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coat_of_arms_of_Croatia [accessed 24 January 2020].

¹²⁵ For example, in 2016, N1 described the same version of the Croatian flag as one of the ‘fascist flags in Europe’. ‘Fašističke zastave Europe: U RH šahovnica s bijelim poljem’, *N1*, 24 May 2016, <<http://hr.n1info.com/Svijet/a126120/Fasisticke-zastave-Europe-U-RH-sahovnica-s-bijelim-poljem.html>> [accessed 24 January 2020].

Klik.ba news portal reported in 2019 that Croats near Tomislavgrad in Bosnia-Herzegovina painted a wall in the colours of the Croatian flag with the first-field-white Croatian coat of arms stating that this ‘symbolizes the Ustasha regime and the dark times of the Independent State of Croatia’. R.D., ‘Kod Tomislavgrada ponovo obnovljena stilizirana zastava NDH’, *Klix.ba*, 4 August 2019, <<https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/kod-tomislavgrada-ponovo-obnovljena-stilizirana-zastava-ndh/190804026>> [accessed 24 January 2020].

In April 2019, the political party Independents for Croatia (NHR) decorated their headquarters in Zagreb with the official Croatian flag from 1990. The police were called, but concluded that there was no element of criminal behaviour. M.T., ‘Ravnatelj policije potvrdio: Neovisni za Hrvatsku neće dobiti prijavu zbog zastave s prvim bijelim poljem’, *Dnevnik.hr*, 1 May 2019, <<https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/policija-uce-podnositi-prijavu-protiv-neovisnih-za-hrvatsku-zbog-zastave-koja-na-grbu-ima-prvo-bijelo-polje---559119.html>> [accessed 25 January 2020].

Despite that, the Index news portal reported that ‘the coat of arms with the first white field became the permanent Ustasha emblem, which was removed from use after the fascists and their collaborators were defeated in the Second World War’. R.I., ‘Stranka Brune Esih u centru Zagreba izvjesila zastavu s prvim bijelim poljem’, *Index.hr*, 26 April 2019, <<https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/stranka-brune-esih-u-centru-zagreba-izvjesila-zastavu-s-prvim-bijelim-poljem/2081291.aspx>> [accessed 25 January 2020].

¹²⁶ N.S./Hina, ‘U Hrvatskoj buja fašizam, a Europa ne reagira’, *Tportal.hr*, 4 December 2016, <<https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/u-hrvatskoj-buja-fasizam-a-europa-ne-reagira-20161204>> [accessed 25 January 2020].

Some Croatian media also argued that ‘Za dom spremni’ is indeed an Ustasha salute and therefore, the HOS flags should not be shown in public. The police, however, replied that ‘the HOS flag was as legal as all the features and inscriptions on it and there was no legal basis for its removal’. Zoran Vitanović, ‘Praznično HOS-ovanje’, *Portal Novosti*, 3 July 2018, <<https://www.portalnovosti.com/praznicno-hos-ovanje>> [accessed 2 February 2020].

Croatian politician and journalist Ivan Zvonimir Čičak argued that the salute is ‘an equivalent of the Nazi salute Sieg Heil’ despite its linguistic meaning being entirely different. Ivica Kristović, ‘Pozdrav Za dom spremni ekvivalent je nacističkom Sieg Heil!’, *Večernji list*, 22 November 2013, <<https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/ustaski-za-dom-spremni-je-ekvivalent-nacistickom-sieg-heil-904408>> [accessed 2 February 2020].

Croatian historian Hrvoje Klasić stated that the salute as a phrase has not been documented in any historical document before 1941 and this was supported by other historians such as Tvrtko Jakovina, Ante Nazor and Zlatko Hasanbegović. Deutsche Welle, ‘Za dom spremni kao pozdrav je uveden tek utemeljenjem ustaške NDH’, *Večernji list*, 25 August 2015, <<https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/za-dom-spremni-lazna-povijest-laznih-domoljuba-1021054>> [accessed 2 February 2020].

PSD, ‘HRT organizirao raspravu o poklicu Za dom spremni!: Hasanbegović, Jakovina i Nazor se složili kako je riječ o ustašluku iz vremena notornog Ante Pavelića i NDH’, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 7 September 2017, <<https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/hrt-organizirao-raspravu-o-poklicu-za-dom-spremni-hasanbegovic-jakovina-i-nazor-se-slozili-kako-je-rijec-o-ustasluku-iz-vremena-notornog-ante-pavelica-i-ndh-505562>> [accessed 2 February 2020].

Serbia aggressor in Croatia during the Homeland War'.¹²⁷ Although historical details related to this salute and the list of sources are available in the footnotes¹²⁸, for the purpose of this research I was interested in how closely the main idea behind this salute – ‘home’ – is connected with the understanding of ‘normal life’. When I started receiving the first completed questionnaires, where so many expressed their disappointment with their country and criticised the problems society was facing, I noticed that some participants clearly stated that this was not what they fought for.¹²⁹ This was further emphasised by those who were interviewed at that time. A participant who joined the Army at age 17 argued that ‘we didn’t go to war for Croatia; we went to defend ourselves, and we gained Croatia as a result; we didn’t feel attacked, they entered our homes and we had to defend ourselves’.¹³⁰ This was

¹²⁷ N.S./Hina, ‘U Hrvatskoj buja fašizam, a Europa ne reagira’.

Croatian president Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović argued that it is necessary to distinguish the context when the salute was used as there are Croatian military units that fought in the Homeland War and whose salute ‘Za dom spremni’ is legal. Hina, ‘Predsjednica: Treba razlikovati kompromitirani ustaški pozdrav od pokliča branitelja u Domovinskom ratu’, *Jutarnji list*, 22 February 2019, <<https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/predsjednica-treba-razlikovati-kompromitirani-ustaski-pozdrav-od-poklica-branitelja-u-domovinskom-ratu/8410019/>> [accessed 2 February 2020].

Supporters of the salute agreed with the HOS veterans claiming that this was indeed an old Croatian salute as it appeared in Pavao Ritter Vitezović’s 1684 work *Odiljenje sigetsko* and in the opera *Nikola Šubić Zrinski* composed by Ivan Zajc in 1876 (available with English transcript at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZkQToUftJE>, accessed 1 February 2020). ‘33 povijesna dokaza o čistoći starohrvatskog pozdrava Za dom spremni’, *Sloboda.hr*, 18 October 2014, <<https://www.sloboda.hr/33-povijesna-dokaza-o-cistoci-starohrvatskog-pozdrava-za-dom-spremni/>> [accessed 2 February 2020].

¹²⁸ For the purpose of historical accuracy, it is important to say that the official slogan of the Ustasha movement was ‘Za dom i poglavnika spremni!’, and, therefore, included the state leader (*poglavnik*) Ante Pavelić. He used it for the first time in his article from 1932. However, the salute kept appearing throughout the Croatian history in various versions, including: ‘For home and God’ (1684), ‘For home’ (1868, 1876, 1894 and 1939), and ‘For home for kindred’ (1885). It seems that the salute originates from the Latin ‘Pro patria paratus’ which is still used by some other military forces in the world and it can also be found on the war medal of Captain Lewis Warrington (1814). Moreover, in August 2017 it was discovered that ‘Za dom spremni’ in that form indeed existed in the memory of Croatian people before Ante Pavelić used it for the first time. In 1921, the magazine *Virovitičan* published an article about a school event where children recited a poem with a verse ‘Brothers should not forget their brother, and fast help is worth gold, Croats were always killed for their brother, for kindred and for home are ready to give their lives’. Based on the available data, this was the first time when the version of the greeting included ‘home’ and ‘ready’ together in the Croatian context. ‘Kako je nastao pozdrav za dom spremni’, *Novosadski reporter*, 6 August 2016, <<https://www.nsreporter.rs/2016/08/kako-je-nastao-pozdrav-za-dom-spremni/>> [accessed 2 February 2020]. ‘Starohrvatski pozdrav Za dom’, *Croatia Rediviva*, 13 August 2017, <<http://croatiarediviva.com/2017/08/13/starohrvatski-pozdrav-dom/>> [accessed 2 February 2020]. Blanka Matković, ‘Za dom(ovinu) spremni pobijediti ili umrijeti pisalo je na američkom odlikovanju iz 1814. godine’, *Hrvatski tjednik*, 28 September 2017, <<http://croatiarediviva.com/2017/10/01/domovinu-spremni-pobijediti-umrijeti-pisalo-americkom-odlikovanju-iz-1814-godine/>> [accessed 2 February 2020]. ‘Za (rod i) dom spremni (život dati)/ mrijeti (u nekim inačicama) nije ustaški pozdrav – Hrvatska djeca recitala su ga 1921. godine’, *Croatia Rediviva*, 27 August 2017, <<http://croatiarediviva.com/2017/08/27/rod-dom-spremni-zivot-dati-mrijeti-nekim-inacicama-nije-ustaski-pozdrav-hrvatska-djeca-recitala-ga-1921-godine/>> [accessed 2 February 2020].

¹²⁹ For example, a veteran from Western Slavonia concluded that ‘we don’t have anything, no independence and no freedom which every nation and country should have; and Croatia is just country but without any values that it should have’. WS009.

¹³⁰ ES022.

supported by other veterans who argued ‘we defended our home’.¹³¹ These statements highlight how much the idea of ‘home’ and values linked to ‘home’ were key to understanding not only the conflict but the period that followed, including a ‘normalisation’ of life. After all, it was exactly that same word – ‘home’ – that was disputed at the time when the research was conducted, and this still happens to be the case at the time of writing this thesis.

The first step was to determine what the word ‘dom’ means as linguistic differences and understandings of this particular concept showed to be important in Jansen’s discussion of reconciliation in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina which I explore in the following chapter. In English, there is an obvious difference between the words ‘house’ and ‘home’. ‘House’ is defined as a building in which a person lives, while ‘home’ refers either to a building or to any location that a person thinks of as the place where they live, where they probably feel comfortable and where they belong to.¹³² The word ‘homeland’, on the other hand, is linked to a country. This is similar in the Croatian language and important to understand as the ‘disputed’ salute refers to ‘home’, not homeland. It does not speak of buildings, towns, or borders, but goes beyond that.

Reflecting upon the disputes in the Croatian public, one veteran reacted very emotionally saying he is not giving up on his home. When asked what ‘home’ is, he replied ‘home includes family, love and everything else that home gives including safety, arguments and other things’.¹³³ He concluded that a home is ‘a family with positive and negative sides’ and, therefore, nobody should interfere with it.¹³⁴ This answer drew my attention as it revealed that ‘home’ is a very personal space where people should feel safe, comfortable and loved, a space that is worth defending and worth living for. The keywords he mentioned reminded me of some definitions of ‘normal life’ that I explore in the empirical chapters, and I was interested if other participants would somehow support, change or expand this idea of ‘home’. Another participant gave a similar reply focusing on home as a place ‘where your family is, where you live or where you grew up’.¹³⁵ He added that in the context of war, home

¹³¹ ES050. WS006.

¹³² ‘What’s the difference between a house and a home?’, *Learner’s Dictionary*, 1 October 2013, <<http://www.learnersdictionary.com/qa/what-s-the-difference-between-a-house-and-a-home>> [accessed 3 February 2020].

¹³³ WS004.

¹³⁴ WS004.

¹³⁵ WS006.

is what you defend until the end.¹³⁶ In this answer the keywords were almost the same and they included family and safety, both worth living or dying for.

Another veteran described 'home' as 'a village, a town and a homeland, but also family, feelings, people, safety, freedom, tradition, customs, religion, culture and language'.¹³⁷ This definition significantly expands the previous ones as it goes beyond a personal space adding the identity of the nation and certain values such as freedom. Another participant agreed with this description and added that 'home' also means having 'your own piece of earth, air and sky' as the concept of 'home' is intertwined with feelings of warmth, love, comfort, satisfaction and happiness.¹³⁸ Happiness emerged as one of the subtopics in one of the Homeland War march songs. In *Himna HOS-a*¹³⁹ by Boško Landeka there is a verse with the rivers and historical borders listed¹⁴⁰ emphasising the Croats not being 'unhappy' as long as those rivers flow; thus, linking past memories and symbols as a source of hope and strength. As stated earlier, HOS volunteers were organised by the Croatian Party of Rights founded in 1861 by Dr. Ante Starčević, known as the 'Father of Homeland'. He emphasised that 'even if there are five Croats left, those five should be allowed to be free and happy'¹⁴¹ linking freedom to pursue goals and desires to happiness within 'home'. This is in line with the definition given by a veteran who highlighted that 'home is a basis of everything because we can go wherever we want, but it's easier to breathe if you know that there is that safe place somewhere which is waiting for you and where you start your family and raise your children'.¹⁴² He concluded that 'losing home or giving it up is the same as removing your own roots'¹⁴³. These definitions focus on home as a personal space which is safe and comfortable, which belongs only to an individual, but which is also influenced by the society an individual is raised in and whose identity becomes a part of the individual's identity. As a result, these definitions tackle one's core and everything that makes you what you are.

Another participant said that 'home is the essence of life, family, freedom, nation, but also theft, betrayal, and a lost and sold future'.¹⁴⁴ This definition is mirroring his disappointment with other problems in Croatian society mixed with feelings of the future that

¹³⁶ WS006.

¹³⁷ FO040.

¹³⁸ ES040.

¹³⁹ Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mDm-IHR4Mg> [accessed 2 May 2020].

¹⁴⁰ This refers to the rivers Una, Drina and Neretva which have been Croatian borders in different historical periods, such as for example, during the rule of King Tomislav in the 10th century.

¹⁴¹ 'Spomen-dom dr. Ante Starčevića', <<http://www.arhiv-gospic.hr/spomen-dom-dr-ante-starcevica>> [accessed 5 May 2020].

¹⁴² ES003.

¹⁴³ ES003.

¹⁴⁴ FO043.

will never be. The essence of one's being as the main idea behind the word 'home' appeared in another answer. One veteran argued that 'home is actually everything, a centre of my existence as everything begins there and you always return to it, regardless of your mood and whether you are tired or not'.¹⁴⁵ He stated that 'home is a place where your loved ones are, the place worth fighting, struggling, working and creating'.¹⁴⁶ 'My home is Croatia', he said, 'but my home is also my own place where the family gathers, where we practice our religion, and follow Croatian traditions and a way of life'.¹⁴⁷ 'I did not mix the terms homeland and home because they are the same, but they are also not the same', he continued concluding that home has been destroyed by 'wickedness, laziness and theft' by some in society.¹⁴⁸ Another participant agreed with this statement and added that home is not only a place of belonging, but also a place of peace and serenity combined with a feeling of relief.¹⁴⁹ These two definitions intertwine the personal life and space with the identity of the nation and traditions, but they also emphasize those social issues that participants perceive as a threat to their 'home'. These are not necessarily physical threats as they speak of moral values or a lack of them.

This does not mean that fear of other threats was not mentioned at all. On the contrary, when asked about his 'home', a former member of HOS replied that 'my home is the place where I feel best and most comfortable, and where I can enjoy, with my family, nurturing the traditions of my ancestors and where I can enjoy every inch of the home they created', but also, 'it is the place that my great-grandparents defended with their own blood to make our lives better'.¹⁵⁰ 'We cherish our culture, our traditions and our homes and this is why in the most recent past we were and we still are for the home ready', he concluded.¹⁵¹ Similar to others, this definition focuses on family, roots, and history, but it clearly emphasises that being 'for the home ready' is not about war, weapons or aggression. It is about guarding those values that are hidden in the individual's core without harming the other unless it is self-defence. As one participant said, 'I haven't fired a single bullet in Serbia'.¹⁵²

Finally, an idea of home can be expanded far beyond the borders of the space described as 'home'. As I discuss in the empirical chapters, for some participants 'normal life' included a spiritual element. The same happened when they were asked about 'home'.

¹⁴⁵ WS009.

¹⁴⁶ WS009.

¹⁴⁷ WS009.

¹⁴⁸ WS009.

¹⁴⁹ ES034.

¹⁵⁰ OTH055. This participant also made a historical reference stating that as 'many enemies such as Turks and Venetians had been attacking us, but we did not give up'.

¹⁵¹ OTH055.

¹⁵² FO037.

Another member of HOS described it as ‘a spiritual house’.¹⁵³ He believes that ‘home’ is much broader than family, friends and the place where he was born. The real ‘home’ represents a place where a person is shaped by his upbringing, religion and belonging to the nation until he becomes ‘a complete person’.¹⁵⁴ Another veteran stated that ‘most of all, home means peace and this means peace in one’s soul and peace in one’s heart’ as what he desires most is ‘peace and truth in his soul’, meaning the inner peace explored throughout this thesis, and finding a comfort in ‘safety given by God who sent us to this world’.¹⁵⁵ For him, ‘home’ is also Croatia, particularly ‘safety and peace in the country, and truth as the most important element of peace although it cannot come to light yet’.¹⁵⁶ Sometimes, ‘home feels like some imaginary impossible mission, but when I think about it, my soul fills with peace, warmth and love because there were people, heroes, and angels who showed us how to live and how to die for it’; hence, ‘home is the most sacred place in life as it means love, truth, freedom and peace’.¹⁵⁷ This participant concluded that he does not know if he would ever be able to achieve this ideal of home because he feels as if ‘Satan forbids us from having a home and that’s why I will fight for it with love and truth until peace and freedom are achieved’.¹⁵⁸ This individual combined his personal beliefs and moral values, for example, an idea of ‘home’ as something good opposed to evil¹⁵⁹ which tries to prevent people from having the life which ‘home’ represents. His definition also included some key topics in peace-building as peace is something which is linked to safety, but also depends on truth, ultimately leading to freedom.

As shown in the empirical chapters, there are important similarities between ‘home’ and ‘normal life’. The main idea behind ‘home’ is a personal space which includes family and friends, and where we can freely exercise freedom of religion and beliefs, remember our ancestors and nourish our traditions, and raise children and teach them our past in safety surrounded by love, while finding our inner peace and growing spiritually and any other way as an individual. However, as ‘normal life’, ‘home’ is not disconnected from the rest of society as it relies on ideals such as freedom and moral values including truth, fairness, honesty and goodness. Just like ‘normal life’, ‘home’ faces different ‘enemies’. Some can be rooted in a lack of morality, for example crime or dishonesty, while others are rooted in aggression of the ‘other’ and a physical threat of destruction. Once ‘home’ is in danger, safety

¹⁵³ ES033.

¹⁵⁴ ES033.

¹⁵⁵ ES037.

¹⁵⁶ ES037.

¹⁵⁷ ES037.

¹⁵⁸ ES037.

¹⁵⁹ Or ‘Satan’, as he put it.

becomes a priority and people are ready to defend it. Once ‘home’ is safe again and people are free, they can find their peace and life can flourish.

The keywords that emerged in those definitions of ‘home’ ranged from physical home and safety to freedom, peace and spiritual, just like they did when participants were asked about ‘normal life’. When these parallels are drawn, it can be concluded that the ideal of ‘home’ for participants not only shares significant similarities with their interpretation of ‘normal life’, but they meet to the point where they become one. Any threat to everything that ‘home’ represents also means a threat to ‘normal life’. Once we know this, it is easier to understand the reactions of veterans who defend their right to the slogan used in the Homeland War. This slogan is not only about belonging to the specific military unit and, therefore, it is not only about defending one’s identity. As one of the interviewees said, ‘we are all Croatian defenders’ and ‘as this includes members of HOS; I don’t want to exclude them as a separate entity, especially because we all saluted “For home ready”¹⁶⁰. The slogan is a reminder that Croatian soldiers ‘never crossed Croatian borders’¹⁶¹ to fight elsewhere, rather they stayed within their borders to defend their ‘homes’. ‘Home’ means much more than villages and towns. As one of my acquaintances explained, the salute summarises ‘the zeal of existence, the pride of belonging, the longing for survival, the power of spirit, and love that lasts and that will outlive us’.¹⁶² Therefore, ‘home’ represents everything ‘normal life’ stands for, and defending it means defending a right to ‘normal life’, and consequently, peace itself. This places ‘home’ in the core of this thesis and of war itself as participants prioritised pursuing ‘normal life’ with all its values, as discussed in the empirical chapters.

In September 2017, the memorial plaque from the beginning of this story was removed to Novska.¹⁶³ Since then, the situation has not changed much and the salute is still a

¹⁶⁰ WS004.

¹⁶¹ ES050.

¹⁶² I would like to thank Mrs. Marija P. Stojević who gave her permission for this statement given during an informal conversation to be quoted here.

¹⁶³ ‘Jasenovac: Uklonjena HOS-ova spomen ploča’, *Dalmatinski portal*, 7 September 2017, <<https://dalmatinskiportal.hr/hrvatska/jasenovac--uklonjena-hos-ova-spomen-ploca/24724>> [accessed 5 May 2020].

This was done after pressure by some political parties and NGOs due to the ‘disputable’ HOS salute and the fact that the original memorial plaque was located in the same village where the concentration camp during the Second World War existed. However, after its removal to Novska, the Croatian politician of Serbian origin and a member of Croatia’s parliament, Milorad Pupovac expressed his dissatisfaction as a new location was ‘only 20 metres from the place where the memorial ossuary of members of the Partisan units was located’. ‘Pupovac: HOS-ovu ploču premjestili pored partizanske kosturnice’, *Aljazeera Balkan*, 7 September 2017, <<http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/pupovac-hos-ovu-ploču-premjestili-pored-partizanske-kosturnice>> [accessed 2 May 2020].

This caused a lot of anger among the veterans who participated in this research. A participant from Western Slavonia asked himself if Croatia is going towards the situation in which the policy is ‘where ever a Serb set foot that is Serbian soil’. Moreover, he felt that symbols of totalitarian regimes had been tolerated while the

common topic in everyday life, politics and media.¹⁶⁴ For many, it remains one of the symbols of identity, as some participants emphasised, but also a symbol of resistance to foreign power and a desire for freedom and ‘normal life’. Analysing the participants’ understanding of the word ‘home’, I showed that the true meaning of the salute is not hidden in its military, historical or political context. Actually, it primarily represents a strong sentiment related to safety, personal growth, and tradition linking it directly to ‘normal life’ which, according to definitions analysed in the empirical chapters, can only exist in a space where people can pursue their ideal of ‘normal’ and create the reality they wish for.

1.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS: TWO CROATS, THREE POLITICAL PARTIES AND NUMEROUS SHADES OF ‘NORMAL’

There is an old Croatian saying, usually attributed to the 19th century novelist Antun Gustav Matoš: ‘two Croats, three political parties’¹⁶⁵. These words, emphasising deeply rooted divisions, still echo loudly throughout Croatian society following the first democratic elections and its’ hard won independence. In everyday life, this phrase is often used to portray a strong sense of dividedness as a national characteristic. Matoš’s saying is actually mirroring deep differences within each individual’s soul and ‘three political parties’ refers to diversity of opinions, beliefs and goals, expressed, for example, when participants in this research were asked about ‘home’ and ‘normal’. As a result, these words are used in everyday life to

authorities ‘wished to ban the salute at Pupovac’s request’. (WS004) Another veteran agreed with this saying that ‘if they ban that salute, then I really don’t know if we can discuss anything openly in Croatia and those who think that the salute was compromised should think about a red star and their comrades who controlled camps in Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška after the Second World War’. (WS005) ‘Much more evil has been done under the red star and Chetnik cockade, but nobody talks about it’, argued an interviewee from Dalmatia (ND052) while another one added that ‘Pupovac keeps nagging about the salute For Home Ready, but nobody questions the four C’s or a memorial to the Borovo Selo killer Šoškočanin’(ND058). These participants highlighted the fact that many other symbols, including those that belonged to the armies that committed crimes against Croats in the Second World War and the Homeland War, were not questioned, while one of the Croatian symbols was disputable due to its resemblance to the salute used by Ustasha during the Second World War.

Note: Vukašin Šoškočanin was a Serbian war commander in Borovo Selo at the time when 12 Croatian policemen were massacred there on 2 May 1991. ‘Vukašin Šoškočanin’, <<https://peoplepill.com/people/vukasin-soskocanin/>> [accessed 2 May 2020].

¹⁶⁴ At the time of writing this thesis, a newly elected Croatian president Zoran Milanović, a member of the SDP (former Communist Party) stated that the memorial plaque ‘should be removed and thrown away’. This caused angry reactions from the Croatian public, defenders and some political parties such as the Croatian Pure Party of Rights (HČSP) who requested from Milanović ‘to leave politics forever’. ‘Zoran Milanović o HOS-ovoj ploči: To treba maknuti, baciti negdje’, *NI*, 22 April 2020, <<http://hr.n1info.com/Vijesti/a502649/Zoran-Milanovic-o-HOS-ovoj-ploci-To-treba-maknuti-baciti-negdje.html>> [accessed 23 April 2020]. P.F., ‘Reakcije na Milanovićevu izjavu o HOS-u’, *HRT*, 23 April 2020, <<https://vijesti.hrt.hr/607605/reakcije-na-milanovicevu-izjavu-o-hos-u>> [accessed 23 April 2020]. ‘Milanović zbog ove izjave mora otići sa političke scene zauvijek!’, *HČSP official website*, 22 April 2020, <<http://hcsp.hr/hcsp-milanovic-zbog-ove-izjave-mora-otici-sa-politicke-scene-zauvijek/>> [accessed 23 April 2020].

¹⁶⁵ Ante Srzić, ‘Nove stranke: političko osvježenje ili sljedbe poznatih figura?’, *Tportal.hr*, 20 April 2015, <<https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/nove-stranke-politicko-osvjezenje-ili-sljedbe-poznatih-figura-20150417/print>> [accessed 15 June 2019].

‘justify’ disagreements on almost every issue and the inability to reach consensus on a local or national level. Moreover, the irony that two persons can have three opinions emphasises the idea that sometimes we cannot even agree with ourselves, as thoughts are dynamic and are subject to change as well as the perception of the world around us.

Opinions, beliefs and goals in the core of this thesis tackle a variety of topics relevant to ‘normalisation’ of life in the post-conflict setting. This exploration of a war-torn society moving towards a peaceful life starts with a simple question about the goal of the nation that just emerged from chaos. In the Croatian context, this is not only about the conflict itself. Instead, it is linked to political changes in 1989/1990 with the transition away from a single-party system, secret police, and violations of human rights. In that society, walls had ears and saying a ‘wrong’ word often led to punishment. Friday evenings, hundreds of people went to Trieste to buy jeans and other ‘luxurious’ items, and Saturday evenings children like me impatiently waited for their parents to come home and show them the riches of the West. People were saving for years for a single trip and on the Yugoslav border they were trembling scared that those little possessions they were able to purchase would be confiscated by the People’s Police¹⁶⁶. In 1991, many joined the army wearing those same jeans, one of the rare symbols of freedom they were allowed to show in communist society without fear of being accused of something inappropriate. Many others were living in basements, trying to find shelter from Yugoslav grenades which they ironically paid for as former Yugoslav citizens. Tinned food, radio batteries, toiletries, blankets, warm clothes and wax candles were among the precious items in the absence of electricity, and quite often there were water outages too. Saturday mornings in Trieste were replaced by life-threatening attempts to take a shower at least once a week. This was the new ‘normal life’ – life in which you are being shot at almost all the time. During this time, many eastern products disappeared from store shelves, and once the nightmare was over in 1995, society woke up in the West. Going to Trieste to get a pair of jeans was no longer the biggest life adventure as this was replaced by building a new non-communist society, where diversity of opinion would be welcome and where peoples’ wellbeing would not depend on Communist Party membership. Once *Goodbye, Lenin*¹⁶⁷ was archived, ‘Hello to what’ emerged.

The transformation of ‘normal’ initially led me to inquire about the priorities of people at the end of war. The idea was to better understand what people’s personal wishes and their

¹⁶⁶ Abbreviated NM – Narodna milicija.

¹⁶⁷ The movie is set in East Berlin in 1989/1990. It portrays the life of a family and their adjustment to a new life after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The details about the movie are available at <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0301357/> [accessed 23 April 2020].

expectations were with regards to macro-political structures. Also, I was curious to learn more about the interaction of these elements in the post-conflict setting and how they influenced the ‘normalisation’ of everyday life still impacted by war-time experiences. Although this is a PhD thesis in political science with a first in-depth exploration of ‘normal life’ contributing primarily to peace-building literature, ‘normal life’ is not exclusively a political science category so I take a multidisciplinary approach. Therefore, I also pursue a historical approach to connect past and present acknowledging their influences on the shades of ‘normal’. Furthermore, I draw on insights from social psychology when dealing with identity and relationships. Finally, I draw on political science literature on community and reconciliation while looking at the importance of returning to a sense of normality in the post-conflict setting. I explore these intellectual intersections in-depth in chapter 2 and bring all these insights into my conversation about ‘normal life’ and a human desire to create a new reality in the empirical chapters. Since I was raised in the same country as the participants in this research, our mutual understanding which developed during this research was rooted in the same influences we experienced at school and in the pre-war society. In that reality, our lives were heavily impacted by the official dogmas of the communist regime; thus, our common starting point was important when addressing post-war concerns in a new unfamiliar world.

I spent the first 15 years of my life¹⁶⁸ in the former Yugoslavia where the Communist Party was the *alfa* and *omega*. I was six years old when I took an oath ‘that I will love our self-governing homeland, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and that I will support brotherhood and unity, and the ideas that Tito fought for’¹⁶⁹. I had no understanding of these words. ‘Comrade Tito’ died when I was four.¹⁷⁰ I realised at that time that he was somehow ‘special’ although I had no idea why he mattered that much or what the ideas he fought for were. Nevertheless, I did promise to follow his path simply because I had no choice to opt out so I did what I was told in a very robotic, unnatural manner. Nobody asked for my opinion and nobody cared. All participants in this research took the same oath in a similar unfree and unwilling fashion. It seems that the feeling their lives were somehow directed by a higher authority from such an early age remains to this day. When I first approached them, many argued that nobody cares about what they had to say¹⁷¹.

¹⁶⁸ This was between 1976 when I was born and 1991 when Croatia proclaimed independence.

¹⁶⁹ This was known as a pioneer oath. As a part of this ritual, children received a blue partisan cap with a red star, a red scarf and a red membership booklet. Damir Horvat, ‘Pionirska zakletva’, *Hrvatski povijesni portal*, 6 November 2006, <<http://povijest.net/2018/?p=481>> [accessed 23 April 2020].

¹⁷⁰ Tito died on 4 May 1980, four days after my fourth birthday. Despite my age, I remember well what I was doing and where I was at the moment when his death was announced on national TV.

¹⁷¹ ES027 and ES037 stated the same in their questionnaires.

The oath we took made us part of Tito's little army, a much bigger entity than ourselves and one we were unable to understand or question. Once I started going to school, I was exposed to new knowledge, a new environment and a larger number of people with different approaches and opinions. This probably encouraged me to subconsciously start exploring my own identity and views, such as: Who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose? As I grew older, I started causing 'incidents' at school. For example, I refused to stand still for hours next to Tito's photo, and after being caught in action, I was given a speech by my teacher and a school director about what 'normal' and 'acceptable' is. I was punished that day because I was anything but 'normal'. While I was serving my sentence for a couple of hours, standing still on my feet in the corner of the classroom and staring at the wall, tired, hungry and forbidden to go to the toilet, the rebel within me woke up questioning why anyone would have the right to define what my version of 'normal' should be, and whether I was entitled to my own identity and thoughts. I did not realise that at that time I was not because my wellbeing could not match the importance of indoctrination¹⁷². However, this remains one of the key moments in my life as it symbolises the beginning of my exploration of 'normal' and the power to create my own world, even if this was within a bubble of a totalitarian regime where human rights and each individual meant very little. That same day I experienced violence from school staff whose job was to look after me, and I accepted it with silence. Over time, my view of this event changed. That violence was 'normal' at that time, but that does not mean it was right or fair, and, thus, it was a very dark shade of 'normal'.

At the beginning of this chapter, the idea of a human ability to rise beyond given frames led me to explore how and why the participants in this research challenged our shared past and the impact of the historical roots of the conflict in their post-conflict 'everyday' lives. I was also interested in the influence of their past experiences on their understanding of the enemies' identity. I asked myself whether the enemy in the early 1990s was the Greater-Serbia ideology and its supporters or if it was also the one I rebelled against as a pupil – something 'bigger' than us that designed our childhood, silenced and forced us to obey creating at the same time future enemies. As one of the participants in this research put it, 'when I was 10 years old, I knew that comrade Tito was my enemy'.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Indoctrination at such an early age consisted of learning the official version of history which highlighted those aspects of history which support communist dogmas and narratives and creating new myths to demonstrate the power of communist sympathisers and their invincibility while at the same time dehumanising the enemies and attributing to them wrong-doings regardless of being true or not. Apart from that, as a child I was learning about the communist ideals and ideas, and their influence in everyday life, such as addressing my teachers with the word 'comrade'.

¹⁷³ ES022.

This further led me to the questions related to punishment and justice, or the lack of it, in a new democratic society where everybody is entitled to a fair trial. If democracy is a part of the deal in a new ‘normal life’ package, I wondered if people were satisfied with the outcome, or if it left them feeling exposed to further violence and possible new threats. I also questioned if the feeling of unfair treatment kept people cemented in the past unable to shape a desirable ‘normal life’ and how this affects their own identity and adjustment to circumstances where a former enemy who possibly killed their friends or family lives next door, pardoned for their crimes. In the end, I wanted to know how all these themes overlap in the lives of people who may be overwhelmed by feelings of anger, despair, grief, and disappointment, perhaps reluctant to accept or unable to cope with a new ‘reality’ where life should be more than just survival in the basements or trenches, and eager to simply live ‘normally’ and unburdened by a violent past.

The deeply divided Croatian society where two people can have three opinions is far from unique, and the approach taken for the purpose of this research makes the topic not only Croatian, but human as many issues tackled in this research come down to a profoundly personal experience of normality. People often use the adjective ‘normal’ but, many find it difficult to define because ‘normal’ is as personal and subjective as our beliefs, views and thoughts. What is ‘normal’ for me may not be ‘normal’ to someone else. Being diagnosed with autism and then dyslexia at the time when I was finishing this research, I found out that Internet sources kept describing everything about me as ‘abnormal’: my special interests, sensory sensitivity, repetitive behaviour and ‘weird’ communication. At the same time, I discovered the autism rights movement that emphasises the concept of neurodiversity promoting the idea that the autism spectrum is a result of natural variations in the human brain rather than a disorder that needs to be cured.¹⁷⁴ I found it strange that in the modern world where diversities of all kinds are broadly accepted, people still have to fight for their right to have a ‘different’ brain because if they do, they are suddenly no longer ‘normal’. This made me wonder about different shades of ‘normality’, a spectrum of different approaches, understandings and definitions which excludes one fixed category that has to match all human beings.

In this thesis, I argue that we need to rethink ‘normal life’ as a part of the post-conflict recovery and the way it is currently understood in a broader context of peace-building. Numerous shades of ‘normal’ that emerge from my research and their links to other peace-

¹⁷⁴ ‘Autism Spectrum’, Wikizero. <<https://wikizero.com/en/Autist>> [accessed 13 July 2020].

building topics demonstrate how complex, dynamic and subjective ‘normal life’ is. It is constantly changing as it is constructed in relation to context, time, identity, the ‘abnormal’, culture and other influences. It is therefore difficult to use ‘normal’ as an aim of peace-building interventions that would fit all in the same way. However, it cannot be ignored because it emerges as one of the post-war priorities leaving reconciliation as something accidental, marginalised and perhaps even ‘abnormal’. For this purpose, I explore the idea of ‘normal life’ through various themes that emerge from my data and which show a significant resemblance to those which are often discussed in peace-building. As a part of this process, I discuss the relationships between ‘normal’ and past, ‘normal’ and safety, ‘normal’ and identities, including the ‘other’, while at the same time rejecting reconciliation as a necessary or desired part of the process. The objective is a better understanding of challenges of re-establishing ‘normal life’ on a daily basis in the field. Based on this analysis, I also argue that our perception of ‘normal’ varies as there is no a unique definition and it changes over time depending on our circumstances and experiences. This way ‘normal’ becomes a palette or a spectrum of numerous shades which, despite the lack of consensus of what ‘normal’ is, opens a space to various approaches to ‘normal’ and peace in a specific context and depending on local circumstances. Based on these observations, my overarching research question is: What meaning does ‘normal life’ have as part of post-conflict recovery? I also aim to answer the following sub-questions:

1. Is ‘normal life’ a goal for people in post-conflict situations?
2. What is their understanding of ‘normal life’ and what does it contain?
3. What are the key elements of ‘normal life’ in the peace-building context?
4. How does ‘normal life’ relate to transformation of post-conflict relationships?

These suggested questions touch the very essence of a human life and question one’s path: where we are coming from, where we are and where we are going next. The answers that emerged from this research kept pinpointing to one particular keyword quite common in everyday living: ‘normal’ – as something that exists beyond violence, something that life should be by default. Just that – ‘normal’. I look at these issues from the ex-combatant perspective, often a marginalised group in peace-building interventions and even a potential ‘spoiler’ in post-conflict societies. I aim to offer insights into peace-building and post-conflict recovery focused on a very personal and individual level. In the Croatian context, ex-combatants were mostly civilians or ‘ordinary people’ who joined the Army to defend their homes, and were thus forced to become soldiers. This significantly changed their way of life

as they had to quickly adjust to the military ‘normal’. Once they left the Army, society had dramatically changed during the war yet they were expected to reintegrate. Many struggled with war trauma leaving them somewhere between the Astore’s ‘death of normalcy’ and attempts to pursue new peaceful ‘normal’. Ex-combatants make a relatively numerous group in the overall population and their reintegration has been largely reliant on various aid programmes. In turn, some researchers have warned about of the lack of evaluation of existing programmes and the need to redirect the welfare system from mainly compensatory measures to the development of various integration programmes.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to examine how army veterans have tried to recover from the violence relying primarily on own efforts while simultaneously ‘normalising’ their lives within a ‘transforming’ society struggling with issues of safety, truth and justice. These ‘ordinary people’ who were exposed to excessive violence know their version of ‘local’, their beliefs, traditions, values, history, and most of all, each other. Sharing similar past experiences could potentially bring their shades of ‘normal’ closer until they reach the point where they can express what kind of post-conflict life the majority of them would like to have and, consequently, improve future peace-building initiatives by showing where these efforts can be better targeted. This may not be a perfect match to the version of life that politics and diplomacy imagine, but it is the people’s version which would be based on their own reality. According to Israeli writer Ephraim Kishon, a survivor of both the Holocaust and Communism, ‘Marshal Tito gave his citizens a little bit of freedom and a little illusion of a better life – only enough for his comrades in Moscow to get angry’¹⁷⁶. Tito’s ‘illusion’ outlived him by only ten years and ended up with massacres. Building peace on an illusion could end up doing the same.

1.3. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE: WHY STUDY PEACE-BUILDING IN CROATIA?

This thesis written from the perspective of the former communist South-Eastern and Eastern Europe should provide a better understanding of post-conflict recovery and ‘normalisation’ in countries undergoing a complicated transition into democracy when the conflict broke out and where ‘ordinary people’ had to adjust to a new ‘normal life’. Unlike Croatia, however, not all transitioning countries experienced a full-scale war and territorial occupation. At the same time, when Croatia’s economy, infrastructure and population were

¹⁷⁵ Dobrotić, ‘Sustav skrbi za branitelje iz Domovinskog rata’, 57-83.

¹⁷⁶ Željko Trkanjec, ‘Tito – a dictator remembered’, *EUobserver*, 4 May 2010, <<https://euobserver.com/news/29997>> [accessed 24 April 2020].

exposed to heavy shelling and destruction, new institutions, civil society and a different way of life started shaping a new set of values and with it, new expectations of its citizens.

Much of the literature has focused on peace-building efforts or transitional justice efforts in the former Yugoslavia and their contributions. There is also a vast literature on the Croatian Homeland War. However, far less is written on the post-conflict recovery and, unlike post-conflict societies such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, peace-building in Croatia remains an outsider to Croatian political science. Very little research has been done, especially in the Croatian context, to determine what has been happening at the local level and what people have done to try to get on with their lives when they are not necessarily involved in peace-building initiatives, nor are they supported in transitional justice efforts. The only Croatian research on forgiveness and reconciliation after the war, conducted by social psychologists in 2000¹⁷⁷, focused on the general population and did not explore Croatian ex-combatants' views on peace-building issues. So, this research also fills that gap. Moreover, the exploration of 'normal' in this thesis reveals how fundamentally unclear the understanding of peace-building is in practice. The data suggest that the term itself is diffused more than the literature would like to claim causing confusion among 'ordinary people'. Furthermore, the question is how people relate to their post-conflict reality in cases when they demonstrate openness to peace-building while feeling excluded from the process; hence, creating a disconnection between their wishes and reality. Thus, this research returns to the local level to analyse how the lives of 'ordinary people' have developed after the conflict, to establish ways in which they have or have not been able to return to 'normal' and what re-building 'normal' could tell us about ways of building peace in the future.

In the existing literature, discussed in chapter 2, particularly the one focused on 'ordinary people' and hybrid peace, the theme of everyday life occasionally emerges but as something that is understood and clear. There is no definition of everyday life or discussion of what it actually is or what it includes. Although in Jansen's research 'normal life' emerged as a desirable priority in some societies where reconciliation shows up only on horizon, a definition of 'normal life' is also lacking. I address this important theoretical gap in deconstructing and challenging the assumptions about 'normal life' as an aim for post-war individuals and societies. Unlike Jansen's work where 'normal life' is identified statically and passively as 'an object of hope', in my thesis, 'normal life' emerges as an ideal enriched by a

¹⁷⁷ Bože Vuleta and Vincent J. Batarelo (eds.), *Peace in Croatia, Research Survey Results* (Zagreb – Split: Cropax, 2001). Goran Milas, Ivan Rimac, Nenad Karajić, 'Willingness to Forgive and Be Reconciled after the Croatian War of Independence in Croatia', *Društvena istraživanja*, Vol. 92 (2007), No. 6, 1151-1173.

dynamic and flexible nature which changes according to the external circumstances and inner experiences; thus, it is being actively pursued. As there is no similar study in the Croatian context, this research also discusses a range of definitions of ‘normal life’, what this ideal could be and how it links to different understandings of inner peace, another framing concept emerging from the data as closely connected to ‘home’ and ‘normal’. I also look into what is lacking in order to establish ‘normal life’ in the post-conflict society from different perspectives such as history, security, relationship with the enemy, justice and how a desire for establishing ‘normal life’ can encourage these processes as a part of a broader peace-building process. I particularly focus on similarities and differences between ‘normal life’ and peace-building in general: topics that emerge in both include truth and justice, while forgiveness and reconciliation largely remain excluded in ‘normal life’. Therefore, this research explores different shades of ‘normal’ and its main elements as well as their mutual relationships and their links to peace-building common themes. This more holistic approach to ‘normal life’ and consequently, peace-building itself, goes beyond specific topics in the socio-political or historical context and explores them on a more personal level; furthermore, it also includes the most inner elements of one’s soul, such as personal development in relation to peace-building.

This exploration of ‘normal life’ will also reveal a different understanding of peace-building (initiatives), reconciliation and co-existence in a specific cultural context. As Jansen suggested, in some societies, the emphasis in life could not be reconciliation as suggested by liberal peace-building; moreover, desires could be completely different and encouraging reconciliation too early or in a way that doesn’t acknowledge linguistic differences and cultural conditioning can be detrimental. This demonstrates why peace-building approaches should consider local experiences in order to be more successful – as one of my participants said, ‘what is normal to me, may be completely abnormal to someone else’¹⁷⁸. These findings also suggest that understanding people’s desires and their perception of ‘normal’ supports them in establishing their version of ‘normal’ helping post-conflict recovery, consequently, building peace in a more stable way.

As stated earlier, while writing in political science, I am also drawing from multidisciplinary insights since the nature of ‘normal’ does not fit exclusively in a specific field. I also draw from a historical approach when exploring the influence of past on the present and ‘normal’ and a social psychology approach when tackling identity and

¹⁷⁸ OTH010.

relationships. I bring all those insights together into my discussion about ‘normal life’ as a first in-depth exploration of this topic contributing primarily to peace-building literature and analysing ‘normal’ in the context of peace-building topics.

1.4. THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis consists of seven chapters. In chapter 2, I give a brief overview of the literature on liberal peace-building and hybrid peace-building rooted in the idea that some forms of hybridity emerge from practices of everyday life. Chapter 3 discusses methodology and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 to 6 show the empirical findings while unpacking the spectrum of ‘normal’ through different themes relevant to the peace-building context and various layers of different but related experiences.

Chapter 4 is based on Jansen’s observation that ‘normal life’ is an object of hope in the former Yugoslav republics. Data collected for the purpose of this research confirm that a post-war priority among participants in this research was indeed ‘normal life’. I analyse what ‘normal life’ means to them, why it is difficult to define it and through their definitions I explore different shades of the ‘normal’ spectrum. I also ask how something that we struggle to describe can be achieved and which obstacles it faces in the Croatian context. This chapter demonstrates the subjective and dynamic nature of ‘normal life’ depending on multiple variables such as beliefs, upbringing, society, and personal experiences. If the ever-changing personal vision of ‘normal life’ constantly influences present and future, potentially shaping relationships with the former enemy and the ‘other’, then it is also important to establish which past events make conflict continue in one way or another.

Therefore, in chapter 5, I explore past events and processes that serve as an obstacle towards a different life in which justice could be served, truth revealed and a new mentality based on democratic values becomes more acceptable. Here, ‘normal’ and troubled past meet through two different, but linked topics – an inability to reveal truth leaving people with a feeling of being unable to change the current version of ‘normal’ and the lack of lustration which led to their disappointment with the current situation which opposes their goals and expectations of how life in Croatian society after the war should look like. Furthermore, these past influences are linked to safety as one of human basic needs and foundations of ‘normal life’. In a society burdened by challenging history and on-going conflicts in the most recent past, safety is a need which keeps being in danger. In this chapter, there is a broader discussion of the possibility of a new conflict with the same enemy and ideology that led to the previous war, and how this represents another obstacle to moving on and having ‘normal

life' instead of living in the conflict. Finally, in this chapter I also tackle a possibility of the veterans' contribution to safety and a more stable peace; thus addressing the agency of the veterans while revealing their inner struggle with the external world that other agents are constructing.

In chapter 6, I move to the more personal space while discussing the problem of reintegration into civilian life and its link to 'normal life'. Based on participants' answers I explore if and why they find it hard to 'reintegrate' and how this influences their sense of identity and inner peace. Using a contact hypothesis, I link this to their relationships with the 'other' in a broader context of co-existence where reconciliation appears as unwanted.

Chapter 7 concludes that in order to understand conflict, we need to return to the local level and analyse the current reality that is being experienced by 'ordinary people as well as their desires and expectations in post-conflict society. They manifest as a pursuit of 'normal life' which emerges as an ideal enriched by a dynamic and flexible nature which changes according to the external circumstances and inner experiences. Specific peace-building topics such as truth, justice and safety appear as critical preconditions of 'normal'; thus, conflict within inner reality continues as long as these are not met. At the same time, security evolves as a very different notion to how it is seen in political science as it emerges as a far more complex experience; hence, revealing its fluid and subjective nature just like 'normal'. This spectrum of 'normal' poses new challenges to peace-building if it truly wishes to open to post-conflict realities; but also inner realities of the individuals involved.

Using 'normal life' as a key theme through all chapters, it is not my goal to determine which steps should be taken to achieve a stable and lasting peace within a certain period of time. My approach is rooted in the data collected for the purpose of this research demonstrating that there is no quick fix, even if 'quick' is defined in decades. The participants in this research rarely spoke of time. Time implies a linear progress with starting and ending points. As Edkins argued, politics draws on a particular linear notion of time although that time has been socially constituted; thus, what happens fits the pattern.¹⁷⁹ On the other hand, trauma works differently as it suggests a disruption of that linearity; what happened is unexpected and does not fit the familiar story so we need to invent a new account which will produce a place for the specific event and make it meaningful.¹⁸⁰ Based on the data, I would dare to say that a pursuit of 'normal life' functions in a similar way as it has been constantly

¹⁷⁹ Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. xiii-xiv.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

impacted by external influences and our inner logic that helps us process the external world in our unique way within 'home' that acts as an environment for our growth. Hence, establishing 'normal life', regardless of its definition, is anything but linear. Therefore, 'normal life' could be portrayed as a sphere with thousands of circles meeting at certain points that somehow change the world around us and the current perception of reality, pushing us in different directions and transforming our goals, expectations, hopes and the vision of what life should be. This makes 'normal life' to some extent resistant to rigid academic conceptualisation leaving it outside of concepts and theories. This will be demonstrated throughout empirical chapters where, due to its fluidity, 'normal life' emerges as an ideal which is not representable in terms of hierarchies, such as Maslow's. Instead of putting 'normal' within specific boundaries and categories where certain limitations cannot be avoided, in this study my research data led me beyond frameworks explored in the literature review. They revealed that to fully understand the depth and complexity of 'normal' using metaphors that portray those intersecting circles is a necessary and beneficial part of its conceptualisation and exploration of the entire 'normal' spectrum.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW:
‘NORMAL LIFE’ AND PEACE-BUILDING –
APPROACHES, ACTORS AND OBJECTIVES

History is intertwined with conflicts accompanied by different forms of violence. Thus, it is useful to address the issues emerging from violence while trying to rebuild a peaceful ‘normal’. The 20th century, or the ‘age of extremes’, as it has been coined by the eminent historian Eric Hobsbawm¹⁸¹, was marked by two world wars and the Cold War, which both had global implications.¹⁸² The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought political changes with a dramatic impact on all communist countries, including Croatia¹⁸³. As mentioned earlier, these changes included a transformation of ‘normal life’ known at that time and a new ‘normal’ that was emerging. Furthermore, as Hauss reminded us, while at least 80 per cent of conflicts since 1945 have been intrastate conflicts¹⁸⁴, ‘we just did not focus on them as such until the 1990s because we tended to see them as proxy battles in the Cold War, rather than disputes to be analysed in their own right’¹⁸⁵. Horowitz agreed with this assessment stating that ethnic conflicts were often treated as if they were a manifestation of something else¹⁸⁶. Thus, conflict too comes in different shades, just like peaceful ‘normal’, significantly expanding the spectrum of ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ and blurring the lines between them.

Another shift in the 1990s relates to the understanding of peace-building as an attempt to return to a peaceful ‘normal’. When the former UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali spoke

¹⁸¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914 – 1991* (London: Abacus, 1995).

¹⁸² Blanka Matkovich, *Croatia and Slovenia at the end and after the Second World War (1944 – 1945), Mass crimes and human rights violations committed by the communist regime* (Irvine: BrownWalker Press, 2017), p. xvii.

¹⁸³ At that time, Croatia was one of six Yugoslav republics, and the former Yugoslavia was a member of the Non-Aligned Movement.

¹⁸⁴ Also called ‘intranational conflicts’.

¹⁸⁵ Charles Hauss, *International Conflict Resolution* (New York – London: Continuum, 2010), p.11. According to some sources, between 1989 and 2008 only seven of the 124 active armed conflicts were interstate warfare. Elisabeth Porter, *Connecting Peace, Justice & Reconciliation* (Boulder – London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2015), p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press, 2000), p. 13.

about *An Agenda for Peace* (1992)¹⁸⁷, Samuel Huntington published *The Clash of Civilizations?* (1993)¹⁸⁸, and Robert Kaplan wrote about a ‘coming anarchy’ that would ‘make our world a far more volatile and violent place’¹⁸⁹ (1994, 1996)¹⁹⁰, the world had already witnessed ‘ethnic cleansing’ in the former Yugoslavia and shortly after in Rwanda. The atrocities committed in these countries encouraged the UN Security Council to establish two *ad hoc* war crimes tribunals¹⁹¹, a move that emphasised the need for a permanent international criminal court.¹⁹² The scale of violence and its consequences drew attention to crucial problems, including the role of the international community and the potential for other actors in peace-building. This revealed different approaches to returning to ‘normal’ to avoid future ‘deaths of normalcy’ and it was primarily done in the context of peace-building. As stated earlier, due to the complexity of ‘normal life’ which is not exclusively a political science category, in this thesis I take a multidisciplinary approach. Although there could be different angles of exploring ‘normal’ (for example, psychology), I primarily contribute to the peace-building literature; thus, drawing on the existing works in this field. Since the existing political science literature does not identify what ‘normal’ in the post-conflict setting is and could be, and how it can be achieved on a local level, I also use a historical and social psychology approach while exploring links between ‘normal’ and past, relationships and identities. In this chapter, I highlight the main works and the key building blocks of the idea of ‘normal life’ that I am taking forward from them. This includes the role of agency and importance of locality in the post-conflict setting in which, due to its dynamic and subjective nature, ‘normal life’ represents not the aim but an on-going process influenced by the past and people’s desires while being essential to transforming the present and re-shaping a vision of a desired future.

¹⁸⁷ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace* (New York: United Nations, 1992). Available at <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/blog/document/an-agenda-for-peace-preventive-diplomacy-peacemaking-and-peace-keeping-report-of-the-secretary-general/> [accessed 24 April 2019].

¹⁸⁸ This was allegedly the favourite book of the first Croatian president Franjo Tuđman. Swanee Hunt argues that the book was also praised by Croatian state-run media, for providing a rationale for nationalistic goals. Swanee Hunt, *This Was Not Our War: Bosnian Women Reclaiming the Peace* (Durham – London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 279.

¹⁸⁹ Hauss, *International Conflict Resolution*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁰ Robert D. Kaplan, ‘The Coming Anarchy’, *The Atlantic* (February 1994), <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1994/02/the-coming-anarchy/304670/>> [accessed 24 April 2019].

¹⁹¹ These were the first war crimes tribunals established after the Nuremberg Trials in 1945 and 1946. The International Tribunal for War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia was founded in March 1993. This was Resolution 808. Full text available at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/808> [accessed 14 January 2020]. It was in May when this tribunal with its seat in The Hague was finally founded. Resolution 827 is available at <<http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/827>> [accessed 14 January 2020].

¹⁹² Hauss, *International Conflict Resolution*, p. 12.

2.1. TOWARDS A PEACEFUL ‘NORMAL’: APPROACHES TO PEACE-BUILDING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL

The term ‘peace-building’ came into focus in the 1970s through the work of Johan Galtung who defined it as one of three approaches to peace: peace-making, peace-keeping and peace-building. Galtung’s understanding of peace-building was based on his conceptual distinction between ‘negative peace’ and ‘positive peace’.¹⁹³ During the Cold War, the focus of peace processes was on peace-keeping, and this often resulted with achieving ‘negative peace’.¹⁹⁴ As I show in the empirical chapters, achieving ‘negative peace’ (which represents the absence of violence), for many participants in this research was the first step to ‘normal’ due to safety as one of the key requirements. From this point, ‘normal’ develops through various stages that can include aspects of ‘positive peace’. In the past 25 years, there has been increased discussion of the need to build a ‘positive peace’ by ‘creating structures and institutions for peace based on justice, equity and cooperation’, as well as addressing the root causes of conflict and preventing their transformation into violence.¹⁹⁵ This is why Hauss highlighted that ‘an important corner toward peace and reconciliation has been turned’ presenting a model that would gradually redirect the world away from Kaplan’s vision of future¹⁹⁶. However, this approach emphasises reconciliation which does not necessarily represent one of the key elements of ‘normal’. Instead of discussing its progress, Jansen suggested asking by whom, for whom, and for what reconciliation is being desired.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, he highlighted that in Bosnia-Herzegovina the object of hope for many ‘ordinary people’ was ‘normal life’, including inter-national co-existence. This is why

¹⁹³ Thania Paffenholz, ‘Civil Society and Peacebuilding’, *Civil Society & Peacebuilding, A Critical Assessment* (Boulder – London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), ed. by Thania Paffenholz, p. 45. Also see: Johan Galtung, ‘Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding’, *Essays in Peace Research, Vol. 2, Peace, War and Defense* (Copenhagen: Ejlers, 1976), pp. 282-304.

¹⁹⁴ Also known as a ‘cold peace’. Hauss, *International Conflict Resolution*, p. 17.

¹⁹⁵ Paffenholz, ‘Civil Society and Peacebuilding’, p.45. A stable and lasting peace can be defined as consisting of mutual recognition and acceptance after the reconciliation process, whose supreme goal is the maintenance of peaceful relations characterized by full normalization with cooperation in all possible domains of collective life that provide secure and trustful coexistence. Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, p. 370.

¹⁹⁶ Hauss, *International Conflict Resolution*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁷ Stef Jansen, ‘If Reconciliation Is the Answer, Are We Asking the Right Questions?’, *Studies in Social Justice*, Vol. 7 (2013), No. 2, 229-243. Elisabeth Porter wrote about two cases which support Jansen’s conclusion. Emir Suljagić, one of the few male survivors of the Srebrenica genocide, said: ‘I never wronged anyone. I did nothing wrong. Reconciliation means we have to meet halfway, but that’s offensive. I was wronged and almost my entire family was killed. I care about justice and truth’. Horacio Verbitsky, a Chilean journalist, made a similar point when he asked: ‘Reconciliation by whom? After someone takes away your daughter, tortures her, disappears her, and then someone denies having ever done it – would you want to reconcile with those responsible?’ Porter, *Connecting Peace, Justice & Reconciliation*, p. 199.

reconciliation seemed to appear not as a priority but as a side effect of a desire for reducing ‘abnormal’ precariousness.¹⁹⁸

Jansen’s research was an important step forward in my research. It placed people’s desires in the centre of the peace-building journey instead of focusing on reconciliation; hence, pushing reconciliation in the background of the story. Based on his insights, I approached this thesis wondering whether the result would be the same and thinking about what ‘normal’ in the similar context could include. However, as stated earlier, unlike Jansen’s work where ‘normal life’ simply emerged as ‘an object’ people dream about, in my research this concept significantly expands and becomes a focal point of the quest in a dynamic post-conflict journey in which inner world responds to external influences, causing their vision of ‘normal’ to constantly shift and transform while being actively pursued. The empirical chapters show how participants in this research largely excluded reconciliation as a relevant part of their idea of ‘normal’ marginalising it to the point where it became almost ‘abnormal’, especially if we look at reconciliation through the lens of liberal peace-building. However, this does not mean that relationship with the ‘other’ is not a part of ‘normal life’ exploration. As Ryan argued, conflicts in the 1990s were not traditional interstate wars where peace could be conceptualised as a return to the *status quo ante* with mutual respect for territorial integrity.¹⁹⁹ Parties to a conflict were often condemned to live together after violence ceased as in Croatia. The enemy was there to stay, often as a neighbour; therefore, peace thinking had to be amended.²⁰⁰ As a result, a rich body of research on post-conflict reconstruction has emerged.²⁰¹ This includes relationships with the ‘other’ which will be tackled in one of the following subchapters. In this subchapter, I will focus on peace-building approaches and the relevance of different actors.

Although there has been an upsurge of interest in positive-sum or win-win conflict resolution that leaves all parties satisfied and open to cooperative problem-solving, Hauss expressed concern about the lack of progress and concluded that there are not enough good ideas or tools for ending contemporary conflicts.²⁰² As stated earlier²⁰³, the lack of safety

¹⁹⁸ Jansen, ‘If Reconciliation Is the Answer, Are We Asking the Right Questions?’, p. 234. Conducting research on psychology of terrorism, John Horgan argued that the longing for the once-normal life can become prioritized and thereby facilitate at least the beginning of psychological disengagement. John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (London – New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 146.

¹⁹⁹ Stephen Ryan, ‘Conflict transformation: Reasons to be modest’, *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (London – New York, 2011), ed. by Dennis J.D. Sandole, Sean Byrne, Ingrid Sandole-Staroste and Jessica Senehi, p. 304.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Monika Heupel, ‘Post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies’, *Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict* (London – New York: Routledge, 2011), ed. by Karl Cordell and Stephen Wolff, pp. 212-222.

²⁰² Hauss, *International Conflict Resolution*, p. 6-7.

poses a serious threat to ‘normal life’ which means that ways of ending conflict are an important step towards ‘normalisation’. Perhaps one of the reasons for this obstacle could be found in Heupel’s explanation that research on post-conflict reconstruction in the 1990s was primarily concerned with mapping out how specific reconstruction strategies could be designed to be effective and thus widely took a problem-solving approach.²⁰⁴ She emphasised that in the late 1990s, when more peace efforts faltered, scholars increasingly challenged the appropriateness of ‘liberal peace’, which became a dominant paradigm in peace-building in the early 1990s.²⁰⁵ According to the liberal peace-building, the return to the post-conflict ‘normal’ assumes that the transformation to a Western-style democracy and free-market economy is a self-strengthening process leading to sustainable development.²⁰⁶ However, although Croatia achieved both, according to participants in this research this did not lead to a stable peace which further undermines attempts to truly find their ‘normal’. Furthermore, some scholars argued that ‘liberal peace’ falls short because its strategies systematically underestimate the influence of local or national development features, and neglect non-Western experiences.²⁰⁷ In the Croatian context, this is particularly important as when the conflict started Croatia gained its independence as a former republic in a non-Western country.

Previous experiences in peace-building have shown that the participation of external actors in overcoming the challenges of sustainable peace may not be enough, since they may not possess the required sensitivity and local expertise to successfully manage conflict and to address its underlying causes.²⁰⁸ This problem highlights the raising of ethical concerns about paternalistic attitudes of external peace-builders and their attempts to impose or transfer norms to local residents perceived as mere recipients of outside intervention.²⁰⁹ Other researchers added that neglecting and potentially marginalising non-European experiences, traditions and cultures, could provoke local resistance, whilst simply transposing liberal democratic blueprints to societies that are radically different from consolidated Western

²⁰³ See Introduction to Chapter 1.

²⁰⁴ Heupel, ‘Post-conflict reconstruction in ethnically divided societies’, pp. 212-222, 216.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Sabine Kurtenbach, ‘Why is Liberal Peace-building So Difficult? Some Lessons from Central America’, *GIGA Working Papers*, No. 59 (September 2007), p. 6. Available at https://www.giga-hamburg.de/de/system/files/publications/wp59_kurtenbach.pdf [accessed 24 January 2019].

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Asaf Siniver, ‘Managing and settling ethnic conflict’, *Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict* (London – New York: Routledge, 2011), ed. by Karl Cordell and Stephen Wolff, p. 190.

²⁰⁹ Schneckener, ‘Peacebuilding in crisis?’, p. 3. Hiroshi Oda, ‘Peacebuilding from Below: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations toward an Anthropological Study on Peace’, *Journal of the Graduate School of Letters*, Vol. 2 (March 2007), 1-16.

democracies could have unforeseen and incalculable consequences.²¹⁰ Richmond, Newman and Paris argued that the apparent emphasis on top-down mediation – in contrast to more bottom-up, community-driven peace-building – has raised concerns about the sustainability of peace-building projects.²¹¹ Based on this observation, it is critical that we look again at the role of other actors in peace-building²¹², particularly those who are most immediately affected by violence and who pursue their vision of ‘normal’. As stated earlier, ‘normal life’ is strongly linked to the local perception of what ‘normal’ even is as it is rooted in the past, traditions, culture, personal experiences, relationships and identities in a specific post-conflict setting. This makes ‘normal’ a dynamic, subjective and on-going process. It also emphasises the importance of locality because the understanding of what is happening among ‘ordinary people’ in the particular space is necessary. For example, while conducting the interviews for this thesis, one of the worries my participants expressed was their concern that outsiders²¹³ would not be able to understand their thoughts and feelings.

Such critiques prompted a turn towards the local. In 1997, Lederach suggested a comprehensive approach to the transformation of conflict that addresses structural issues aimed at transforming conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships.²¹⁴ Based on the view that people possess a potential for peace, they should be seen as resources, not recipients.²¹⁵ He proposed a pyramid model of an affected population, with three categories: top level, middle-range and grassroots. Lederach found the greatest potential in the middle-range actors, including civil society, whose status and influence derive from on-going relationships with top level actors and grassroots (‘ordinary people’).²¹⁶ Lederach’s

²¹⁰ Schneckener, ‘Peacebuilding in crisis?’, p. 5. Jenny Engström, ‘Democracy and democratisation’, *Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict* (London – New York: Routledge, 2011), ed. by Karl Cordell and Stephen Wolff, pp. 103-111. Tobias Debiel and Patricia Rinck, ‘Rethinking the local in peacebuilding, Moving away from the liberal/post-liberal divide’, *Peacebuilding in Crisis? Rethinking paradigms and practices of transitional cooperation* (London – New York, 2016), ed. by Tobias Debiel, Thomas Held and Ulrich Schneckener, p. 244.

²¹¹ Edward Newman, Roland Paris and Oliver P. Richmond, ‘Introduction’, *New perspectives on liberal peacebuilding* (Tokyo – New York – Paris, 2009), ed. by Edward Newman, Roland Paris and Oliver P. Richmond, p. 4.

²¹² This observation is based on Siniver’s conclusion the third party must assume a neutral role with the focus on communicating and facilitating strategies, while activities should be performed by individuals and NGOs as they often do possess the required sensitivity and local expertise. Siniver, ‘Managing and settling ethnic conflict’, p. 190.

²¹³ For example, one participant commented that it is going to be difficult for ‘Englishmen’ to understand some key political process and emotions linked to them which he highlighted. WS009.

²¹⁴ Lederach, *Building Peace*, pp. 20-21.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42, 94. Civil society has been in a focus of research for many other authors and it is often seen as one core actor in many of the theories seeking ‘positive peace’, although Paffenholz concluded that ‘we face a real deficit of theories about the concept of civil society in peace-building’. Paffenholz, ‘Civil Society and Peacebuilding’, p.43. Brewer argued that civil society is a key agent of peace-making which mediates between the state and the grassroots, encourages social and political change, whilst offering space and resources to do so,

framework represented a modified Marie Dugan's 'nested paradigm' (1996), and was also closely related to the work by James Notter and Louise Diamond in the same year. Unlike Lederach, Notter and Diamond found a unique potential in the grassroots arguing that 'governments, to date, have not been able to successfully carry out social peace-building programs'.²¹⁷ Although Lederach acknowledged the importance of understanding local, Ryan emphasised that the very claim that we need to transform the parties to a conflict implies a certain lack of tolerance of cultural difference and insensitivity to other ways of life.²¹⁸ This results in supporting grassroots empowerment, but 'only if you pick the side that *we* believe is best for you'.²¹⁹ This criticism is in line with Richmond who stressed that liberal peace-building elevates elites and institutions over societies and everyday life 'where peace and war are experienced most acutely'.²²⁰ As a result, Richmond shows how liberal peace-building has largely remained top-down due to its inherent focus on the macro instead of the micro-level. He also challenged the idea that there is no alternative to liberal peace, as its universal aspirations are not mirrored on the ground due to inability to communicate across cultures.²²¹ He did not suggest disregarding liberal peace-building. Instead, his research reveals the importance of 'a localised perspective of peace-building – the view from below but also transversally and transnationally connected to the global' which 'is the starting point for a reassessment of the liberal peace project'.²²²

although its strength alone is not a guarantee that peace processes will succeed. He found the grassroots 'amorphous, unorganised, if not disorganised, and poor', and unlike civil society, lacking skills, resources, international links and motivations. John D. Brewer, *Peace Processes, A Sociological Approach* (Cambridge – Malden: Polity, 2010), pp. 31, 46.

On the other hand, Jansen warned about a possibility of the civil sector being irredeemably contaminated by politics. He highlighted that any evidence of collusion between NGO players and top level actors can be very detrimental for fragile post-conflict societies and it can easily undermine people's motivation to engage in social activities and reconciliation itself. Jansen, 'If Reconciliation Is the Answer, Are We Asking the Right Questions?', p. 238. Other scholars also emphasised problems related to the role of civil society in Bosnia-Herzegovina in post-conflict transformation. Rüb stated that 'civil society groups might become instrumentalized by political elites on the basis of ethnicism, which in some cases can lead to the 'decivilization' of society, as in Bosnia-Herzegovina'. Quoted in: Christoph Spurk, 'Understanding Civil Society', *Civil Society & Peacebuilding, A Critical Assessment* (Boulder – London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), ed. by Thania Paffenholz, p. 19. Ryan agreed with this conclusion and highlighted that 'the presence of violence...will also populate civil society with more belligerent groups who will seek to support and justify the use of armed force or state oppression'. Stephen Ryan, *The Transformation of Violent Intercommunal Conflict* (Aldershot – Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), p. 68. Spurk stressed that civil society groups at the local level also revert to 'primary groupings', as well as communities, and serve as coping strategies for people in response to state collapse. Spurk, 'Understanding Civil Society', p. 19.

²¹⁷ James Notter and Louise Diamond, *Building Peace and Transforming Conflict: Multi-Track Diplomacy in Practice* (Arlington: Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy, October 1996). Available at <https://imtdsite.files.wordpress.com/2017/03/op-7.pdf> accessed 20 June 2020].

²¹⁸ Ryan, *The Transformation of Violent Intercommunal Conflict*, pp. 30-31.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Oliver P. Richmond, *A postliberal peace* (London – New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 16.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 12.

²²² Ibid., p. 3.

Based on Richmond's conclusions, in the empirical chapters I analyse how participants in this research mostly spoke of top level and middle-range actors in a negative way. However, although those actors emerge as 'spoilers' of 'normal', the participants in this research did not exclude them from the journey towards 'normal life'. Instead, their contribution based on expectations of the people is being highlighted despite the criticism, and there is a strong emphasis on how they should support 'ordinary people' on their path towards 'normal'. This thesis argues that some 'local' solutions could be possible, but to address all crucial issues the country faces, joint efforts of all actors are expected in one way or another. This will be explored through this thesis where participants spoke from their local perspective while also linking the issues they face to macro-political structures, including transnational ones. They also emphasise their inability to create a new 'normal life' for themselves due to the interests of political elites opposed to their goals and aspirations. This is particularly related to expectations of what kind of 'normal life' people should have compared to the life they do have. While a peace agreement, usually signed by top level leaders, may lead to transformation of conflict at a national level, local problems such as inequality, divisions, mistrust, economic deprivation, fear and violence, may persist and lead to new instabilities causing new challenges to 'normal'.²²³ Smyth stressed that support for a peace agreement may decrease as raised expectations of improvements in quality of life are not met, particularly in communities heavily affected by violence.²²⁴ As a result, the grassroots may choose different strategies to demonstrate their frustration that can fuel violence in the post-agreement period.²²⁵ An extensive study of the people's expectations in Northern Ireland revealed that employment opportunities contributing to a 'better life' were among the most expected results of the peace process in those communities that were directly influenced by violence.²²⁶ Although getting a job was not one of the priorities among the participants in my research immediately after the war, I show why that changed and how the lack of employment opportunities in Croatia became a symbol of an unjust life which shook hope for a better 'normal' life and had a serious impact on the relationship between ex-combatants and other 'ordinary people' in Croatian society, deepening existing divisions within society even

²²³ Elham Atashi, 'Challenges to conflict transformation from the streets', *Conflict transformation and peacebuilding, Moving from violence to sustainable peace* (London – New York: Routledge, 2009), ed. by Bruce W. Dayton and Louis Kriesberg, p. 45.

²²⁴ Quoted in: Atashi, 'Challenges to conflict transformation from the streets', p. 49. Originally published: Marie. Smythe, The process of demilitarization and the reversibility of the peace process in Northern Ireland, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 544-566.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 51.

further, damaging relationships and creating a hostile environment in which pursuit for ‘normal life’ became nearly impossible for some.

My goal to study how ‘ordinary people’ explore their version of ‘normal’ and its significance in the post-conflict reality led to a focus on local and community. I acknowledge potential drawbacks of this approach and have them in mind when conducting the data analysis. For example, some scholars criticised post-liberal approaches for overemphasising the potential of local actors for achieving emancipatory peace.²²⁷ Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall argued that local cultures and communities are also sites of power asymmetry, patriarchy and privilege in which customs and civil society actors may replicate what external actors are sometimes accused of in the international arena.²²⁸ According to them, local groups may be highly disempowered, fragmented and lacking any capacity for peace activity, or not be interested in peace at all.²²⁹ Paffenholz highlighted that internal divisions could be so deep that local resistance is more often directed against local elites than against international actors.²³⁰ These are all valid points which emerged from my research data, particularly when participants²³¹ spoke of their own group accusing their veteran associations of no willingness to support ex-combatants due to internal divisions and ‘local sheriffs’ undermining their ability to build peace through ‘normalisation’ of lives within their communities. Therefore, this thesis acknowledges Ramsbotham’s, Woodhouse’s, Miall’s and Paffenholz’s critique of the potential of ‘local’ which is, therefore, being approached as a piece of the puzzle in the political arena, instead of an isolated element.

Finally, most observers agree that even the notion of local in general remains problematic because ‘local’ is what liberal or post-liberal peace-builders make of it.²³² I would add that ‘local’ could also be what ‘ordinary people’ make of it. While conducting my research some participants spoke from the perspective of their group – ex-combatants, others were trying to address problems of their ‘local’ community such as a village or a town. Some

²²⁷ Debiel and Rinck, ‘Rethinking the local in peacebuilding’, p. 241.

²²⁸ Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution, The prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts*, (Cambridge – Malden: Polity, 2011), p. 236. Mac Ginty discussed in detail how ‘local’ can actually be used by international actors in order to achieve different objectives. Roger Mac Ginty, ‘What do we mean by “local”?’’, *Peacebuilding in Crisis, Rethinking paradigms and practices of transitional cooperation* (London – New York: Routledge, 2016), ed. by Tobias Debiel, Thomas Held and Ulrich Schneckener, pp. 196-202.

²²⁹ Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 244. Thania Paffenholz, ‘Peacebuilding goes local and the local goes peacebuilding’, *Peacebuilding in Crisis, Rethinking paradigms and practices of transitional cooperation* (London – New York: Routledge, 2016), ed. by Tobias Debiel, Thomas Held and Ulrich Schneckener, pp. 213-214.

²³⁰ Paffenholz, ‘Peacebuilding goes local and the local goes peacebuilding’, p. 215.

²³¹ For example, WS016 and ES003.

²³² Schneckener, ‘Peacebuilding in crisis?’, p. 14. Debiel and Rinck, ‘Rethinking the local in peacebuilding’, p. 241.

expended it to the entire country and the nation as opposed to other actors in the arena, such as political elites, which were described as not being ‘national’ in terms of having a feeling of belonging. Thus, ‘local’ itself can be broad or narrow, depending on the angle. Despite the criticism, Mac Ginty stressed that ‘the local does matter in how people perceive peace in their own lives’²³³, or in my case, how they perceive ‘normal’. People live in spaces which are often very difficult for outsiders to access, such as homes, schools, health centres, or roads. These zones of informality are also places of important interactions that allow individuals and collectives to gauge if society is becoming more or less peaceful.²³⁴ I approached the participants in these zones of ‘informality’ when I spoke to them about the research and conducted interviews. Understanding participants’ background, culture, history and current issues threatening their vision of ‘normal’ would be difficult for outsiders, especially when trying to understand perceptions of peace, visions of ‘normal’ and related obstacles. Furthermore, external agents will have naturalised their own justifications for intervention and peace-building processes, yet may be unaware of just how subjective and culturally loaded their own interventions may be.²³⁵ Since ‘normal life’ is subjective as it depends on one’s past and current experiences, the expectations of ‘ordinary people’ could clash with external subjectivity because internal and external may not be able to understand each other. However, as Debiel and Rinck have shown, conceptualising peace mainly in the framework of the everyday life, means neglecting how the local is embedded in wider power structures and domestic politics whilst assuming that there are local solutions.²³⁶ This is yet another point emerging from my research when the participants strongly linked their inability to heal and ‘normalise’ their lives due to a specific influence of wider domestic and foreign power structures. Although their ‘normal lives’ happen on a local level, this does not necessarily mean that solutions to obstacles faced are also local as they may expand beyond national borders.

To bridge the differences between peace-building approaches, Hoffman suggested that genuine peace-building means an abandonment of uniform and bureaucratically imposed

²³³ Mac Ginty, ‘What do we mean by “local”?’ , p. 194.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 206. In the context of my research, this element of external culturally loaded emerged at the very beginning of the fieldwork when some participants complained about the first question where they were asked to tick the box next to their gender. Options were: Male, Female and I would rather not say. Someone reacted angrily saying that this question was ‘extremely stupid’ and concluding that ‘the influence of the LGBT community is defeating for common sense’. OTH001. This example shows how using a simple phrase can potentially cause a rift between external and local if cultural traditions and beliefs are not being taken into account.

²³⁶ Debiel and Rinck, ‘Rethinking the local in peacebuilding’, p. 248.

structures and greater sensitivity and understanding of local conditions without falling into the trap of ‘romanticising the local’.²³⁷ The concept of hybridity has been heralded as a tool that aids in moving away from binaries of liberal versus post-liberal peace towards thinking about the multiplicity of outcomes that might occur when two entities meet and interact.²³⁸ Similarly, Peterson argues that, ‘through the collapsing of binaries, notions of universals are challenged’, and what is left is ‘a series of iterations and in-betweens to be analysed and judged on their own merits’.²³⁹ This allows for a more accurate and context-specific exploration of heterogeneous specificities of the local.²⁴⁰ New hybrid forms of peace that combine liberal peace-building concepts with local perceptions require a reconsideration of who and what peace is constructed for; how it is negotiated and renegotiated by the strong and the weak; what is to be included in its parameters; and, how its emancipatory objectives develop.²⁴¹ This does not mean that hybrid peace-building is a perfect solution. As Peterson noted, there are several issues that this approach highlights, such as the need for greater methodological clarity, the absence or downplaying of issues of injustice and power, and ‘hybridising capital’ suggesting a different potential in different local actors.²⁴² However, she does acknowledge Mac Ginty’s argument for flexibility of hybridity and the different forms this approach can take in order to overcome these challenges.²⁴³ Mac Ginty highlighted that hybridity encourages critical question of contents and fixity of categories, whilst being aware of the fluidity of conflicts and their actors.²⁴⁴ In the context of my research, this fluidity expands to all categories tackled in this thesis starting from local itself and its internal divisions whether between ex-combatants and their associations or ex-combatants and the rest of society. It expands to the very notion of peace-building, the changeability of ‘normal life’ in the post-conflict setting, and grey areas where reconciliation may be nothing more than

²³⁷ Mark Hoffman, ‘What is left of the “liberal peace”?’ , *Connect*, Vol. 21 (2009), No. 2, 10-11. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall agreed with Hoffman’s conclusion and argued that peace-building should reflect and be a product of a negotiated discursive practice and not the outcome of a technically defined and externally imposed blueprint. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 231. Mac Ginty described this problem as a danger of peace-building being reduced to ‘a functional and technocratic exercise of ticking boxes, counting heads and weapons, amending constitutions, and reconstructing housing units’. Roger Mac Ginty, *No War, No Peace: The Rejuvenation of Stalled Peace Processes and Peace Accords* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 3-4.

²³⁸ Peterson, ‘A Conceptual Unpacking Of Hybridity’, p. 12.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ Richmond, *A postliberal peace*, p. 3.

²⁴² Peterson, ‘A Conceptual Unpacking Of Hybridity’, pp. 13-14.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 15. Mac Ginty highlighted that lenses offered by hybridity encourage us to critically question the contents and fixity of categories, whilst being aware of the fluidity of conflicts and their actors. Mac Ginty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance, Hybrid Forms of Peace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 2, 208.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

tolerable co-existence while tackling issues of injustice as another obstacle to ‘normal’ instead of downplaying them.

Given a desire to understand how people actually ‘normalise’ their lives at the local level, this research will fall within the context of hybrid peace-building which combines liberal peace-building concepts with local perceptions and is rooted in forms of hybridity emerging from practices of everyday life. Three main arguments as a part of my critique of liberal peace-building are: the lack of focus on grassroots, the lack of focus on the ‘local’ and the lack of understanding of variations within different societies. Notter and Diamond argued that ‘governments, to date, have not been able to successfully carry out social peace-building programs’²⁴⁵; hence, peace-building efforts may only partially succeed unless they find fertile ground within the local communities. Therefore, this research focuses on the grassroots in affected regions to understand what exactly happens in post-conflict recovery and why. Despite the critics of post-liberal peace-building who suggested that those who emphasise the local tend to romanticise it, my focus shifted to the local with all its positive and negative characteristics. As I will show in the empirical chapters, ‘romanticising’ the local was largely avoided by the participants who openly criticised top actors such as the UN as well as themselves. This put the emphasis on the harsh reality of the grassroots from their own perspective addressing the problems of the current everyday ‘normal’ with the aim of exploring the obstacles to the desired ‘normal’ and establishing what should be included in the future parameters of hybrid forms of peace in the context of everyday life.

2.2. EX-COMBATANTS PURSUING ‘NORMAL LIFE’: WHAT IS ‘NORMAL’ AND CAN WE IDENTIFY IT?

As highlighted earlier, former soldiers as a specific group among ‘ordinary people’ and their experiences of pursuing ‘normal life’ are at the centre of this thesis. Ex-combatants are an important part of those communities mostly affected by violence and in the Croatian context they represent over 10 per cent of the population. There is a tendency within the peace-building community to look at ex-combatants ‘as “target groups” of assistance programmes who have to become “educated” and “socialised”, or as “spoilers” who should disband and disappear once peace has prevailed – rather than [as] peace-building partners or agents in the driver’s seat of transformation’²⁴⁶. This perspective excludes ex-combatants as

²⁴⁵ Notter and Diamond, *Building Peace and Transforming Conflict*, p. 5.

²⁴⁶ Veronique Dudouet, Hans J. Giessmann and Katrin Planta, ‘Deficits and blind spots in existing approaches to post-war security promotion’, *Post-War Security Transitions, Participatory peacebuilding after asymmetric*

possible agents of change despite their successful reintegration potentially being one of the most valuable peace-building resources.²⁴⁷ Post-conflict recovery is a complex and multidimensional process of transformation from conflict to stability, security and peace.²⁴⁸ Therefore, post-conflict disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)²⁴⁹ and security sector reform (SSR)²⁵⁰ are some of the key activities for the provision of justice and security²⁵¹; hence, they should be collaboratively planned and implemented. Both are directly linked through the integration of ex-combatants into ‘new’ security institutions and structures, and, as such, they represent a part of the broader peace-building agenda.²⁵² These processes are particularly important in cases where violence could re-emerge (as potential ‘spoilers’²⁵³) or where ‘tactical violence’²⁵⁴ could continue. Spear argued that, although the tasks of disarmament and demobilization are often bundled, demobilisation plays a greater role in ensuring successful peace-building.²⁵⁵ She noticed that there are societies where guns play

conflicts (London – New York: Routledge, 2012), ed. by Veronique Dudouet, Hans J. Giessmann and Katrin Planta, p. 30. McEvoy stated that the range of work in which politically motivated former prisoners and combatants, such as those in Northern Ireland, are involved includes: direct service including counselling and training to ex-prisoners and their families, capacity-building in local communities, conflict-related tourist programmes delivered by former combatants, community-based anti-poverty work and anti-racism work, resolving disputes at interface areas concerning contested marches, community-based restorative justice as alternatives to punishment violence, youth diversionary work, initiatives on dealing with the past (including truth recovery) and developing relations with former enemies and victims of violence and devising forms of memorialisation and commemoration. Kieran McEvoy, ‘Agents of change – ex-prisoners, ex-combatants and conflict transformation in Northern Ireland’, *Post-War Security Transitions, Participatory peacebuilding after asymmetric conflicts* (London – New York: Routledge, 2012), ed. by Veronique Dudouet, Hans J. Giessmann and Katrin Planta, pp. 109-110.

²⁴⁷ McEvoy argues that ‘much of the work undertaken by former prisoners in Northern Ireland offers a direct challenge to the assumptions underpinning much of the academic and policy literature on DDR, with regards to the timing and sequencing on peace processes and the alleged passivity of ex-combatants, seen as a security problem to be managed rather than leaders of conflict transformation’. Furthermore, ‘it is precisely because of their violent pasts that former prisoners and ex-combatants are ideally placed to provide such agency in moving out of conflict’. McEvoy, ‘Agents of change – ex-prisoners, ex-combatants and conflict transformation in Northern Ireland’, pp. 120.

²⁴⁸ Kristin Valasek, ‘Combating stereotypes: Female security personnel in post-conflict contexts’, *Defying victimhood, Women and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, (Tokyo – New York – Paris: United Nations University Press, 2012), ed. by Albrecht Schnabel and Anara Tabyshalieva, p. 310.

²⁴⁹ According to the UN Integrated DDR Standards, DDR is a process that ‘contributes to security and stability in a post-conflict recovery context by removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking the combatants out of military structures and helping them to integrate socially and economically into society by finding civilian livelihoods’. Valasek, ‘Combating stereotypes’, pp. 310-311.

²⁵⁰ Police reform was included in the Erdut Peace Agreement (1995) which was the basis for the peaceful resolution to the Croatian Homeland War in Eastern Croatia.

²⁵¹ Valasek, ‘Combating stereotypes’, p. 310.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 311.

²⁵³ For example Republican dissidents in Northern Ireland. Another example is corrupt regimes.

²⁵⁴ This refers to violence by groups who wish to continue armed conflict for political advantage. Quoted in: Brewer, *Peace Processes*, p. 32. Originally published in: John Darby (ed.), *The Effects of Violence on Peace processes* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001).

²⁵⁵ Joanna Spear, ‘Disarmament and Demobilization’, *Ending civil wars, The implementation of peace agreements* (Boulder – London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), ed. by in Stephen John Stedman, Donald Rothchild and Elizabeth M. Cousens, p. 141.

legitimate roles and therefore complete disarmament is unfeasible and undesirable.²⁵⁶ Brewer added that ‘gunmen can also experience emasculation during decommissioning’.²⁵⁷ If membership in a fighting force confers social status, losing it may be profoundly threatening to combatants: ‘any reintegration of these former combatants into society will have to provide them with a role equivalent status to the one they had during the conflict, or at least positively recognise the role they played in the conflict’²⁵⁸. Securing a new status for ex-combatants could be challenging, especially shortly after the conflict ends. Destroyed infrastructure, a lack of employment opportunities, due to the gap between the skills of ex-combatants and the skills demanded in the labour market, and a breakdown of social networks, shifts the problem from ‘how to reintegrate’ into ‘reintegrate into what..?’²⁵⁹ Consequently, reintegration schemes seem doomed to failure if they exclusively target registered combatants at the expense of addressing their broader social base.²⁶⁰ Moreover, some groups of combatants will have specific needs due to, for example, PTSD. If returning to ‘normal’ is one of the goals, then the question is which version of ‘normal’ people are expected to return to in their specific circumstances and how should they be supported in the process of ‘normalisation’.

Addressing these issues in the Croatian context Ivana Dobrotić from the University of Oxford emphasised that ‘veterans and their problems are a rare topic of academic debate’.²⁶¹ She concluded that

the Republic of Croatia intended a wide sphere of rights for its defenders, and these rights range over almost all social security systems, but they stretch even beyond that. The data show that there is a constant growth in the number of the users of certain rights, but also of the expenses related to that. A large and constant growth of the users of the right of the disability allowance and a large number of unemployed defenders are particularly worrying. Despite large expenses for the housing allocation, numerous requests remain unsolved, and will represent a problem that the governments will have to deal with for a long time.²⁶²

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Quoted in: Dudouet, Giessmann and Planta, ‘Deficits and blind spots in existing approaches to post-war security promotion’, p. 33. Originally published in: John Brewer, *Peace process, A sociological approach* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p. 70.

²⁵⁸ Spear, ‘Disarmament and Demobilization’, p. 145.

²⁵⁹ Dudouet, Giessmann and Planta, ‘Deficits and blind spots in existing approaches to post-war security promotion’, p. 34.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Dobrotić, ‘Sustav skrbi za branitelje iz Domovinskog rata’, pp. 57-83.

²⁶² Ibid.

Dobrotić acknowledged that ‘the key prerequisite for a successful reintegration is the improvement of the employment level of the veteran population’, but also warns ‘about the lack of evaluation of existing aid programmes, as well as on the need to redirect the welfare systems for the defenders from mainly compensatory measures to the development of various integration programs’.²⁶³ Nikola Jelovac argued that ‘most of them have psychological difficulties and frustrations, but not to the extent that they are permanently unable to work’ stating that most of their difficulties stem from the fact that they do not work.²⁶⁴ He highlighted that

in regards to them who have been struggling with the process of transformation upon their return from war, frustrated by new political circumstances and mostly without work, tried to solve their existential problems by declaring them incurable chronic patients, instead of reintegrating them into the world of work, with support and understanding for them and their families.²⁶⁵

Jelovac concluded that this ‘solution’ distanced veterans from life, further stigmatising them at the same time they faced a mismatch between the world they fought for – or their desired ‘normal’ – and the one they got. In the empirical chapters, I show that some participants argued the social stigma in the perception that those who defended the homeland are not ‘normal’.²⁶⁶ The very reason that brought them to war – which was simply to protect ‘home’ and life – was arguably ‘abnormal’. Many asked what they actually fought for²⁶⁷; this dilemma disturbs their inner peace and leaves them dissatisfied. Based on Jelovac’s and Dobrotić’s observations and Spear’s understanding of the importance of the ex-combatants status, in the empirical chapters I explore how the status of the Croatian veterans challenged their relationship with the rest of society and their ability to return to ‘normal’ due to the lack of employment opportunities. This led to another layer of injustice emphasised by the participants in my research in the context of ‘normal life’ where work, creating and feeling a valuable member of society as a new ‘status’ emerged as an important precondition to having ‘normal life’.

It is also important to emphasise that most participants had been ordinary civilians who joined the army to defend their homes, which in many cases were the frontlines. Thus,

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ PSD, ‘Nikola Jelovac: 95 posto braniteljja nema sve simptome PTSP-a’.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ WS030.

²⁶⁷ For example ES051.

they did not go back to a society far away from the conflict once they left the army. Their old civilian ‘normal’ was interrupted by the war after which they needed to create a new ‘normal’. Their communities were part of the conflict, and, thus, being useful in that context was relevant so not to be a ‘burden’; instead they wished to be active, which is seen as being ‘normal’. The return to communities affected by violence also means that in this case combatants were not cut off from their social milieu, but were embedded in their community at all times.²⁶⁸ This raises another question about how appropriate the term ‘reintegration’ actually is. For example, in the context of Northern Ireland, McEvoy found that there is reluctance to accept that term since it is often associated with ‘ordinary’ criminality rather than ‘politically motivated’ offences. It also implies that former combatants are somehow not a part of their society, and therefore they need to change in order to ‘fit back’ into it.²⁶⁹ As I show in this thesis, veterans interviewed in this study also struggled with the same term. Some of them simply rejected it arguing that they have never left their community and they temporarily went to fight, while almost all of them had difficulties with explaining what reintegration even is despite admitting it was stressful. One of them simply put it in the context of ‘normal’ highlighting that the process of reintegration suggested ‘civilising’ people after the war and their return to peaceful lives free of extreme violence²⁷⁰. Finally, the term reintegration also implies that ex-combatants are passive recipients of aid and interventions, instead of encouraging them to take an active role in this process.²⁷¹ I tackle this problem in the Croatian context in regards to ‘early retirements’ that some participants described as social euthanasia which socially shunned them or, as Jelovac put it, distanced and stigmatised them further.

In the Croatian context, academic works largely focus on transitional justice and reconciliation, and partially on physical and psychological health of veterans, but leave out other areas of ‘normal life’ including the feeling of being active and appreciated. This left the veterans feeling that they were simply expected to transform from soldiers into pensioners, becoming passive receivers rather than active creators of their ‘normal life’, which caused frustration and dissatisfaction. As I stated earlier, I show how this resulted in a rift between the veterans and the rest of society dividing local which, due to the lack of understanding,

²⁶⁸ Dudouet, Giessmann and Planta, ‘Deficits and blind spots in existing approaches to post-war security promotion’, p. 34.

²⁶⁹ McEvoy, ‘Agents of change – ex-prisoners, ex-combatants and conflict transformation in Northern Ireland’, p. 107.

²⁷⁰ ES040.

²⁷¹ McEvoy, ‘Agents of change – ex-prisoners, ex-combatants and conflict transformation in Northern Ireland’, pp. 107-108.

potentially clash with each other and significantly undermine attempts of veterans to have the desired ‘normal life’ within their own communities.

Dobrotić’s and Jelovac’s conclusions give some indication of what ‘normal life’ could mean for army veterans. Transforming soldiers into active civilians would contribute to their health, finances, quality of life, self-esteem and a feeling of being more comfortable within society. Although Duffield noticed that if we wish to examine conflict we must begin by analysing what is normal²⁷², I found the in-depth research of ‘normal’ largely missing in the political science literature where the emphasis is still on dualities, such as home/foreign, local/international, safety/danger and us/them. The major challenge in my research project was a lack of a definition of ‘normal life’ and its’ parameters. As a participant noticed, ‘what is normal to someone could be abnormal’²⁷³ to another; hence, indicating flexibility required when discussing ‘normal’ and avoidance of fixed categories, as it was the case with hybrid peace-building.

To begin with the exploration of ‘normal’, I primarily had to rely on anthropological studies. After all, it was an anthropologist Laurie King – Irani who described a desire to live ‘normal lives’ a potentially ‘valuable asset for transformation’²⁷⁴, a process which is in the heart of post-conflict recovery. She also agreed that this desire for ‘normal’ should be ‘tapped in any reconstruction and rehabilitation process’²⁷⁵. Stef Jansen engaged in a more in-depth exploration of ‘normal’ in his book *Yearnings in the Meantime: ‘Normal lives’ and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex* published in 2015. In Jansen’s work, ‘normal’ carries a connotation of ‘ordinary’, ‘mundane’ or ‘quotidian’.²⁷⁶ Ivana Maček, another anthropologist who also conducted research in Bosnia-Herzegovina, narrowed down this experience of ‘ordinary’ or ‘quotidian’ ‘normal’ to the concept ‘charged with a sense of morality, of what was good, right or desirable’; hence, ‘normal life’ describes how people want to live while a ‘normal person’ is the one who ‘thought and did things people found acceptable’.²⁷⁷ As a result, ‘normality’ is not simply ‘ordinary’ but instead it communicates social norms and often indicates one’s ideological position.²⁷⁸ Furthermore, Maček highlighted that ‘social norms are

²⁷² See Introduction of chapter 1.

²⁷³ OTH010.

²⁷⁴ Laurie King – Irani, ‘Iraq: A look back’, *Orbis*, Vol. 51, Issue 1, Winter 2007, 91-106.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

²⁷⁶ Stef Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime: ‘Normal Lives’ and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex* (New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), p. 33.

²⁷⁷ Ivana Maček, ‘Chapter 1: “Imitation of Life”: Negotiating Normality in Sarajevo under Siege’, *The new Bosnian mosaic: identities, memories and moral claims in a post-war society* (London – New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), ed. by Xavier Bougarel, Elissa Helms and Ger Duijzings, p.52.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

always in a process of change’ because ‘each member of a society continuously defines and redefines her/his norms of conduct and perception of reality in accordance with her/his daily experiences’.²⁷⁹ Maček described this as ‘negotiation’ emphasising that lives are disrupted gradually and continuously which ‘leaves space for people to come to terms with disruption: to feel them, to think about them, to explain them, and to find their own ways of acting – in other words, to negotiate their normality’.²⁸⁰ As people do not just automatically accept new explanations, ideas and norms, ‘the negotiation of normality takes place in a political space where the power over defining “truth” is highly contested’²⁸¹. This happens because the human need for security can ‘be used by actors in a political arena to promote their own versions of reality, and consequently those with more power have more to say about what normality is’.²⁸² Jansen also acknowledged this dynamic of ‘normality’ stating that ‘studies of political violence emphasise the remarkable malleability of notions of normality, testifying to people’s resilience and adaptability in extreme conditions’. Furthermore, previous research ‘documents people’s capacity to become accustomed to conditions of violence through routinisation’²⁸³. Once the ‘abnormal’ is reclassified as ‘normal’, the extraordinary is made ordinary while the unpredictable becomes predictable²⁸⁴. Hence, in Jansen’s work establishing routines in everyday life regardless of what they are at the specific moment of time appears to be a key to ‘normal’ while in Maček’s work ‘the negotiation of normality’ is strongly linked to a political space.

This fluidity of ‘normal’ and constant ‘negotiation’ also emerges from empirical data in this thesis which will be discussed in the following chapters with one significant difference as it includes both – a political space and everyday life, but also goes beyond it and stretches even to the spiritual realm. In the Croatian context there is also a strong need for safety, as participants’ answers demonstrated, but what my data also show is a strong desire of participants to reject a version of reality imposed by the actors in a political arena and to claim their right to shape their ‘normal’ according to their vision; hence, emphasising the role of agency and each individual with a strong focus on pursuing truth whether this is the truth about historical events or the truth about personal war experiences and a contribution to peace.

²⁷⁹ Maček, ‘Chapter 1: “Imitation of Life”: Negotiating Normality in Sarajevo under Siege’, p.52.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p.53.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid., p. 52.

²⁸³ Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime*, p. 34

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

Tackling challenges when discussing ‘normal’, Jansen emphasised that ‘there is a tendency in anthropology to approach phenomena from a direction that intuitively seems to be opposed to them, thus providing a diagnostic perspective’ and as a result, ‘the issue of “normality” – sometimes glossed as “normalcy” or “the normal” – often emerges in studies of what is considered “abnormal”’, hence, entailing critique.²⁸⁵ This is in line with the conclusions of the group of researchers who conducted a study on ‘normal life’ at a residential facility for people with physical and intellectual impairments. Based on their findings, they emphasised that ‘the experience of normality was also evidenced through references to the absence of abnormality’.²⁸⁶ This also shows in my empirical chapters, although the line between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ sometimes appear to be extremely thin.

To understand these complexities better, it is necessary to explain different perceptions of ‘normal’ that Jansen examined. Firstly, he posed questions similar to those in the introduction of this thesis relevant to understanding a line between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’. Hence, he wondered whether ‘abnormal’ war conditions were considered ‘normal’ for an undetermined period of time or perhaps in principle ‘abnormal’ but ‘routinised precisely through a temporary suspension of “normal” standards of evaluation and expectation’.²⁸⁷ As I discuss in the empirical chapters, this also proved to be difficult to participants in my research to understand and it resulted with ‘normal’ developing as a spectrum of numerous shades with violence being the darkest shade for some who accepted it as a part of life, but still ‘abnormal’ for some others who insisted on safety as one of the key preconditions of ‘normal’. Furthermore, even in those cases when violence was accepted as a part of life, none of my participants saw it as a constant element in their everyday lives which further highlights the relevance of safety in everyday life as a key to ‘normal’. Hence, although violence can be accepted as a part of life, there is still an element of temporality in my data which is in line with Jansen’s ‘undetermined period of time’.

Secondly, due to social, political, economic and other changes, understanding ‘normal’ as opposed to ‘abnormal’ is not that straightforward. Using an example of the second Intifada, Tobias Kelly noted that ‘there were in fact two senses of the ordinary at work, in tension with each other: one that empirically described the typical and the mundane, including a

²⁸⁵ Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime*, p. 33

²⁸⁶ Fiona Graham, K. Anne Sinnott et al., ‘A more „normal“ life: Residents’, family, staff, and managers’ experience of active support at a residential facility for people with physical and intellectual impairments’, *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 2013, 256-264.

²⁸⁷ Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime*, p. 35

normalising of the abnormal’ and the other one ‘that normatively prescribed an ideal’.²⁸⁸ Kelly named the first one the ‘is’ and the second one the ‘ought’. Building upon the previous works on the post-socialist transformations in the Soviet Bloc, Jansen highlighted how they ‘addressed “normality” predominantly by tracing a “descent into the ordinary” through a focus on access to consumer goods and aspirations associated with western middle classes’; thus, emphasising the realm of the material accessible in the ‘normal’ West as opposed to ‘abnormal’ communist reality.²⁸⁹ This was explained further by another socio-cultural anthropologist Krisztina Fehervary who emphasised that in socialist countries ‘select commodities imported from the West (including socialist goods produced solely for export) were encountered as prized valuables and icons of a different world’.²⁹⁰ They seem to ‘make life easier and more pleasurable’, but this was not just evidence of a better production system, but ‘served as icons of a more human political and economic system, a place where living a “normal” life was possible’.²⁹¹ Another anthropologist Douglas Rogers concluded that ‘reformulations of what life entails have been central to the entire post-Soviet period across a number of domains’ with ‘the entire “transformation” period of the 1990s’ being ‘described as a time in which everyday life took on outsized importance, as familiar encompassing structures disappeared with the abrupt end of socialism and commonplace activities took on uncommon significance’. During that period, ‘members of the last Soviet generation searched eagerly for “normal life”, a search that often led them – and indeed Russians of all generations – into the bewildering world of post-Soviet politicized consumption’.²⁹² It is important to have this in mind because as Jansen concluded, ‘many anthropological writings on “normality” emerge from research on radical upheaval’. This comes in two forms that predominate in the literature: war and postsocialist transformation²⁹³ and what happened in the post-Yugoslav states was a combination of both.

Based on the previous ethnographic studies, Jansen argued that ‘these writings document the maintenance of a distinction between the descriptive “is” and the normative “ought”, with the register of “normality” reserved for the latter’.²⁹⁴ Furthermore, he

²⁸⁸ Ibid. Originally published in: Tobias Kelly, ‘The Attractions of Accountancy: Living an Ordinary Life during the Second Palestinian Intifada’, *Ethnography*, 9(3), 2008, 351-376.

²⁸⁹ Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime*, p. 36.

²⁹⁰ Krisztina Fehervary, ‘Goods and states: The political logic of state-socialist material culture’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51 (2), 2009, 426-459.

²⁹¹ Ibid, p. 429

²⁹² Douglas Rogers, ‘Bringing oil to life: Corporations and conspiracies in Russian oil documentaries’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 78, Issue 1, Spring 2019, 50-73.

²⁹³ Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime*, p. 34.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 38.

highlighted that ‘what we find here is not only a normative aspiration for the future’ because ‘in its references to the “ought”, post-Yugoslav discourses of “normality” also enlist the “was” which was absent from Kelly’s study on negotiations of ordinariness because ‘his Palestinian interlocutors did not have much actual “ordinariness” to recall’.²⁹⁵ Apart from that, ‘in studies of post-socialist transformations in the post-Soviet Bloc the “was” is also detached from “normality” because ‘it posited as “abnormal” that needs to be overcome by a return to Europe’.²⁹⁶ Consequently, Jansen concluded that ‘research in the post-Yugoslav states provides substantially different insights, showing previous everyday lives to be a central positive source of the evocation of “normality” for very broad layers of the population’ because life experiences in socialist Yugoslavia emerged as ‘normal life’.²⁹⁷ This happened because, unlike the Soviet Bloc, consumption predominantly appears in terms of which goods, services and experiences had previously been more accessible than now and ‘living standards were twinned with a sense of worth symbolised by cross-border mobility and global recognition’²⁹⁸. As a result, ‘the “ought” was thus opposed to the “is” but intimately related to the “was”’²⁹⁹; hence, directly linking an aspiration for the future (the ‘ought’) with the life before the 1990s (the ‘was’). As opposed to this emerges the ‘is’ or ‘abnormal’ which is actually ‘is not’. Jansen concluded that ‘relative consensus also prevailed amongst the BiH³⁰⁰ population that “politics” was to blame for this predicament’.³⁰¹

However, as I will discuss in the empirical chapters, my research findings among the Croatian Army veterans were significantly different. Not only that previous lives in socialist Yugoslavia did not emerge as the ‘ought’, but in fact they emerged as a negation of the ‘ought’ and inspiration for something beyond that life and the current one; hence, encouraging the radical change of the ‘was’. Therefore, in the context of my thesis, these perceptions of ‘normal’ developed as the ‘is’, the ‘was’, the ‘ought’ and the ‘could’. The ‘could’ emerges as a key to understanding the responses collected from the participants in this thesis because their lives are not only about the past that was, the present that currently is or even the future that should be based on their current experiences and expectations, but it is also what their lives could be once conditions for the ‘ought’ are met. Thus, ‘normal’ is not only negotiated ‘through the continuation of everyday activities’ or ‘a commitment to routines’ as Jansen

²⁹⁵ Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime*, p. 38.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

³⁰⁰ Bosnia and Herzegovina.

³⁰¹ Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime*, p. 40.

concluded³⁰², but goes much further as a never-ending story without the beginning or the end because, unlike Jansen's 'linear temporality'³⁰³ where 'a linear, forward movement' emerges as 'an imperative'³⁰⁴, in this thesis it is anything but linear. Furthermore, any 'abnormality' in the current 'is' is not exclusively a fault of politics, as it was in Jansen's research. Instead, as I show in the empirical chapters, the responsibility for 'normal' is also individual and each member of society is expected to contribute to a better 'normal'. This explains why in this thesis 'normal' develops as a very dynamic, subjective and fluid quest that stretches from everyday life to not so ordinary experiences and even spiritual realm.

Acknowledging this flexibility and subjectivity of 'normal', my aim was to determine basic key points relevant to the majority of participants in this study. As Atashi and Smyth argued, what can undermine safety and lead to more violence or another expression of dissatisfaction are unfulfilled expectations of improvements in the quality of life.³⁰⁵ If 'normal' excludes at least the worst forms of violence, such as war, and it relies on expectations according to beliefs, goals and desires, this means that success could be related to the quality of life which creates opportunities for goals to be pursued and wishes to be fulfilled.

Anthropologists such as Jansen and Maček gave a brief overview of what 'normal' should look like based on their findings in the post-Yugoslav states. Jansen argued that 'references to "normal lives" evoked anything from being able to walk the streets safely (contrasted with war and with postwar crime), over permanent access to electricity and running water (interrupted during wartime, reinstalled for most afterwards), rights to employment, housing and health care (reduced by post-socialist transformations), to holidays on the Adriatic coast (now unaffordable for many)'.³⁰⁶ This is in line with Maček who discussed basic needs for food, water and a source of energy as essential to physical survival³⁰⁷ as well as 'finding employment, because having a job to go to not only meant economic benefits and social contacts, but most importantly it provided structure for a daily routine'.³⁰⁸ Similarly, another anthropologist and philosopher Jarrett Zigon linked 'normal life' to having a family, a career and stability. Monika Palmberger, also an anthropologist, agreed with this stating that 'normal life' is 'tightly connected to social security and economic

³⁰² Ibid., p. 37.

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 44.

³⁰⁴ Stef Jansen, 'On not moving well enough, Temporal reasoning in Sarajevo Yearnings for "normal lives"', *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 55, Supplement 9, August 2014, S74-S84.

³⁰⁵ Atashi, 'Challenges to conflict transformation from the streets', p. 49.

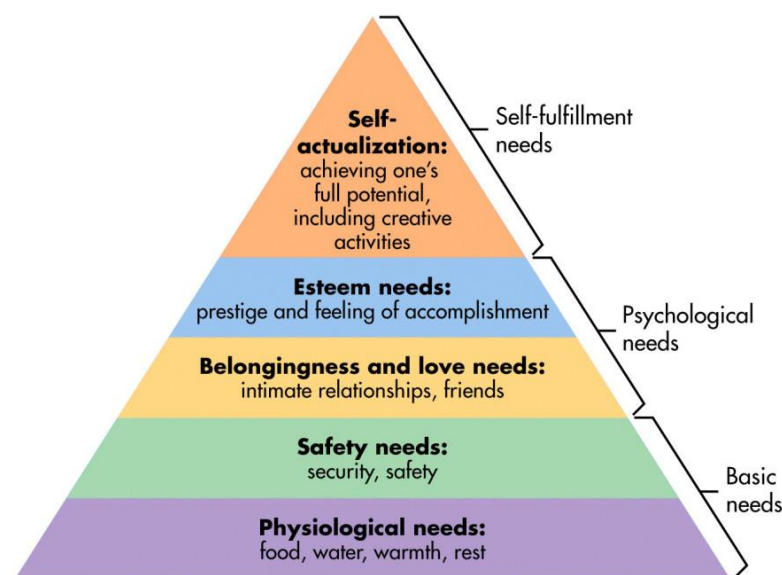
³⁰⁶ Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime*, p. 41.

³⁰⁷ Maček, 'Chapter 1: "Imitation of Life": Negotiating Normality in Sarajevo under Siege', p.54.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p.67.

well-being'.³⁰⁹ In the research conducted by sociologist Katarzyna Waniek, a person who managed to leave 'the collective alcoholic trajectory of her family through attempting suicide and entering a children's home'³¹⁰, the participant in the study explained what living 'normally as a normal person' meant to her: 'I have a regular job, I have a husband, I have a home, I have bills that I have to pay, which is not cool but, but that's the way life is'.³¹¹ Basically, 'a normal life is simply that: a life of stability without too many worries' or as one of Zigon's interlocutors put it, 'a normal life is being able to come home after a hard day of work, grab a beer and sit in front of the television'.³¹² All these arguments on what 'normal' should be can be linked to Maslow's hierarchy of needs³¹³. It represents a five-tier model with psychological needs such as food, water and rest, and safety needs as the most basic. The model can be divided into two categories of needs: deficiency (first four levels) and growth needs (the top level), but the order of needs might be flexible 'based on external circumstances or individual differences'.³¹⁴

Image 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs³¹⁵



³⁰⁹ Monika Palmberger, 'Ruptured pasts and captured futures: Life narratives in postwar Mostar', *Focaal, Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 66, 2013, 14-24.

³¹⁰ Katarzyna Waniek, 'Reversed "Betrayal Funnel". A Case of a Children's Home Inmate Who Suffers from Being Disloyal to Her Alcoholic Family', *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 10 (1), 2014, 60-78.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³¹² Jarret Zigon, 'Hope dies last, Two aspects of hope in contemporary Moscow', *Anthropological Theory*, Vol. 9, Issue 3, 2009, 253-271

³¹³ Saul McLeod, 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs', *Simply Psychology*, 20 March 2020, <<https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>> [accessed 25 April 2020].

Maslow's model can be divided into two categories of needs: deficiency (first four levels) and growth needs (the top level), but the order of needs might be flexible 'based on external circumstances or individual differences'.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

On the other hand, the lack of ‘normal life’ is tied with the greater socio-economic situation.³¹⁶ As a result, another anthropologist Merima Šehagić defined a sense of normality as ‘a stable political and economic present and future’ where the first and foremost needs are related to material and social security³¹⁷. This normality in post-conflict societies can be disturbed by memories from the war³¹⁸ which was also found in studies on Holocaust survivors where ‘traumatic memories continue to interfere with attempts at normalcy’.³¹⁹

Research on the Holocaust revealed some other aspects of ‘normalisation’ relevant to this thesis. For example, some Holocaust survivors spoke of intense pressure for normalisation after the war. They rebuilt their lives ‘by picking up from the only place that they knew – where they had “left off” before the war” – and tried to put their traumatic experiences behind them while immersing themselves in daily routines, ‘leaving them no time to reflect on their traumatic experiences’.³²⁰ This was further reinforced when ‘society attempted to minimise the horror that Holocaust survivors endured’; hence, ‘we were the people that didn’t exist’ and ‘we were told not to speak about our past, we should forget about it’.³²¹ Being deprived of social support and even shunned in some communities resulted with creating ‘apparent normality’.³²² As I show in empirical chapters, the veterans who participated in this research spoke of similar experiences starting from having a feeling that they suddenly need to fit in, that nobody cares what they think, and trying to live normal lives where many still find a sanctuary among other veterans, often the only company willing to discuss the past, memories and feelings. In both cases, having social support emerged as an important element to establishing ‘normal life’ after facing extreme suffering and violence.

Furthermore, the role of family also emerged in my research data as it was the family where the veterans, who felt shunned from the rest of society, often found support. Similarly to other scholars, anthropologist Marita Eastmond focused on the importance of family when she linked the notion of ‘normal life’ to notions of family welfare and building materially and socially secure bases of welfare and status.³²³ Looking back at the experiences of the Holocaust survivors and normalisation of their lives after the Second World War, a group of

³¹⁶ Zigon, ‘Hope dies last, Two aspects of hope in contemporary Moscow’, p. 263.

³¹⁷ Merima Šehagić, ‘How a collective trauma influences ethno-religious relations of adolescents in present-day Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina’, *Social Inclusion*, Vol. 4, Issue 2, 2016, 133-143.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 139

³¹⁹ Carl F. Auerbach, Shoshana Mirvis et al., ‘Structural dissociation and its resolution among Holocaust survivors: A qualitative research study’, *Journal of trauma & dissociation*, 10 (4), 2009, 385-404.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² *Ibid.*, p. 401

³²³ Marita Eastmond, ‘Introduction: Reconciliation, reconstruction, and everyday life in war-torn societies’, *Focaal, Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, Issue 57, 2010, 3-16.

researchers analysed intergenerational relationships and an impact of trauma on their family ties. They emphasise that ‘although most survivors and their descendents lead normal lives, specific vulnerabilities may appear under adverse situations and are interwoven in the family dynamics’.³²⁴ As a result of massive trauma, ‘the lifetime of one generation is not sufficient to bridge between the world of trauma and the world of normal life’, they conclude.³²⁵ These data indicate that supporting the veterans (or war survivors in general) has to address their broader social base, as Dudouet, Giessmann and Planta highlighted.³²⁶

In Jansen’s research, as well as other studies quoted earlier, references to ‘normal life’ rarely addressed ideology or identity³²⁷ which is another significant difference in this thesis where identity emerges as one of important topics. It is exactly ideology and identity that also emerged in other research. The famous psychologist Bruno Bettelheim described the time when he was in a concentration camp during the Second World War and when, in order to save his sanity, he decided to immerse himself in a study as a participant. He found out that communist prisoners and religious Jews, whose ideologies helped them explain the reason for their suffering, were better able to cope with the unbearable conditions in the camp. This way they managed to save their identity; hence, encouraging Bettelheim to conclude that political or religious beliefs gave meaning to life in a meaningless situation.³²⁸ Laufer explains this by the Terror Management Theory which indicates that, in order to overcome anxiety, people develop cultural mechanisms, such as ideology and religion, which enable them to feel part of something greater than themselves and something that will last after they are no longer alive.³²⁹ However, this does not mean that people did not change due to enormous suffering and that their identity, although mostly preserved, was indeed intact. This was explained by another Holocaust survivor Mado who recalled her companions arguing in the camps that ‘if they returned, everything would be different’.³³⁰ However, according to Mado, they were wrong because everything was the same. ‘It is within us that nothing is the same’, she discovered. This is not a loss of identity, but ‘a shift in identity, a painfully honest confession

³²⁴ Dov Shmotkin, Amit Shrira et al., ‘Resilience and Vulnerability Among Aging Holocaust Survivors and Their Families: An Intergenerational Overview’, *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, Vol. 9, Issue 1, 2011, 7-21.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³²⁶ Dudouet, Giessmann and Planta, ‘Deficits and blind spots in existing approaches to post-war security promotion’, p. 34.

³²⁷ Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime*, p. 41.

³²⁸ Avital Laufer, ‘Psychological Growth in the Aftermath of Terrorist Acts’, *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics & Culture*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2003, 30-36.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³³⁰ Lawrence L. Langer, ‘Pursuit of death in Holocaust narrative’, *Partisan Review*, Vol. 68, Issue 3, 2001, 379-395.

that the self has been split not by some psychotic condition but by the twin realities that inhabit her spirit'.³³¹ 'People believe memories grow vague', she continues, 'are erased by time, since nothing endures against the passage of time. That's the difference: time does not pass over me, over us. It doesn't erase anything, doesn't undo it. I'm not alive. I died in Auschwitz but no one knows it'.³³² As I show throughout this thesis, these elements of 'normal life' that give special meaning to one's survival and existence are highly valued among the Croatian Army veterans who participated in this research whether this was about their identity, religious beliefs linked to forgiveness and 'inner peace' or an idea of home which also includes a spiritual realm. As many of them revealed in their answers, the horrors of war did leave a trace on their souls and in one way or another, they mostly returned home somehow different with a Croatian defender identity emerging as one of the most important layers of their identities.

In my exploration of 'normal life' I also partially relied on other research fields and theories to think through what the elements of a good life might be. For example, 'normal life' of good quality emerges as a strong theme in health studies³³³, especially disability studies where 'various discourses of normality reign'³³⁴. This focus on normality is not necessarily related only to poorer health which decreases the quality of life, provokes 'frustration with the limitations imposed' by illness³³⁵ and often results in fear that can dominate one's life and make normalisation after recovery even more difficult³³⁶. This is also related to significant changes to life routine, and one's abilities and independence whether this is due to physical or mental health. For example, the participants in the study on HIV-positive patients in India considered the infection as 'an unwelcome disruption to their "normal lives" and therefore something they were not comfortable with and tried to skirt' in order to avoid stigma and discrimination.³³⁷ While focusing on people with disabilities, some scholars speak of several elements of adult 'normal life': self-motivation, engagement with a community, daily activity, wise decision-making, and bodily health. 'These metrics of adulthood start to

³³¹ Langer, 'Pursuit of death in Holocaust narrative', p. 384.

³³² Ibid., p. 384

³³³ Kenneth F. Baker, John D Isaacs and Ben Thompson, 'Living a normal life': a qualitative study of patients' views of medication withdrawal in rheumatoid arthritis', *BMC Rheumatology* 3, 24, 2019, 1-8.

³³⁴ Masae Kato and Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner, 'Motivations for seeking experimental treatment in Japan', *BioSocieties*, Vol. 13, 1, 2017, 255-275.

³³⁵ Miriam Stewart, Jeffrey R. Masuda et al., "'I want to meet other kids like me": Support needs of children with asthma and allergies', *Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing*, Vol. 34, Issue 2, 2011, 62-78.

³³⁶ Tone Seppola-Edvardsen and Mette Bech Risor, 'Ignoring symptoms, The process of normalising sensory experiences after cancer', *Anthropology in Action*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2017, 34-40.

³³⁷ Mathew Sunil George and Helen Lambert, "'I am doing fine only because I have not told anyone": the necessity of concealment in the lives of people living with HIV in India', *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, Vol. 17, Issue 8, 2015, 933-946.

contrast to realities' of one's disability, 'which is defined by the failure to achieve adult milestones like self-care, independent living, and gainful employment'.³³⁸ In this context, 'normalisation' of life happens through a pursuit of autonomy through goals and taking ownerships of one's actions with focusing on the centrality of work and being productive in defining an active adult life.³³⁹ Looking at the quality of life as defined by schizophrenic patients, a group of sociologists and psychiatrists summarised their findings highlighting some key elements that such a life should include: work, health, leisure activities, social relationships, family, financial stability and adequate accommodation.³⁴⁰ Similar data were collected in another study on attitudes towards mental health issues where respondents suggested that 'normal life' means 'being able to do everyday things, like going to the grocery store, paying bills, things that you have to do to live'.³⁴¹

As I show in empirical chapters while keeping in mind that many veterans suffer from poorer health ranging from PTSD to mobility impairments, all these elements also emerged in this thesis. However, what was rarely included in patients' answers were some critical elements of 'normal life' for participants in my research, such as satisfaction, happiness, peace of mind (or 'inner peace'), lack of anxieties and stress, and wellbeing in general.³⁴² Furthermore, as I stated in the introduction of this thesis, 'normal life' for the participants in this research takes place within 'home' which consists of multiple layers, and, hence, represents a particularly complex idea. A similar thought emerged in the previously cited health study which focused on a residential facility for people with physical and intellectual impairments. Their desire for 'normal life' was also linked to 'home' because 'living in a normal home environment was central to the experience of normality'.³⁴³ In this context, 'home was both a physical place and a set of relationships' and 'having a home meant belonging somewhere, being part of something, and having ownership of a physical space'.³⁴⁴ Here, a residential facility started feeling like home when the residents became more engaged in maintaining it, and having responsibility and authority over it. This opportunity to be

³³⁸ Adrianna Bagnall Munson, 'Framing life as work: Navigating dependence and autonomy in independent living', *Qualitative Sociology*, 43, 2020, 89-109.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103, 107.

³⁴⁰ Matthias C. Angermeyer, Anita Holzinger et al., 'Quality of life – as defined by schizophrenic patients and psychiatrists', *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2001, 34-42.

³⁴¹ 'Attitudes toward mental illness – 35 states, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico', *MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 2007, p. 619. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5920a3.htm> [accessed 18 August 2021].

³⁴² Angermeyer, Holzinger et al., 'Quality of life – as defined by schizophrenic patients and psychiatrists', p. 36.

³⁴³ Graham, Sinnott et al., 'A more "normal" life: Residents', family, staff, and managers' experience of active support at a residential facility for people with physical and intellectual impairments', p. 260.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

authentic and to pursue their idea of what home is enabled them to create a home in the place which did not feel like one. Hence, an idea of home also emerges not only essential to ‘normal life’ but also another quest which is rooted in one’s expectations, desires and previous experiences.

As shown earlier with the example of the Holocaust survivors, it is also important to understand how other people understand a ‘normal life’ of good quality when they think of those in need. Although the psychiatrists in the previously cited study on schizophrenic patients focused on health care, medications and mental well-being, they also included social relationships, family, and work as important elements of a good quality life. However, they also rarely spoke of some elements of ‘normal life’ that were important to participants in my research such as ‘normal life’ in general, leisure activities, emotional balance (which could be linked to ‘inner peace’) and joy of life (or happiness).³⁴⁵ The authors of the study concluded that ‘patients ignore most of the aspects of quality of life which are directly related to the consequences or the treatment of schizophrenia, while the psychiatrists exclude central aspects of normal human life’³⁴⁶; hence, further demonstrating fluidity of ‘normal’ that depends on one’s perspective, circumstances and expectations.

Although the understanding of ‘normal life’, including the one of good quality, can indeed be extremely subjective, there is a model that tries to categorise various elements relevant to different people. In the 1980s, the capability approach had been developed by Amartya Kumar Sen and Martha Nussbaum, co-authors of *The Quality of Life* (1993) in which they addressed the issues of defining and measuring the quality of life. Nussbaum’s ten distinct Central Human Functional Capabilities have been proposed as being central to human rights debates and they include Life³⁴⁷; Bodily Health³⁴⁸; Bodily Integrity³⁴⁹; Senses, Imagination, and Thought³⁵⁰; Emotions³⁵¹; Practical Reason³⁵²; Affiliation³⁵³; Other

³⁴⁵ Angermeyer, Holzinger et al., ‘Quality of life – as defined by schizophrenic patients and psychiatrists’ p. 37.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 39

³⁴⁷ Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length. ‘Nussbaum’s formulation’. Available at <http://www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~delittle/nussbaum.htm> [accessed 13 January 2020]. Originally published in: Martha Nussbaum, Amartya Sen, *The quality of life*, 1993.

³⁴⁸ Being able to have good health, adequate nutrition, adequate shelter, opportunities for sexual satisfaction and choice in reproduction, and mobility. Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Being able to avoid unnecessary and non-beneficial pain and to have pleasurable experiences. Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Being able to use the senses, imagine, think, and reason; and to have the educational opportunities necessary to realize these capacities. Ibid.

³⁵¹ Being able to have attachments to things and persons outside ourselves. Ibid.

³⁵² Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s own life. Ibid.

³⁵³ Being able to live for and to others, to recognise and show concern for other human beings. Ibid.

Species³⁵⁴; Play³⁵⁵; and Control Over One's Environment^{356,357}. Nussbaum claimed that 'a life that lacks any one of these capabilities, no matter what else it has, will fall short of being a good human life'.³⁵⁸ Mousavi, Dharamsi, Forwell and Dean argued that life capability as the first and most fundamental one refers to a person having a quality life of normal duration.³⁵⁹ What exactly 'normal duration' should be depend on countries, but for the participants in this research that would be 54,3 years³⁶⁰ compared to 73 years of the average lifespan in Croatia³⁶¹. This means that at the time when I conducted this research, the majority of participants were only slightly younger or slightly older than their anticipated lifespan. In the empirical chapters, I explore what 'normal life' should be and how participants' expectations of 'normal life' actually speak of its quality and a life which is more than just survival, a life in which one can live comfortably while growing personally and professionally. Spierre Clark and Seager stated that although Maslow's and Nussbaum's approaches are 'fundamentally different, both conceptions of human well-being recognise the multi-dimensional nature of what most people value in life' and they can be integrated 'by conceptualising Nussbaum's list of capabilities as preconditions that are required to fulfil needs on Maslow's hierarchy'³⁶², as shown below.

³⁵⁴ Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals and the world of nature. Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities. Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Being able to live one's own life and no one else's; enjoying freedom of association and freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Tahmineh Mousavi, Shafik Dharamsi, Susan Forwell and Elizabeth Dean, 'Occupational Therapists' Views of Nussbaum's Life Capability: An Exploratory Study', *OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health*, Vol. 35 (4), 2015, 239-249.

³⁵⁸ 'Nussbaum's formulation'. Available at <http://www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~delittle/nussbaum.htm> [accessed 13 January 2020]. Originally published in: Martha Nussbaum, Amartya Sen, *The quality of life*, 1993.

³⁵⁹ Mousavi, Dharamsi et al., 'Occupational Therapists' Views of Nussbaum's Life Capability: An Exploratory Study', p. 239.

³⁶⁰ S.S./Hina, 'Medved otkrio niz podataka o braniteljima; njihova prosječna dob je 54,3 godine', *Tportal.hr*, 19 September 2019, <<https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/medved-otkrio-niz-podataka-o-braniteljima-njihova-prosjecna-dob-je-54-3-godine-20190919>> [accessed 18 November 2019].

³⁶¹ A.M., 'Komar: prosječni životni vijek civila u Hrvatskoj je 73 godine, a većina branitelja umire u dobi od 51 godine', *Narod.hr*, 3 June 2016, <<https://narod.hr/clanak/komar-prosjecni-zivotni-vijek-civila-u-hrvatskoj-je-73-godine-a-vecina-branitelja-umire-u-dobi-od-51-godine>> [accessed 18 November 2019].

³⁶² Susan Spierre Clark and Thomas P. Seager, 'A Human-Centred Approach to the Prioritization of Critical Infrastructure Resilience', Centre for Infrastructure Protection and Homeland Security, George Mason University, published on 13 July 2017. Available at <https://cip.gmu.edu/2017/07/13/human-centered-approach-prioritization-critical-infrastructure-resilience/> [accessed 18 August 2021].

Image 2: Nussbaum’s central capabilities (centre) and supporting critical infrastructures (left) mapped onto Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (right)³⁶³



Given they approached the topic from the perspective of supporting critical infrastructures; they argued that ‘during the crisis, it is the capabilities and human needs at the base of the pyramid that must be prioritised before those at higher tiers because they are essential for survival’.³⁶⁴ As stated earlier, Bar-Tal emphasised safety as a starting point for reconciliation³⁶⁵, and, I show in the empirical chapters, it also emerged as a basis of ‘normal life’ by having enough supplies to survive and being able to live without violence. Compared to Maslow’s pyramid, ‘normal life’ appears to develop in a similar way, starting from the basic needs that have to be satisfied before an individual can attempt to achieve ‘normal life’ where Mac Ginty’s ‘everyday peace’ may remain insincere with regards to the ‘other’, but with more substance with regards to oneself. In the context of my thesis, this emerged as inner peace; thus, it is important to analyse how ex-combatants make sense of it while addressing its different aspects and explain different understandings of what this concept represents. Although I partially relied on Maslow, Nussbaum, Jansen and other scholars cited earlier as a starting point when thinking about ‘normal life’, the idea of inner peace opened to a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be human since living ‘normally’ is not about the list of external or physical conditions that need to be met, but a very delicate and dynamic

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, pp. 378, 390.

mind-set. A similar approach emerged in another academic work tackling ageing and dementia where ‘normalising’ life is linked to creating ‘a whole wellbeing model’.³⁶⁶

On a practical level, I demonstrate this in the empirical chapters using, for example, employment prospects. For some, a job guarantees survival, while for others it can be about feeling accomplished and useful, growing personally or being creative. Therefore, the participants in this research placed employment on different levels of Maslow’s pyramid revealing the fluidity of ‘normal’ and going beyond Maslow’s and Nussbaum’s models into a wider spectrum of ‘normal’ and its complexities. If a difference between the ‘old’ and ‘new normal’ is also taken into account, then ‘there is a sense in which establishing a “new normal” enabled a different sense of wellbeing and quality of life’; thus, emphasising a temporal distance from the ‘was’ when normality is redefined due to changed circumstances.³⁶⁷

Regardless of the definition of ‘normal life’, it is important to understand what exactly people in post-conflict societies are dealing with. Slim noted core areas of agony such as loss, indignity, feelings marked by critical incidents, uncertainty, fear and survival.³⁶⁸ The last phase is particularly challenging because it never ends. Social opportunities, poverty, employment prospects, crime and safety, including landmines, are some of the problems that people often have to face on the long road towards a ‘normal life’. As it will be analysed at a later stage, when asked about their priorities after leaving the Army, Croatian veterans mostly pointed out various components of ‘normal life’, such as personal relationships, friends, work and health. On the other hand, the majority was not interested in peace-building initiatives and reconciliation. Therefore, the concepts relevant to this field of study are largely excluded from ‘normal life’ although some key points of ‘normal life’ are closely related to peace-building themes. Also, if emotions are cultural constructs, as some scholars argue³⁶⁹, and if cultural factors play an important role in shaping the response to war and stress as well as attempting its subsequent healing³⁷⁰, then our definition of ‘normal’ can be partially influenced by our environment which even further emphasises the significance of ‘local’ in peace-building. How do we go back to our ‘normal mode’ and ‘normal lives’ is particularly important in the

³⁶⁶ Charlotte L. Clarke, Sarah E. Keyes et al., ‘I just want to get on with my life’: a mixed-methods study of active management of quality of living with dementia’, *Ageing & Society*, 38, 2018, 378-402.

³⁶⁷ Clarke, Keyes et al., ‘I just want to get on with my life’: a mixed-methods study of active management of quality of living with dementia’, p. 391, 394.

³⁶⁸ Hugo Slim, *Killing Civilians, Method, Madness and Morality in War* (London: Hurst & Company, 2007), pp. 109-115.

³⁶⁹ Thomas Gregory and Linda Åhäll, ‘Introduction’, *Emotions, Politics and War* (London – New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), ed. by Thomas Gregory and Linda Åhäll, p. 2.

³⁷⁰ Stanley Krippner and Teresa M. McIntyre, ‘Overview: In the Wake of War’, *The Psychological Impact of War Trauma on Civilians*, (Westport– London: Praeger, 2003), ed. by Stanley Krippner and Teresa M. McIntyre, p. 4.

case of those who have been exposed to long-term violence and who experience difficulties adjusting to ‘new’ circumstances which could result in addictions, domestic abuse and mental health problems. Krippner and McIntyre argued that irreparable material and kin losses, as well as the loss of everyday routines, values, and important rituals, render collective healing more difficult.³⁷¹

Drawing on Jansen’s conclusions about ‘normal life’, Maslow’s hierarchy, Nussbaum’s framework and specific needs of army veterans, this research focuses on socio-psychological processes that lead to moving on from ‘negative peace’ to ‘positive peace’ using the re-building ‘normal life’ as a focal point. Although the uniqueness of the socio-psychological perspective has been recognised by several authors, other central questions emerging from Jansen’s observations influence this project relating to the meaning of ‘normal life’ for different people and how different ways of understanding this concept impact peace-building issues such as past, truth and justice. This includes the relationship with the former enemy discussed in the next subchapter.

2.3. FACING THE ‘OTHER’: ‘NORMAL LIFE’ RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RECONCILIATION AND CO-EXISTENCE

As discussed in the previous subchapters, who peace is constructed for and what is to be included in the parameters of ‘normal life’, are crucial questions. If ‘ordinary people’ on the local level are those who are acutely affected by violence, it can be assumed that they should benefit from peace, including the ‘normalisation’ of their lives. This begs the question of what this peace should be and what are its final goals, since the expectations of ‘ordinary people’ could be different from those of top level actors; thus, challenging the assumptions of liberal peace-building. Peace agreements are usually signed by top level leaders and they do not necessarily reflect the opinion of all sides in the conflict.³⁷² It takes far more than ‘a political pact and good intentions to root out the pathologies of war and build a healthy society’.³⁷³ Decades of apparent peace are no guarantee that conflict is over, and problems that were not resolved in a previous conflict may escalate. This was the case in the former Yugoslavia where the idea of brotherhood and unity appeared to be the basis of the entire society, but the country’s disintegration started with the death of Yugoslav president Josip

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁷² The consequences of this were discussed in Atashi’s paper ‘Challenges to conflict transformation from the streets’.

³⁷³ Quoted in: Hauss, *International Conflict Resolution*, p. 103. Originally published in: John Lloyd, ‘Ireland’s uncertain peace’, *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 1999), 109-23. Also: John Lloyd, ‘The Troubles that won’t go away’, *The New York Times Magazine*, 12 December 1999, 89-93.

Broz Tito in 1980 and reached its peak with ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina. A Bosnian Croat described Tito's era stating 'Yes, we lived in peace and harmony...because every hundred metres there was a policeman to make sure we loved one another'³⁷⁴. This statement cannot be generalised, but it indicates some pre-existing divisions and portrays peaceful living in a 'negative' peace. Moving towards a 'positive peace' should address these issues leading to healthier relationships and, consequently, a calmer 'normal' where the former enemy would no longer be the enemy.

Like many other authors, Lederach concentrated on reconciliation as a central component when dealing with contemporary conflict and reconstructing divided societies, although he acknowledged creating a catalyst for reconciliation and then sustaining it in divided societies as a fundamental question.³⁷⁵ Reconciliation is a process of relationship building based on four elements: truth, requiring open revelation of the past and dealing with it; mercy, requiring acceptance, forgiveness, compassion and healing; justice, requiring restitution, compensation and social restructuring; and peace, including cooperation, harmony, respect and security.³⁷⁶ Although the literature extensively discusses reconciliation, any agreement on a precise definition of the concept and the best way to achieve it has yet to be reached. Unlike Lederach, Krüger defines it as a process aiming towards an improved, morally more accountable relationship instead of 'rebuilding' the same relationship.³⁷⁷ Schaap rejected the idea of reconciliation based on a shared moral account of the nature of past wrongs.³⁷⁸ Instead, he suggested political reconciliation to be initiated by the invocation of a 'we' as the basis of a new political order in the present instead of reconciliation beginning with the recollection of a prior state of harmony, whether ideal or real.³⁷⁹ Furthermore, Nadler and Liviatan distinguish between socio-emotional reconciliation, which aims to remove socio-emotional barriers ('apology-forgiveness cycle'), and trust-building reconciliation, which aims to replace distrust with trust, disregarding the past and to promote intergroup

³⁷⁴ Miles Hewstone, Nicole Tausch, Alberto Voci, Jared Kenworthy, Joanne Hughes and Ed Cairns, 'Why Neighbors Kill, Prior Intergroup Contact and Killing of Ethnic Outgroup Neighbors', *Explaining the Breakdown of Ethnic Relations, Why Neighbors Kill* (Malden – Oxford – Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), ed. by Victoria M. Esses and Richard A. Vernon, p. 72.

³⁷⁵ Lederach, *Building Peace*, p. 25.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁷⁷ Christa Krüger, 'Spiral of growth: a social psychiatric perspective on conflict resolution, reconciliation, and relationship development', *Trauma, truth and reconciliation, Healing damaged relationships*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), ed. by Nancy Nyquist Potter, p. 34.

³⁷⁸ Andrew Schaap, *The time of reconciliation and the space of politics*, Paper for the Second Conference on Law, Time and Reconciliation, University of Tilburg, 22-23 May 2003, p. 1, <<http://www.cappe.edu.au/docs/working-papers/Schapp1.pdf>> [15 November 2019].

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

cooperation in the present.³⁸⁰ Regardless of how we define it, Bar-Tal highlighted that reconciliation is a complex process that involves changes of motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions by the majority of society members, and therefore is by nature gradual, reciprocal and voluntary³⁸¹; thus, it emerges as a subjective and dynamic process that comes in different shades just like ‘normal’, consequently creating a spectrum.

Reconciliation is not linear; hence its starting point varies. Huyse suggested three main stages necessary for lasting reconciliation. First, fear must be replaced by ‘non-violent coexistence between the antagonist individuals and groups’.³⁸² Second, when fear no longer rules, ‘coexistence evolves towards relations of trust’, whereby victims and offender can grow gradually confident in dealing with each other.³⁸³ This often happens in an informal context of everyday life and in the setting which may not be accessible to outsiders. Third, reconciliation must be supported by democratic values that ensure human rights, economic justice and the honouring of political commitments.³⁸⁴ Bar-Tal argued reconciliation is an informal process that does not have a formal beginning or ending, although it needs to start with a sense of security as a basic need and in some cases it may stop without its full completion.³⁸⁵ Furthermore, some scholars concluded that the scope of reconciliation, and the different ways by which it can be achieved, vary greatly from culture to culture.³⁸⁶ Ryan highlighted that although the main elements of reconciliation are well known (investigation, recognition of victims, closure, restitution, forgiveness and amnesty) the appropriate balance of these elements is unclear.³⁸⁷ For example, Porter concluded that for some ‘the search for truth and justice may be more immediate than living alongside one’s former enemies’ because ‘it is those who have been harmed who can set the boundaries of forgiveness’.³⁸⁸ On the other hand, Atashi highlighted that one of the challenges is the assumption that in the aftermath of conflict, all individuals are equally interested in dealing with the past and truth seeking,

³⁸⁰ The major difference between these two approaches is in their goals: socio-emotional reconciliation aims to achieve relative peace and harmony and a possible integration of rival groups into a unified social entity, while trust-building reconciliation only aims to produce enough trust to enable co-existence in a conflict-free environment where two adversaries agree to the goal of separate co-existence.

Arie Nadler and Ido Liviatan, ‘Intergroup Reconciliation Process in Israel: Theoretical Analysis and Empirical Findings’, *Collective Guilt, International Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ed. by Nyla R. Branscombe and Bertjan Doosje, pp. 218-219.

³⁸¹ Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, p. 376.

³⁸² Quoted in: Porter, *Peacebuilding*, pp. 157-158. Originally published in: Luc Huyse, ‘The Process of Reconciliation’, *Reconciliation after violent conflict, A Handbook*, (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2003), ed. by David Bloomfield, Teresa Barnes and Luc Huyse, pp. 19-33.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, pp. 378, 390.

³⁸⁶ Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 247.

³⁸⁷ Ryan, *The Transformation of Violent Intercommunal Conflict*, pp. 82-83.

³⁸⁸ Porter, *Peacebuilding*, p. 183.

without taking into account that specific social conditions may actually threaten post-conflict stability.³⁸⁹

Forgiveness has found its place in the majority of reconciliation definitions which raised the issue of ‘secularity’. Hamber and Kelly noticed that reconciliation has ‘struggled to shake off its religious connotations’.³⁹⁰ However, the ‘spirituality’ of reconciliation has proven valuable occasionally. For example, in Mozambique, there seems to have been almost a spontaneous reconciliation at the grassroots level and people were re-humanised with support of traditional healers.³⁹¹ This is an important element to remember when discussing peace-building from below. As Mac Ginty pointed out, local is likely to contain elements of religious and other practices that are not terribly obvious to outsiders and may even make them uncomfortable.³⁹² This is significant in Croatia, a predominantly Catholic country, where ‘home’ which was discussed in the introduction of this thesis is a space where ‘normal’ takes place and also includes a spiritual element, as shown earlier.

The majority of these issues make reconciliation an intensely personal process which is why Thiessen argued that ‘only local actors themselves can reconcile with one another’.³⁹³ Kriesberg agrees when he says that the degree of reconciliation tends to differ at the individual and collective levels among different groups on each side, and it is never fully realised for all at all times.³⁹⁴ Thus, reconciliation happens in the informal context of everyday life in different shades, just like attempts to achieve ‘normal life’. These are both subjective and dynamic concepts. As such, some authors, for example Hayner, distinguish

³⁸⁹ Atashi, ‘Challenges to conflict transformation from the streets’, pp. 55-56.

³⁹⁰ Brandon Hamber and Gráinne Kelly, *A Place for Reconciliation: Conflict and Locality in Northern Ireland*, Democratic Dialogue, No. 18 (2005), p. 19, <<http://uir.ulster.ac.uk/20768/2/ddreport18.pdf>> [20 January 2020].

³⁹¹ Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable truths, Transitional justice and the challenge of truth commissions* (New York – London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 197-204. Ryan, *The Transformation of Violent Intercommunal Conflict*, p. 91. Ryan also argued that in the west, where society has fragmented and a sense of community has eroded, therapy has offered an outlet for individuals who feel themselves to be damaged. However, in the parts of the world where communities remain strong we should not ignore indigenous rituals and practices, which very often draw on religion beliefs. Ryan, *The Transformation of Violent Intercommunal Conflict*, p. 98. Wessells and Monteiro also pointed out that western trained healers might not have understanding or belief in other systems and might instead try to promote their own models that will not be accepted by indigenous culture. Michael Wessells and Carlinda Monterio, ‘Psychosocial Interventions and Post-War Reconstruction in Angola: Interweaving Western and Traditional Approaches’, *Peace, Conflict and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21st Century* (Upper Saddle River: Winter, Prentice-Hall, 2001), ed. by D.J. Christie, R.V. Wagner and DD. Winter, pp. 262-275.

³⁹² Mac Ginty, ‘What do we mean by “local”?’’, p. 206.

³⁹³ Gunnar Theissen, ‘Supporting Justice, Co-existence and Reconciliation after Armed Conflict: Strategies for Dealing with the Past’, *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation* (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2004), <http://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/theissen_handbook.pdf> [17 November 2019].

³⁹⁴ Louis Kriesberg, ‘Waging conflicts constructively’, *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (London – New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), ed. by Dennis J.D. Sandole, Sean Byrne, Ingrid Sandole-Staroste and Jessica Senehi, p. 166.

between individual reconciliation and national or political reconciliation.³⁹⁵ However, as the Croatian example will show, political reconciliation may not mean much at the local level, and in some cases, it can cause more tensions as attempts on the national level can become spoilers on the individual level as a threat to ‘normal life’.

This begs a new question. What does ‘reconciliation’ actually mean to different people, particularly in societies where the social distance between conflicting groups has been enormous and ‘normal’ for generations, and how desirable is it? Reflecting on questions similar to those posed in the first paragraph of this subchapter, Jansen has proffered one of his own: if reconciliation is the answer, are we asking the right questions?³⁹⁶ He critically examined liberal assumptions that reconciliation is beneficial for all and drew attention to negative feedback effects that efforts to foster reconciliation may entail.³⁹⁷ He also noted that in English, the very term reconciliation indicates a restorative movement, a reconstruction of a past situation, while the term *pomirenje* in Bosnian (or *pomirba* in Croatian) evokes peaceful acceptance rather than mobilization or action³⁹⁸; thus, emphasising the importance of local understanding of reconciliation. If reconciliation is the answer and the goal, then how can it be achieved if different societies understand it differently? This means that the question is whether reconciliation is desired or is it actually ‘normal life’ with co-existence that people pursue. What also matters is whether reconciliation is beneficial and how people in a specific setting understand it.

Jansen’s findings were supported by other research projects. One study³⁹⁹ concluded that approximately 45 per cent of Croatian citizens refuse to forgive, but they do accept co-existence as a lower level of tolerance, which is described by Dragutin Babić, as an ‘existential necessity’.⁴⁰⁰ In a study on Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, Halpern and Weinstein concluded there was no ‘a single example of what we could term empathy’ which led the researchers to ask whether people should be satisfied with co-existence, often in the

³⁹⁵ Hayner, *Unspeakable truths*, p. 183.

³⁹⁶ Jansen, ‘If Reconciliation Is the Answer, Are We Asking the Right Questions?’, 229-243.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 236. This definition is very similar to the first dimension of reconciliation described by Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall as ‘accepting the status quo and ending violence’. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 247.

³⁹⁹ Milas, Rimac and Karajić, ‘Willingness to Forgive and Be Reconciled after the Croatian War of Independence in Croatia’, 1151-1173.

⁴⁰⁰ Dragutin Babić, ‘The Coexistence of Croats and Serbs in the pre-war and post-war period – An implicate critique of the war in Croatia as an ethnic conflict’, *Migracijske i etničke teme*, Vol. 20 (2004), No. 2-3, 187-208.

shadow of mistrust, resentment and even hatred.⁴⁰¹ Addressing this issue in his interview for the Croatian newspapers *Jutarnji list*, Velibor Bobo Jelčić, a movie director born in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, said: ‘Why are we constantly complaining about a divided society? What’s wrong with that? Isn’t that also a democratic choice? My town agreed to this division and its ‘cemented’ war outcome’⁴⁰². After all, that kind of living is one of the shades of ‘normal’ where violence is absent, but people have no wish to develop their relationships with the ‘other’ as they prefer having their ‘normal’ in which they make their own choices of what is relevant or not, including personal relationships.

Not only does the word ‘reconciliation’ have different meanings in different languages and in some cultures ‘co-existence’ could be preferred, but in some cases reconciliation carries a negative connotation. McEvoy, McEvoy and McConnachie argued that much of what passed for reconciliation work in Northern Ireland was largely irrelevant to addressing core causes of the conflict.⁴⁰³ In a 2005 interview, an Irish Republican Army activist admitted no interest in reconciliation because ‘it is a term that has been so used and abused; it’s a dirty word’⁴⁰⁴. This Irish example is not unique. Discussing peace education that started in Zenica in 1997, Belloni and Hemmer highlighted that most social cohesion activities were disguised as generally recreational, educational, or practical initiatives, especially in the early post-war years, because ‘if you call it reconciliation, they will not come’.⁴⁰⁵ Researchers warned that, this ethnicity-blind approach ‘risks ignoring the very real need for securing ethnic expression, as well as the need to discuss the past sources of ethnic violence’, although it removed the social pressure surrounding reconciliation with the ‘enemy’ and facilitated viewing other participants as individuals.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰¹ Quoted in: Porter, *Peacebuilding*, pp. 180-181. Originally published in: Jodi Halpern and Harvey M. Weinstein, ‘Rehumanizing the Other: Empathy and Reconciliation’, *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 26 (2004), No. 3, 561-583.

⁴⁰² Mirjana Dugandžija, ‘Ispovijest Bobe Jelčića: Podijeljeno društvo? Pa što nedostaje podijeljenom društvu?’, *Jutarnji list*, 10 July 2016, <<http://www.jutarnji.hr/kultura/kazaliste/ispovijest-bobe-jelcica-podijeljeno-drustvo-pa-sto-nedostaje-podijeljenom-drustvu/4513862/>> [15 October 2019].

⁴⁰³ Lesley McEvoy, Kieran McEvoy and Kristen McConnachie, ‘Reconciliation as a dirty word: Conflict, community relations and education in Northern Ireland’, *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 60 (Fall/Winter 2006), No. 1, p. 93.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁴⁰⁵ Robert Belloni and Bruce Hemmer, ‘Bosnia-Herzegovina: Civil Society in a Semiprotectorate’, *Civil Society & Peacebuilding, A Critical Assessment* (Boulder – London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), ed. by Thania Paffenholz, p. 138. Jansen found that many people in Bosnia-Herzegovina treated inter-national reconciliation first of all as a Western-imposed idea. Moreover, he pointed out that the word politics (*politika*) has a very bad reputation in the region which has serious implications for reconciliation efforts and other forms of transformatory action. Jansen, ‘If Reconciliation Is the Answer, Are We Asking the Right Questions?’, pp. 230, 233, 238.

⁴⁰⁶ Belloni and Hemmer, ‘Bosnia-Herzegovina: Civil Society in a Semiprotectorate’, p. 146.

This ‘dirtiness’ of reconciliation emerged in my research when participants reacted negatively to reconciliation questions; one of them replied: ‘Blanka, my love, again you with your reconciliation’⁴⁰⁷. For many, co-existence is good enough just like Babić, Halpern and Weinstein suggested, and this includes ‘negative peace’ which was also what Jelačić described. As Sandole highlighted⁴⁰⁸, this is what most people outside the field mean even today when they discuss or think of ‘peace’ as some of my participants who concluded that ‘war ended and that’s peace’⁴⁰⁹. However, while ‘negative’ peace might be a necessary condition for ‘positive peace’, Sandole and other scholars argue it tends not to be an optimal condition because it stops short of dealing with the underlying, deep-rooted causes and conditions of the conflict which might escalate toward violence⁴¹⁰ instead of leading towards healing and (re)constructing community bonds. But, as shown earlier, this ‘bonding’ may not be wanted. Thus, the question remains not how to achieve reconciliation but what people want after the war and how to support them pursuing it. This could simply be ‘normal life’ in which reconciliation has the entirely different meaning from the one argued in liberal peace-building and even if defined differently, it may not be desirable at all. If this is the case, and if the relationship with the ‘other’ is not transformed, rebuilt or developed due to the lack of interest among ‘ordinary people’ who still need to live next to the ‘other’, how does this influence their perception of identity of the former enemy which shares the same living space?

To answer that question, it is important to look at the contribution of social-psychological approaches to the study of ethnic conflicts and peace-building with ‘the added dimension of the image formation of the other’.⁴¹¹ Here the key to understanding the root causes of conflict is not in the security dilemma or the breakdown of state authority, but rather in the socio-psychological factors that affect behaviour of individuals and collectives in a conflict situation and in developing and reinforcing ‘us versus them’ mentality.⁴¹² As such, any effort to successfully manage conflict and achieve a truly stable peace must address embedded anxieties and individual, societal or other identities, established to differentiate some individuals from others.⁴¹³ In conflict, the lack of personal identification applies equally

⁴⁰⁷ WS014.

⁴⁰⁸ Dennis J.D. Sandole, *Peacebuilding, Preventing Violent Conflict in a Complex World* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), pp. 8-9.

⁴⁰⁹ WS006.

⁴¹⁰ Sandole, *Peacebuilding*, pp. 8-9.

⁴¹¹ Siniver, ‘Managing and settling ethnic conflict’, p. 190.

⁴¹² Ibid. Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, p.17.

⁴¹³ Siniver, ‘Managing and settling ethnic conflict’, p. 190.

to victims, who are simply perceived as ‘enemies’⁴¹⁴, and perpetrators, who tend to lose their own identity within their group.⁴¹⁵ This is closely related to distance, as there is a relationship ‘between the empathic and physical proximity of the victim, and the resultant difficulty and trauma of the kill’.⁴¹⁶ People distance themselves from the ‘other’ until the ‘other’ is dehumanized.⁴¹⁷ As a result, communities polarise even further and the whole enemy population easily becomes a legitimate military target often subjected to collective punishment.⁴¹⁸ Building upon Allport’s ‘contact hypothesis’ Pettigrew argued that contact between groups reduces prejudice.⁴¹⁹ Distance, on the other hand, denies humanity, concluded Grossman.⁴²⁰

However, it seems that the idea of distance is not that simple. Other studies have shown that neighbourly ties, which often imply positive interpersonal relations, have rarely motivated people to risk their lives to save others. When they did, rescuers justified it with a sense of shared humanity, instead of a special connection arising from local ties.⁴²¹ Furthermore, Hewstone and others highlighted that contact cannot offer complete ‘immunity’

⁴¹⁴ This is a so-called object-focus de-individuation, also known as a ‘blinding effect’. The consequence is that members of the ‘other side’ are no longer viewed as single persons with their own unique perceptions and values. Instead all members of an enemy group are viewed as part of a whole and all are assumed to share the negative attributes that are projected on to that group. Ryan, *The Transformation of Violent Intercommunal Conflict*, p. 71.

⁴¹⁵ Also known as subject-focus de-individuation. Hewstone et al., ‘Why Neighbors Kill, Prior Intergroup Contact and Killing of Ethnic Outgroup Neighbors’, p. 65.

⁴¹⁶ Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The psychological cost of learning to kill in war and society* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1996), p. 97.

⁴¹⁷ In order to understand what dehumanisation is, it is important to define what humanness is. Haslam and his colleagues found that people distinguish a sense of human uniqueness from an equally accessible sense of humanness as ‘human nature’. Uniquely human traits tend to resolve around civility, refinement, higher cognition and morality, they are understood to reflect late-acquired social learning, whereas human nature traits centre on emotionality, interpersonal warmth and openness, and are seen as innate, essence-like, cross-culturally universal and prevalent within the population. Apparently, the emphasis is on our morality and emotions, and this could explain why emotional or moral detachment could play a more significant role in denying humanity, than physical distance. Nick Haslam and Stephen Loughnan, ‘Prejudice and dehumanization’, *Beyond Prejudice, Extending the Social Psychology of Conflict, Inequality and Social Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), ed. by John Dixon and Mark Levine, p. 91.

⁴¹⁸ Slim, *Killing Civilians*, pp. 2, 122. Jeffrey Burds, who conducted research on war crimes during and after the Second World War, believes that forced impregnation of German women after the end of the Second World War by Russian soldiers was a deliberate tactic as a form of punishment for the entire German society. Jeffrey Burds, ‘Sexual Violence in Europe in World War II, 1939 – 1945’, *Politics & Society*, Vol. 37 (2009), No. 1, p. 53.

⁴¹⁹ Thornton, ‘Introduction’, p. 5. Some other psychologists agree with Pettigrew’s conclusion. Sally Broughton, for example argued that stereotypes among Macedonians and Albanians in Macedonia are primarily the result of lack of information and contact between people, including segregated education (encouraged even by teachers and parents) and media. Sally Broughton, ‘Before and After Trauma: the Difference Between Prevention and Reconciliation Activities in Macedonia’, *The Psychological Impact of War Trauma on Civilians: An International Perspective (Psychological Dimensions to War and Peace)* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), ed. by Stanley Krippner and Maria McIntyre, pp. 232, 236.

⁴²⁰ Grossman, *On Killing*, p. 102.

⁴²¹ Richard A. Vernon, ‘Why Neighbors Kill: An Overview’, *Explaining the Breakdown of Ethnic Relations: Why Neighbours Kill* (Malden – Oxford – Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), ed. by Victoria M. Esses and Richard A. Vernon, p. 2.

although it is not entirely ineffective as it is a necessary condition for potential hostility to be prevented.⁴²² They argued that mere proximity may mean nothing at all (and even have negative effects when the ‘other’ is nearby in worrying numbers) if there is a ‘psychological wall’ between people. Moreover, even if prior intergroup contact had positive effects, it is unreasonable to expect these to survive countervailing influences, in-group pressure, massive propaganda, and threats.⁴²³ As Waller noted, distance is a physical, moral and psychological construct.⁴²⁴ This is why a number of authors deny the argument of the ‘contact hypotheses’ in conflict resolution i.e., ‘the more contact there is between conflicting parties, the more scope there is for resolution’.⁴²⁵ Slim argued that it is surprisingly easy to sustain ‘collective thinking’ even when faced with the enemy.⁴²⁶ The reason for this could perhaps be found in the ‘intra-humanization’ effect. Leyens and others found that people tend to reserve uniquely human emotions to their own group and deny them to out-groups even when the relevant intergroup contrast was not marked by conflict or antagonism.⁴²⁷ In the empirical chapters, I explore how little impact previous neighbourly ties had on the relationships between participants and the ‘other’ as those bonds are burdened by mistrust, pain and a profound sense of betrayal.

Instead of focusing on distance, Porter highlighted that the recognition and affirmation of identities and the inclusion of different groups in all aspects of peace-building is crucial to minimise, and ultimately suppress, negative feelings and violent responses that they provoke.⁴²⁸ Bar-Tal agreed arguing that social changes would be encouraged by a new repertoire of premises, assumptions and aspirations that allows reaching an agreement. This would include all society members who need to change their fundamental views about the conflict and the relationship with the rival, their own group and their past.⁴²⁹ Thus, the secret

⁴²² Hewstone et al., ‘Why Neighbors Kill, Prior Intergroup Contact and Killing of Ethnic Outgroup Neighbors’, pp. 62-63, 84.

⁴²³ Ibid., pp. 70-74.

⁴²⁴ James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How ordinary people commit genocide and mass killing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 197. Moral distance is described by Waller as ‘moral disengagement’ which included three practices: moral justification, dehumanization, and euphemistic labelling of evil actions. Waller, *Becoming Evil*, p. 202. This way the ‘other’ is placed outside the in-group boundary of justice, fairness and morality. Hewstone et al., ‘Why Neighbors Kill, Prior Intergroup Contact and Killing of Ethnic Outgroup Neighbors’, p. 65.

⁴²⁵ Quoted in: Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 248. Originally published in: Miles Hewstone and Rupert Brown (eds.), *Contact and conflict in intergroup encounters*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

⁴²⁶ Slim, *Killing Civilians*, p. 176

⁴²⁷ Haslam and Loughnan, ‘Prejudice and dehumanization’, pp. 90-91. Originally published in: Jacques-Philippe Leyens et al, ‘The emotional side of prejudice: the attribution of secondary emotions to ingroups and outgroup’, *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4, 186–97.

⁴²⁸ Porter, *Peacebuilding*, p. 68.

⁴²⁹ Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, p. 323.

is not in increasing intergroup contact, but its quality and duration⁴³⁰ which could potentially encourage a different perception of the ‘other’. Apparently, this is an exceptionally challenging and stressful process, particularly in times of rapid social change as in Croatia, when new information is introduced. Consequently, people come to understand that their values and beliefs are out-dated becoming more alienated and unsure of how to resolve problems associated with their identity.⁴³¹ For example, it may be distressing to feel personally vulnerable in exploring long-held myths about the ‘other’ or suddenly discover that the reasons for long-held bitter hatred are unwarranted, that the ‘other’ is an ordinary human being with shared feelings, hopes and fears similar to one’s own.⁴³² This could also explain resistance to alternative ideas, including those that challenge preconceptions about the ‘enemy’, and revising the past in a more objective manner even from a temporal distance.⁴³³ However, this step is necessary because seeing the enemy as ‘ordinary people’ is crucial to being able to experience empathy for them, reconstruct social relationships and re-humanise.⁴³⁴ Some scholars found a possible solution in the human identity, which remains the most general and basic form of self-identification.⁴³⁵ Parekh stressed that ‘identity politics has so far been defined and based on gender, ethnicity and nationality’.⁴³⁶ However, ‘it is just as crucial to affirm our universal human identity’.⁴³⁷ He acknowledged that collective identities with shared experiences and concerns yield a moral anchor; therefore, human identity remains abstract unless it is anchored in, and enriched by our particular identities with the aim of these multiple identities becoming complementary instead of conflictual.⁴³⁸ Jansen criticised the ‘we are all people’ approach stating that ‘people do not engage with each other based on some abstract common humanity’ instead, encounters ‘necessarily rely on mutual

⁴³⁰ Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 182. Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, pp. 403-404.

⁴³¹ Karina V. Korostelina, ‘Readiness to Fight in Crimea, How it Interrelates with National and Ethnic Identities’, *Identity Matters, Ethnic and Sectarian Conflict* (New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), ed. by James L. Peacock, Patricia M. Thornton and Patrick B. Inman, p. 52.

⁴³² Porter, *Peacebuilding*, p. 89. Also see Bar-Tal, ‘Socio-Psychological Barriers on the Individual Level: Freezing’, *Intractable Conflicts*, pp. 289-306.

⁴³³ Bar-Tal describes this process as ‘unfreezing’ and it begins on an individual level. Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, pp. 327-331.

⁴³⁴ Julia Welland, ‘Compassionate soldiering and comfort’, *Emotions, Politics and War* (London – New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), ed. by Thomas Gregory and Linda Åhäll, p. 118. Emma Hutchinson, Roland Bleiker, ‘Grief and the transformation of emotions after war’, *Emotions, Politics and War* (London – New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), ed. by Thomas Gregory and Linda Åhäll, p. 217. Slim also underlined the importance of identification as an important part of empathy which is central to compassion and which draws on positive description of who and what people are as human beings. Slim, *Killing Civilians*, p. 34.

⁴³⁵ Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 261. Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, p. 379. Slim, *Killing Civilians*, p. 187.

⁴³⁶ Bhikhu Parekh, *A New Politics of Identity, Political Principles for an Interdependent World* (Basingstoke – New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 2.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 50.

recognition between persons of specific social positionings'⁴³⁹ such as 'mother', 'daughter' etc. Thus, I encouraged participants to identify their enemy in their own words if they chose to but Parehk's human identity rarely emerged. Instead the collected data confirmed that identifying the 'other' is linked to past events and experiences and a way to transforming these beliefs is possible through the personal voluntary transformation of the 'other' which begins with truth.

Based on the insight that reconciliation is culturally conditioned and dependent on the local, this research relies on Jansen's critique of reconciliation. Unlike many other peacebuilding research projects my goal is not to discuss different pathways towards a final stage of reconciliation where previous relationships have been restored and inter-communal trust exists⁴⁴⁰. I draw upon Mac Ginty's idea of 'everyday peace', described as insincere and without substance, hence representing nothing more than a mere acceptance of conflict as a survival strategy.⁴⁴¹ Despite that, as Jansen and Mac Ginty persuasively argued, at the micro-local level people engage in everyday tolerance and cooperation within their daily life, often for pragmatic reasons instead of part of a deliberate reconciliation process⁴⁴², for example work and trade. In the empirical chapters, I explore how this insincere everyday peace in Croatia is represented by peaceful co-existence with limited contact with the 'other' as participants feel there is no other choice. At the same time, they focus on everyday survival possibly expecting a new conflict due to lack of trust in top level actors, middle-range actors and the 'other'. This strips them of a sense of security as a basic need, also identified by Bar-Tal as a starting point of reconciliation⁴⁴³. Tackling the ties with the 'other', I also explore the potential for what Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall described as 'overcoming polarization' and 'managing contradiction'⁴⁴⁴, the stages of reconciliation where, according to

⁴³⁹ Jansen, 'If Reconciliation Is the Answer, Are We Asking the Right Questions?', p. 236.

⁴⁴⁰ Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 247. They argued that this last stage, called 'fourth dimension of reconciliation', happens more usually between individuals in small groups, such as families or villages, where personal contacts have been strong – particularly in more traditional pastoral societies.

⁴⁴¹ Roger Mac Ginty, 'Everyday peace: Bottom-up and local agency in conflict-affected societies', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 45 (December 2014), No. 6, pp. 548-564.

⁴⁴² Mac Ginty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance*, p. 209. Jansen, 'If Reconciliation Is the Answer, Are We Asking the Right Questions?', p. 233.

⁴⁴³ Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, p. 378, 390.

⁴⁴⁴ Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 247. These are the second and the third dimension of reconciliation. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 259. In my previous research of modern Croatian history, I conducted many interviews. Although my research was focused on the Second World War and post-war period, many interviewees were often willing to discuss other events, such as the ones which took place during the Homeland War and immediately after the war. In their own words, they were describing and explaining what peace is to them and how far they were willing to go in building new relationships with the 'others'. Although they had no knowledge of political science, a vision of 'their' peace was more or less identical to a 'cold peace', while their relationships with 'others' often

them, re-humanisation of the 'other' takes place. This allows some space for exploring a grey area between co-existence and reconciliation where there may be no reconciliation in terms of forgiving the enemy and transforming identities to the point where trusting the 'other' is no longer an issue. Instead, it allows for a scenario where reconciliation may not be possible, desired or sought because certain hostilities may still exist. However, the consideration of the use of force at least in some cases is highly unlikely which meets a safety requirement as a basis for a peaceful 'normal life'. As this thesis shows, the understanding of this 'grey area' better fits the contemporary context of Croatian society where the majority of participants in this research do not pursue reconciliation. Despite peaceful co-existence and absence of violence, certain hostilities are still showing in regards to identifying themselves and their enemy in terms of military units. Furthermore, the quality of the relationship with the 'other' seems irrelevant as long as safety is met; thus, ensuring a pursuit of 'normal life' to continue and progress. All these challenges lead to a long journey of personal transformation within society, which is also changing, and which may or may not meet expectations of those who were mostly acutely exposed to violence.

2.4. DEALING WITH THE PAST AND 'NORMALISING' THE PRESENT

In the previous subchapter, I tackled the relationship with the 'other' emphasising that the personal voluntary transformation of the 'other' begins with truth. Truth also emerged as one of the key topics in Lederach's context of reconciliation, and therefore, I now explore its importance in the context of 'normal life'. Dealing with the past has been a topic of debates in post-conflict societies, although they tend to be dominated by scholars interested in truth commissions, justice and reconciliation. There is a large body of literature on these issues; however, my research focuses on the role of history and truth in everyday life. Past events and processes serve as a basis for evolving socio-psychological dynamics that fuel later developments of reality, including conflict.⁴⁴⁵ The security dilemma, for example, cannot be understood without some awareness of fear and anxiety.⁴⁴⁶ As highlighted earlier, security was identified by Bar-Tal as the first step towards reconciliation⁴⁴⁷, Maslow placed it among the basic human needs, while in my research it emerged as a building stone of 'normal life'.

corresponded to the description of co-existence. Many of them accepted peaceful co-existence thinking that they simply had no other choice. It felt like they were satisfied with that and had no intention of rebuilding these relationships any further. Since my previous research was not focused on peace-building and reconciliation, I did not explore these findings in details, although some of them were a starting point for this thesis.

⁴⁴⁵ Daniel Bar-Tal, 'Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts', *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 50 (July 2007), No. 11, p. 1430.

⁴⁴⁶ Gregory and Åhäll, 'Introduction', p. 2.

⁴⁴⁷ Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, pp. 378, 390.

Therefore, it is relevant to examine emotions and psychological processes rooted in past events that play an important role on the long path to post-conflict transformation and ‘normalisation’.

Lederach, who argued that the lines of contemporary armed conflicts are drawn along ethnic, religious, or regional affiliations, agreed with Friberg’s conclusion that ‘ethnic conflicts’ should actually be named ‘identity conflicts’.⁴⁴⁸ The major obstacle in research of ‘identity’ conflicts is that each conflict is different because each ethnic group has its own history, culture, language, myths, narratives, victimhood and tradition.⁴⁴⁹ Moreover, ethnicity does not guarantee homogeneity, as a group itself may have multiple internal divisions. This problem emerged in my research because there were Serbs among Croatian defenders and vice versa, even though the war was fought for Croatian independence and the attacks came from Serbian soil. Divisions among Croats are furthermore emphasised by loyalty to the former communist regime or Croatian patriotism. All these issues highlight the necessity of investigating the roots of such conflicts. Understanding their complexity can improve the ability to respond more quickly and effectively, reducing the scale of human suffering⁴⁵⁰ and encouraging ‘normalisation’ free of violence.

Discussing the immediacy of the experience which ‘arises from the close proximity of conflicting groups, the shared common histories of the conflictants, and the dynamic of severe stereotyping coupled with radically differing perceptions of each other’⁴⁵¹, Lederach recognised the challenges historians are facing and highlighted research after the conflict as crucial in establishing what the truth really is.⁴⁵² These factors are connected because plural histories mean there is ‘our’ and ‘their’ history which leads to stereotyping because ‘us’ and ‘them’ are not the same and ‘we’ cannot even agree on what happened. Porter argued that when uniqueness of self-identity, collective identity and national identity is not recognised

⁴⁴⁸ Lederach, *Building Peace*, pp. 8, 12-15. Cordell and Wolff highlighted that the most important confusion about ‘ethnic conflict’ is that it is about ethnicity. They emphasised that the conflict is not ‘ethnic’ but at least one of its participants; rather, an ethnic conflict involves at least one conflict party that is organised around the ethnic identity of its members. Karl Cordell and Stefan Wolff, ‘The study of ethnic conflict: An introduction’, *Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict* (London – New York: Routledge, 2011), ed. by Karl Cordell and Stephen Wolff, p. 4.

⁴⁴⁹ For example, Lederach emphasised the shared common histories of the conflictants. Lederach, *Building Peace*, p. 13.

⁴⁵⁰ Cordell and Wolff, ‘The study of ethnic conflict: An introduction’, p. 1.

⁴⁵¹ Lederach, *Building Peace*, p. 13.

⁴⁵² As we encounter new issues and information we constantly categorise them – usually putting them into familiar existing categories we feel we can rely on. Categorisation helps us accumulate an understanding of the world, but our schemas tend to value conformity over accuracy which means that we simply do not like information that introduces doubt or ambiguity into the categories by which we live. We rely on the same principle when we think of people, but in doing so we tend to generalise and oversimplify. Our inclination either to deliberately ignore or overemphasise information in order to maintain, rather than challenge, a working category can lead us easily into stereotypes. Slim, *Killing Civilians*, pp. 184-185.

and affirmed by others, emotions of rage, disappointment and bitterness associated with exclusion can erupt into aggressive reactions.⁴⁵³ This kind of situation brings ‘us’ closer to those who feel or think like ‘us’, and those who are not with ‘us’ will find themselves on the other side. As Trotter underlined, ‘in a country at war every citizen is exposed to the extremely powerful stimulation of herd instinct’.⁴⁵⁴ Porter believes that this dualistic mind-set is harmful leaving no scope for debate over contested concerns, therefore working against reconciliation of differences, development of trust and healing of wounded relationships.⁴⁵⁵ This also represents a threat to ‘normal life’ which implies some sort of a relationship with the ‘other’ even if it is purely co-existence.

Since history is related to roots and different layers of identity⁴⁵⁶, it provides societies and individuals with a dimension of longitudinal meaning over time which far outlives the human life-span.⁴⁵⁷ However, knowledge of the past is often limited due to different circumstances; thus the need for further research. Bar-Tal highlighted that conflicts fluctuate with time, and as contexts change, so changes the socio-psychological repertoire of involved societies.⁴⁵⁸ It is important to remember that history is hardly ever static or linear. It changes too, as McPherson said, ‘history is a continuing dialogue between the present and the past’.⁴⁵⁹ Interpretations of the past are subject to change in response to new evidence which means that there is no single, eternal, and immutable ‘truth’, and therefore, revision, described as ‘the lifeblood of historical scholarship’⁴⁶⁰, is essential. Barnes went one step further and concluded that there can be no real hope for peace, security and prosperity unless we can break through the ‘historical blackout’.⁴⁶¹ Given that ‘truth is always the first war casualty’⁴⁶², emotional

⁴⁵³ Porter, *Peacebuilding*, p. 68.

⁴⁵⁴ Wilfred Trotter, *Instincts of the herd in peace at war* (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1990), p.216.

⁴⁵⁵ Porter, *Peacebuilding*, p. 45.

⁴⁵⁶ Social psychologist Tom Pettigrew envisions social identity as potentially comprising several nested levels of affiliation. Thomas F. Pettigrew, ‘Social Identity Matters, Predicting Prejudice and Violence in Western Europe’, *Identity Matters, Ethnic and Sectarian Conflict* (New York – Oxford, 2007), ed. by James L. Peacock, Patricia M. Thornton and Patrick B. Inman, p. 35. Thornton, ‘Introduction, Identity Matters’, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁵⁷ Jeremy Black and Donald M. MacRaild, *Studying history* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 3.

⁴⁵⁸ Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, p. 29.

⁴⁵⁹ James McPherson, ‘Revisionist Historians’, *Perspectives on history*, 1 September 2003, <<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/september-2003/revisionist-historians>> [accessed 15 May 2019]. This problem was also discussed in the book *What is History?* (1961) by E.H.Carr who suggested that ‘history is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and past’ which implies that it is changeable. Black and MacRaild, *Studying history*, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁰ McPherson, ‘Revisionist Historians’.

⁴⁶¹ Harry Elmer Barnes, ‘Revisionism and the Promotion of Peace’, *The Journal of Historical Review*, Vol. 3 (Spring 1982), No. 1, 53-83, <http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v03/v03p-53_Barnes.html> [accessed 25 June 2019].

⁴⁶² Horowitz speaks of the critical role of rumour which aims to mobilise ‘ordinary people’ to do what they would not ordinarily do, and shifting the balance in a crowd toward those proposing the most extreme action. Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 74-75.

disturbances and distortions in historical writing are greatest in wartime as materials for correcting historical myths are most evident when they are related to wars.⁴⁶³ Barnes highlighted that historical revisionism represents the effort to correct the historical record in light of a more complete collection of facts, a calmer political atmosphere, and a more objective attitude, with the aim of ‘discrediting misleading myths that are a barrier to peace and goodwill among nations’.⁴⁶⁴ As stated earlier, this is essential to challenge the preconceptions about the ‘enemy’ and transform the relationship with the ‘other’.

These objectives make the job of a historian quite challenging, especially in post-conflict societies where interpretations of historical events are particularly prone to variations according to how they are viewed in terms of political and social utility, and where political atmosphere and everyday life are still fuelled with emotions which prevent us from taking a critical look at ourselves and arriving at a more just and balanced view of our issues. This makes less biased assessments and new interpretations of controversial areas of historical study likely to elicit new charges of ideological bias as has recently happened in Croatia. Like in many other divided societies, stereotypes rooted in the past psychologically prevent Croatian society from dealing with its past, healing and moving on. These divisions keep influencing ‘normal life’ with daily exposure to historical debates, entrapped in a circle of manipulations and myths related to past events that leave entrenched effects on everyday life. On low-key conflict lasting a very long time, Brewer warned that people learn to successfully routinize and cope with it. ‘Peace’ itself is unfamiliar and ontologically strange, especially for victims and their relatives.⁴⁶⁵ Bar-Tal described this feature as ‘centrality’ stating it indicates that society members live a normalised conflicted life, often without realising its tremendous effects and without being aware that there are other ways of life.⁴⁶⁶ This central preoccupation with conflict through normalisation contributes to its intractability because participants do not feel an urgency to terminate it.⁴⁶⁷ As one participant said, ‘I have no normal life apart from my war memories’⁴⁶⁸; for him, conflict became ‘normal’. Unresolved communal wounds become part of the psyche of a society extending into future generations and fuelling new conflicts. Moreover, in the short term, peace may be destabilising emotionally because it requires change and the overthrow of familiar ideas, routines and

⁴⁶³ Barnes, ‘Revisionism and the Promotion of Peace’.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Brewer, *Peace Processes*, p. 36.

⁴⁶⁶ Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, p. 46.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ ND050.

behaviours.⁴⁶⁹ Peace provokes what Lederach calls the ‘identity dilemma’ because people who have defined their identity for so long in terms of the traditional enemy, suddenly find they have to reshape their sense of who they and their enemies are.⁴⁷⁰ In the public domain, the emphasis is on peace, reconciliation and forgiveness, while privately people often feel nothing but grief, bitterness and anger.⁴⁷¹ Therefore, in-depth healing of society cannot happen⁴⁷², which makes moving towards a desired ‘normal life’ challenging.

2.5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I gave an overview of works relevant to this thesis. The main focus was primarily on political science sources as this thesis contributes to peace-building literature relying on the ethnographic research of Stef Jansen, a social anthropologist. While conducting research in the post-Yugoslav states, he found ‘normal life’ to be an object of hope; hence, revealing reconciliation that liberal peace-building focuses on to be pushed into the background of the post-conflict story. Furthermore, everyday life emerged as a concept of interest in the post-liberal literature; however, previous works did not explore ‘normal’ or everyday life in depth creating a gap for this thesis to fill. My research data revealed that ‘normal’ is not a simple concept, but emerges as a full spectrum of shades with some that can be ‘normal to one person, but abnormal to another’⁴⁷³. As suggested in the previous chapter, this spectrum of ‘normal’ does not have linear coherence neither within the community nor within the experience of an individual. Its intersecting circles are fluid and dynamic as their meeting points constantly shift and change under the influence of various external factors; thus making ‘normal’ difficult to conceptualise.

Furthermore, layers of ‘normal’ spread across all areas of life; hence, ‘normal’ is not only a political category and different approaches are needed to explore its full potential. Although in this thesis ‘normal’ is explored in the context of post-conflict recovery, including safety in the community and relationships with the ‘other’, I also draw on a historical approach. This enables the analysis of past influences on the ‘normal’ spectrum which particularly emerge in the context of the quest for historical truth and lustration, or the lack of both which, according to participants, has a significant impact on their sense of safety.

⁴⁶⁹ Brewer, *Peace Processes*, p. 36.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Steve S. Olweean, ‘When Society Is the Victim: Catastrophic Trauma Recovery’, *The Psychological Impact of War Trauma on Civilians, An International Perspective (Psychological Dimensions to War and Peace)* (Westport– London: Praeger, 2003), ed. by in Stanley Krippner and Teresa M. McIntyre, p. 271.

⁴⁷³ OTH010.

Finally, I also draw on a social psychology approach to investigate the link between identities and 'normal' and a potential for transforming the relationship with the 'other'. As discussed earlier, based on the complexity of reconciliation as culturally conditioned and dependent on local, this research relies on Jansen's critique of reconciliation suggesting that in some societies reconciliation may not be possible, desired or sought because certain hostilities may still exist although the consideration of the use of force at least in some cases is highly unlikely. As life continues in the atmosphere of mistrust, fear and anxiety, previous relationships are mainly not being restored although at the micro-local level people engage in everyday tolerance and cooperation within their daily life, often for pragmatic reasons; thus suggesting limited contact with the 'other' with a tall psychological wall in between. Based on Ramsbotham's, Woodhouse's and Miall's insights, I focus on the grey area between co-existence and reconciliation where people try to overcome polarisation followed by re-humanisation of the 'other' although mainly without forgiveness and deeper personal bonding. This does not exclude hostilities which are manifesting through identification of the 'other' which remains cemented in war; thus undermining Allport's 'contact hypothesis' as contact between groups does not reduce prejudice due to profound feeling of pain and betrayal. Faced with a possible threat of another conflict, 'collective thinking' persists as it enforces a sense of safety within one's own group. Instead of Bar-Tal's transformation of the fundamental views about the conflict, the focus is on a basic safety being met as a basis for pursuing 'normal life' in a very cold peace. Relying on these different insights will result in a multidisciplinary approach necessary to provide a deeper understanding of how multi-layered, fluid and dynamic 'normal' in the post-conflict setting is and why it is so essential to societies that try to move away from violence.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY:
DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

In the previous chapter, I spoke of the works relevant to this thesis which unpacked different understandings of some peace-building themes and post-conflict topics. Although those works tackled some aspects of ‘normalcy’, current research does not provide an in-depth insight of what ‘normal life’ really is or how it can be achieved. In this chapter, I discuss how I approached this exploration of ‘normal’ and how I am going to answer my research questions to provide a better understanding of what ‘normal’ in the post-conflict society is or could be. In the literature review I already emphasised that ‘normal’ is not only a political category; thus, different approaches are needed. This thesis is embedded in political science contributing primarily to the peace-building literature due to ‘normal’ being explored in the context of post-conflict recovery and linked to reconciliation in the community. However, I am also drawing on a historical and social psychology approach while exploring links of ‘normal’ with past, relationships and identities in the pursuit of my research questions.

Based on the existing literature I discussed earlier, it can be concluded that ‘normal life’, although partially tackled through the presence of everyday life, has remained somehow hidden in the literature despite Jansen’s work which places it at the core of post-conflict reality in societies where reconciliation may not be desired and where people could simply be satisfied with co-existence. Moreover, Jansen also emphasised linguistic differences⁴⁷⁴ relevant to understanding of reconciliation in different cultural settings showing its flexibility not only being hidden in how researchers define it, but also how people understand it in their own local context. This revealed a subjective and dynamic nature of reconciliation as it depends on multiple influences and experiences, just like ‘normal life’. If the ‘what is normal to me can be abnormal to another’⁴⁷⁵ approach applies in this case, then for some people reconciliation can appear only on the horizon, as Jansen suggested⁴⁷⁶, although in ways that do not match liberal peace-building. While reconciliation could be one of the important post-conflict goals for researchers or some political actors, it may be much less relevant to the lives

⁴⁷⁴ Jansen, ‘If Reconciliation Is the Answer, Are We Asking the Right Questions?’, p. 236.

⁴⁷⁵ OTH010.

⁴⁷⁶ Jansen, ‘If Reconciliation Is the Answer, Are We Asking the Right Questions?’, p. 234.

of ‘ordinary people’ whose focus may be elsewhere, such as ‘normal life’. Hence, it was important to return to the local level where violence was experienced more acutely and where ‘ordinary people’ experience everyday life.

I approach this research having two methodological aims in mind. The first is to give a voice to Croatian veterans and their problems as they are ‘a rare topic of academic debate’.⁴⁷⁷ As expressed in their questionnaires and interviews, veterans often feel neglected and marginalised⁴⁷⁸; thus, I wanted to let them explain the challenges they and their country have been experiencing since the end of the Homeland War. This approach gave veterans an opportunity to address the issues crucial to the country’s political development and ‘normalisation’ of life in the post-conflict era as equal and valuable members of community, rather than ‘spoilers’ or ‘those who live on benefits’, as they are sometimes perceived within Croatian society. It is important to highlight that I am looking at a specific segment of the population; thus, the question remains how others in society would feel about the same issues and what future research could reveal about post-conflict complexities and ‘normalisation’ for society as a whole. Despite the similar background that participants in this study share with myself and the rest of society, including an upbringing in a non-democratic society labelled by political tensions and oppression, differences in the veterans’ approach and understanding of ‘normal’ need to be recognised. This is due to them being those who experienced violence the most acutely and those whose former ‘normal’ was almost overnight transformed from civilian into military; thus causing a significant life-shattering change. After all, ‘it is us who don’t want another war and we would do anything to prevent it’⁴⁷⁹.

Secondly, in this study the veterans are not simply a group of people. They are individuals who may share similar war experiences, but whose opinions and ideas may be very different. This included thoughts on various peace-building topics; thus, revealing how a nuanced understanding of those themes on the local level and how complex post-conflict society can be. In a country where democracy is still very young, this variety of thoughts gave veterans the power of a fresh insight into the difficult path of post-conflict recovery and ‘normalisation’. This was another methodological aim of this study. Here veterans act as co-constructors of the data as it is they who are telling their stories and interpret them in an individual and unique way. As their understanding of the world and ‘normal’ arises out of one’s personal experiences, this strengthens the relationship between veterans’ actions,

⁴⁷⁷ Dobrotić, ‘Sustav skrbi za branitelje iz Domovinskog rata’, 57-83.

⁴⁷⁸ ND081. ND044. ND054. FO020. FO028. OTH014.

⁴⁷⁹ OTH052

thoughts and emotions making the whole experience profoundly personal; thus resulting in a subjective approach to knowledge.

As conflict partially strips people of their humanity and identity, one of the challenges in post-conflict countries is the humanisation of an entire society, particularly those who experienced violence the most. In order to do that, people should not be seen exclusively as members of groups based on ethnic, political, religious or other differences. Instead, they should be seen as individuals with the right to speak out, especially if they are in danger of being ignored or described as someone who may hinder peace-building efforts. Therefore, one of my goals was to give them back their unique individual voices free of peer pressure or group expectations; and using this approach, simply humanising instead of victimising them. Giving them an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings in their own words was an attempt to support reflecting upon their experiences, re-thinking their 'normal' and encouraging their process of humanisation while acknowledging their beliefs and ideas as valuable and valid. As a result, veterans are no longer just that. That term itself suggests identification of people in terms of conflict or some sort of victimisation and, therefore, opening the space to categorisation based on binaries such as war or peace. Once they stop being just 'veterans', whether they are potential 'spoilers', 'agents of change' or a 'target group of assistance programmes', and simply become ordinary people who speak about some not so ordinary experiences, their identification shifts toward a full range of identities as they become someone's siblings, parents, partners and friends. This is in line with the concept of hybrid peace-building which, as suggested in chapter 2, shifts towards the multiplicity of outcomes, or, as Peterson argued, 'a series of iterations and in-betweens to be analysed and judged on their own merits'⁴⁸⁰. In the next three subchapters, I explain my approach to this exploration of veterans' 'normal' and my choice of methods and participants and, finally, I highlight ethical considerations in this study.

3.1. HOW AND WHY TO EXPLORE 'NORMAL'?

This different focus on 'normal', discovered through Jansen's work, was one of the starting points in this thesis as it was something that I could easily relate to. This was due to my personal background as I was born and raised in the country I am exploring in this thesis and as a child I witnessed the conflict I am tackling. Thus, I also share similar pre-war experiences with the participants in this research as well as some of the post-war issues they

⁴⁸⁰ Peterson, 'A Conceptual Unpacking Of Hybridity', p. 12.

faced, such as a strong sense of injustice due to unsolved past issues and the current political tensions linked to the sense of insecurity. Given a subjective and dynamic nature of ‘normal life’, what ‘normal’ in a specific context really is may be difficult to understand to outsiders who have no experience living in that same context and they are not familiar with the language, culture, history and traditions. This means that what is normal to me in the context I know may not be normal to a stranger. As stated earlier, even the understanding of ‘normal’ among ‘ordinary people’ within the same community may differ, but having the same background and sharing some experiences can bring them closer in their exploration of different shades of their local ‘normal’. This was visible when participants struggled to find the words to express their opinions. Instead, sometimes they simply said: ‘you know what I mean’⁴⁸¹. This assumption was based on the fact that we speak the same language and come from the same place despite our lives being different. They expected me to know what they were referring to and I did. If I were an outsider, those unspoken words would have been impossible to decipher. Unlike many other authors, I am not writing about something which is happening far away from everything I know; I am writing about my own life and that of my family members. This includes Croatian Army veterans within my family who did not participate in this research, but with whose personal experiences I am familiar, which gave me the initial insight in the post-conflict lives of Croatian defenders decades before I even started this research.

This personal connection to this project was both a challenge and an advantage. The main challenge was to disconnect my personal journey from that of the participants and often remind myself that, despite their opinion, I should not ‘know’ what they actually think or feel. In situations like these, I had to encourage them to express themselves in one way or another and rephrase questions if necessary. For them, this was sometimes hard to understand and in some cases it required more detailed explanations of research ethics and approach. Another problem related to emotions since the veterans thoughts brought back not only their memories but mine too. We were reliving those memories together although they had to express them while I did not. On the other hand, once an interview was done, each participant could bury those thoughts again deep into their mind while my memories kept emerging to the surface during the entire period of conducting the research and writing this thesis. Thus, there was an emotional toll involved as issues that used to be buried in the first years after the war were

⁴⁸¹ This observation was brought up several times during informal conversations. The same attitude was expressed in the questionnaires when participants stated ‘you can see/conclude for yourself’ (ND054), ‘I guess it’s clear to you’ (WS016) and ‘as a historian, you already know the answer’ (OTH034). One veteran replied with the question ‘Do you watch the news?’ suggesting that I should already be aware of the answer (OTH022).

brought back to life. During the writing period, I kept going back to them, remembering more details, connecting more dots, reflecting upon my experiences and sometimes even questioning whether my mind was playing tricks on me.

The researcher who does not share similar experiences with the participants in the research is free of this part of the PhD journey; in my case, this was not only an intellectual and academic journey, but also a deeply personal one and what I learned from it is that as a civilian I am far more similar to my participants than I thought. I also learned that there is a part of me which still exists in 1991 when the war started and I remember those times better than more recent ones. This suggests that despite time appearing to be linear, this is not the case with my personal experiences of the world around me as more traumatic events from the more distant past can have a far significant influence on who we are today than recent events. This confirms a disruption of linearity⁴⁸² in the life of an individual as opposed to what happens on a macro-political level and potentially widens the gap between one's expectations, goals and a desired 'normal' and the current reality leading to tensions between the external world and the inner one where subjective experience of the past remains very vivid and powerful. In my case, I can easily say that 1991 was the most important year in my life, the crossroad that defined who I am today and where my intellectual curiosity lies in a pursuit of understanding the bubble which was at that time created around me and individuals in my life and which became our other skin. I wanted to know if there is a different kind of 'normal' apart from my own, a different way of living for people whose experiences were similar to mine and if so, what it includes and how it can be achieved. As I show in the empirical chapters, many participants in this research felt the same; thus, that part of their identity which was also shaped by the war is still very important to them. Finally, what I also learned is how far an individual can go after experiencing something very traumatic, almost like a Phoenix rising from the ashes.

Another challenge to this exploration of 'normal' was my autistic brain which works in a specific 'outside the box' way and which processes and articulates only what I can actually see in my mind, making me a visual thinker. Every single piece of information participants revealed was stored in my mind, linked to the narrative, transformed into a movie and then added across various layers of this story. This way 'normal' was developing like a spectrum as my autism makes me a part of another spectrum. This place I was writing from has been described by society as 'not normal' as it was labelled by a diagnosis. As I show in

⁴⁸² Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, pp. xiii-xiv.

the empirical chapters, many participants argued that they had also been labelled too, mostly as a burden⁴⁸³, and as stated in the previous chapter, they were stigmatised to the point where there was a perception that those who defended homeland were not ‘normal’⁴⁸⁴; thus, protecting ‘home’ and life as the goals of their fight became ‘abnormal’.

This shifted veterans to the spectrum of all of us who do not ‘fit in’, who somehow stand out and who challenge any presumption of what ‘normal’ is and where its boundaries are. This brings us to a different realm where ‘normal’ becomes enriched by so many nuances that it truly emerges as a spectrum on its own. The main challenge is then to negotiate this liberating understanding of ‘normal’ with constraints and expectations of society and local. As a researcher, to me this meant deconstructing ‘normal life’ from an intellectual-analytical perspective and processing my life experiences navigating through the hidden maze of my own mind. Being dyslexic proved to be helpful as it enabled a better sense of ‘spatial’ relationships between different elements of ‘normal’ while bringing to the surface the most critical ones, particularly when faced with so many data and themes of ‘normal’ that are impossible to tackle in one thesis. Autistic people see the trees while dyslexic ones see the forest; the diversity of ‘normal’ emerged as a topic where both skills are essential.

As a result, this thesis does not speak of conflict but of life itself and many details in it could potentially be applicable to people who experienced different traumas or even those who simply want to break the chains of old life perhaps burdened by bad memories, habits and unhappiness, and go beyond what they thought their limitations were and explore their true potential. This thesis speaks of a spiral of life, its ups and downs, going back and forth, being at the bottom and moving up. Most of all, it speaks of faith, dedication and courage to pursue the ideal of ‘normal’ in the circumstances which for many are not exactly ‘normal’. In a way, I made this journey together with my participants. They were going through the process of retrospection just like me stating, for example, ‘now when I am discussing this with you I understand some things better’⁴⁸⁵. My questions encouraged participants to think about different angles and perspectives while their answers pushed me to do the same. This exploration of ‘normal’ was a two-way street as we were all learning from each other while mutually filling individual gaps and testing our willingness to acquire new information, challenge previous beliefs and assumptions and restructure our thinking; hence doing what

⁴⁸³ WS003. ND031. FO035. Some used a word ‘problem’ (ES011), ‘a difficulty’ (ND008) or ‘interference’ (ND056).

⁴⁸⁴ WS030.

⁴⁸⁵ ES037.

Bar-Tal identified as important to social changes in post-conflict society⁴⁸⁶. This makes this thesis a study about knowledge as a non-linear and pragmatic process revealing a complex spiral of life itself but also its exploration; thus encouraging a conceptual engagement which can hardly be presented in a linear way.

Although interviews were based on questionnaires with the aim of expanding their answers and exploring them in-depth, this retrospective joint journey resulted with more sub-questions that kept emerging during the interviews. The data collected in this way justified an importance of an in-depth approach as the participants kept revealing far more than they did in the questionnaires almost like they were peeling an onion until they reached its middle part. This is why I can compare an entire process of exploring 'normal' with 'normal life' itself, as they both consist of many layers each revealing a new shade and clues to the next one. This process put participants at ease. Often our interviews were conducted in a comfortable atmosphere, facilitating a friendly conversation, especially when participants wanted to share much more than what my questions included. This helped them to open up more than they normally would and to express thoughts that they had not been able to articulate in a very long time. In those instances, I had to take a critical distance and remind myself and them that this is still research and, thus, there are things that needed to be done in a specific way to gather the relevant data.

This unique personal positioning within my research opened more space to deeper insights of participants, consequently leading to a more valuable contribution to the understanding of 'normal' in the post-conflict society. This did not happen despite the challenges I discussed earlier. It happened because of them as both challenges and contributions in this case are coming from the same source. This gives the thesis an (auto)ethnographic touch which was further emphasised in the empirical chapters where I used the anecdotes about my childhood experiences to engage the readers and to bring them closer to a broader context in which the participants were also born and raised. As Brigg and Bleiker argued, 'autoethnographic insights are legitimate if they open up perspectives on political issues or phenomena that would otherwise remain foreclosed'⁴⁸⁷; in my case the autoethnographic element was enriched by autistic perception to discover what lies underneath. Löwenheim concluded that taking this approach he 'became much more aware of the human capacity to make a difference' as it aims to create mutual empowerment among

⁴⁸⁶ Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, p. 323.

⁴⁸⁷ Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker, 'Autoethnographic International Relations: exploring the self as a source of knowledge', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36(July 2010), No. 3, p. 796.

people, including ordinary individuals⁴⁸⁸. As stated earlier, this thesis is largely about that human potential to go forward, to change the world around us, to support others on that path while pursuing a version of ‘normal’ that fits one’s needs and vision. Ethnography itself can be defined as ‘a type of qualitative research that gathers observations, interviews and documentary data to produce detailed and comprehensive accounts of different social phenomena’⁴⁸⁹. It may involve ‘close engagement with a social group over time’⁴⁹⁰ or ‘a full immersion of the researcher in the day-to-day lives or culture of those under study’⁴⁹¹; this element was largely present in my academic journey.

My approach to this project in the months preceding the official start of the research were influenced by my previous academic work in Croatia, although that was done in the modern history field. After the Homeland War, I detested the imposed idea of reconciliation so much that I dedicated 15 years of my life to researching historical truth, as this was my way of finding my version of ‘normal’. I particularly focused on those topics which were buried under layers of manipulation in the former Yugoslavia and researching them at that time potentially meant punishment. I also believed that in the absence of justice from other humans or the judiciary, truth could be the only path to justice to be nourished in our personal space, over time allowing for some closure despite the pain. One participant actually said that he agreed to an interview for this research ‘because of your bravery and truth’⁴⁹² and because ‘brave people like you have been silent, banned, ignored and persecuted’⁴⁹³.

Many participants in this research were familiar with my work for years and this made my PhD journey much easier as a number of those who wanted to participate in it was more than sufficient. As many of them met me at my book launches in the past and were in direct contact with me, mutual trust already existed. Apart from that, their comments on my previous work provided an initial insight into a post-war life they would like to have; thus opening space to what Lee Ann Fujii described as ‘accidental ethnography’ which ‘makes sense of unplanned moments, those outside of arranged conversations and premeditated observation, as suggestive of the larger political and social world in which the researcher is

⁴⁸⁸ Oded Löwenheim, ‘The ‘I’ in IR: an autoethnographic account’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36 (October 2010), No. 4, 1023-1045.

⁴⁸⁹ Scott Reeves, Jennifer Peller, Joanne Goldman and Simon Kitto, ‘Ethnography in qualitative educational research: AMEE Guide No. 80’, *Medical Teacher*, Vol. 35 (2013), No 8, p. 1365.

⁴⁹⁰ Alison B. Hamilton and Erin P. Finley, ‘Qualitative methods in implementation research: An introduction’, *Psychiatry Research*, 283 (2020), reprint, p. 5.

⁴⁹¹ Nisarata Sangasubana, ‘How to Conduct Ethnographic Research’, *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 16 (March 2011), No. 2, 567-573.

⁴⁹² ES016.

⁴⁹³ ES016.

embedded'⁴⁹⁴. Through previous conversations, I had an opportunity to get immersed into their world and to approach this research in a way an anthropologist would – by observing what people do, why that makes sense for them and with which goal. All these experiences influenced the shaping of my overarching research question ('What meaning does 'normal life' have as a part of post-conflict recovery?') to guide the inquiry process not in a specific cultural context where people live like it would be an anthropological study, but in a more specific political context and a point of history where people recover from extreme violence. I aimed to answer that question through several sub-questions that emerged from the literature discussed earlier.

The first sub-question tested Jansen's assumption on 'normal life' being an object of hope and the post-liberal conclusion about the importance of everyday life. The lack of research on this topic in the Croatian context meant that there were no previous data to rely on. In practice, this also meant that the first sub-question had to be simple: Is 'normal life' a goal for people in post-conflict situations? This had an impact on the questionnaire which was designed in the early stages of this research with a slightly different purpose since the importance of 'normal life' was only one of the possibilities that could emerge from the data. Having this in mind, a range of questions relevant to peace-building and post-conflict recovery were included in the questionnaire such as peace, reconciliation, forgiveness, truth, justice, past, identity, reintegration into civilian life and safety. This resulted in an enormous amount of data linked to the peace-building field of study. It also enabled me to establish possible parameters and fluidity of 'normal life' as the data revealed that for different people it can include many different things; this further led to answering the second sub-question which was 'What is their understanding of "normal life" and what does it contain?'

The literature discussed in the previous chapter revealed there could be different understandings of normalised life after conflict. Liberal peace-building emphasised democracy, free market and a role of top level actors while post-liberal approach focused on everyday life and 'ordinary people'. Hybrid peace-building suggested a combination of these approaches opening the space for a communication between local and global, and between all the actors. As stated earlier, Richmond described this as localised peace-building.⁴⁹⁵ This flexibility combined with avoidance of fixed categories enabled an exploration of 'normal' without specific boundaries. All key elements of liberal and post-liberal peace-building were

⁴⁹⁴ Xymena Kurowska, 'When one door closes, another one opens? The ways and byways of denied access, or a Central European liberal in fieldwork failure', *Journal of Narrative Politics*, Vol. 5 (2019), No. 2, p. 76.

⁴⁹⁵ Richmond, *A postliberal peace*, p.3.

present in the questionnaire because they are somehow relevant for some understanding of ‘normal life’. I also included a large spread of different possibilities as I was aiming at an iterative process between what the literature says it is important for ‘normal life’ and what my participants told me was important for their ‘normal life’.

Using this approach, I was able to answer the third sub-question: ‘What are the key elements of “normal life” in the peace-building context they are experiencing?’. The literature focuses on the specific elements of the post-conflict transformation such as security, economy, development and some everyday issues, like health, which are all relevant to ‘normalisation’ after conflict. However, this was not sufficient to detect which ‘normal’ is indeed ‘normal’ to people in their own context, particularly when having in mind Spear’s argument about the need to provide ex-combatants with a role equivalent to the status they had during conflict.⁴⁹⁶ As a result, some questions focused on the details that matter to my participants as a part of their ‘normal’ and civilian life.

As I show in the empirical chapters, my data revealed that, apart from those peace-building themes which are somewhat a basic level of ‘normalisation’, what also matters to people are some other aspects of living which may not seem ‘basic’ in terms of survival, but involve finding happiness and satisfaction. These are, for example, a sense of fairness, having home as a safe space for personal growth, a feeling of accomplishment and being appreciated within community which is linked to one’s dignity and self-respect. This provides us with a different understanding of ‘normal life’ where this concept does not rely exclusively on topics relevant to peace-building such as truth, justice and reconciliation, but it expands beyond that and keeps changing to the point where what people truly want is living to the fullest. This is why this research partially relied on Nussbaum’s framework and Maslow’s hierarchy as my wish was to explore ‘normal’ beyond a purely peace-building context. Therefore, some questions about a quality of life and satisfaction with certain aspects of everyday life were also included in the questionnaire.

Furthermore, in this context the presence of other people cannot be avoided; thus, tackling a relationship with a former enemy who also happens to be a pre-war and/or a post-war neighbour was needed. Thus, the fourth sub-question was ‘How does “normal life” relate to transformation of post-conflict relationships?’ Hence, some questions in the questionnaire included reconciliation, a relationship with neighbours, identity, a sense of (in)security and willingness to accept the return of former enemies to their homes. In those questions, I

⁴⁹⁶ Spear, ‘Disarmament and Demobilization’, p. 145.

explored whether reconciliation was one of a fundamental issues for participants, as Lederach suggested⁴⁹⁷, or the emphasis was rather on co-existence, as Jansen⁴⁹⁸ and some other researchers concluded. Therefore, I relied on a contact hypothesis to find whether people feel more able to accept their former neighbours or if that previous closer bond was permanently damaged, thus, building new bonds is not desired. This also helped with unpacking the data about security due to closeness of the ‘neighbours’ and their influence in society being perceived as a new threat.

Answering the first sub-question depended on quantifiable information as my goal was to use statistical data to understand a broader context and show the main priority of participants after the war. This required reaching out to a larger number of veterans who filled the questionnaires. However, answering other sub-questions meant that asking very specific additional sub-questions was needed. As this required a more qualitative exploratory perception focused work that included what is experienced, how it is experienced and why it is experienced, I chose to combine the questionnaires with in-depth interviews. This approach provided participants with the opportunity to explain their answers in the questionnaires, explore their thoughts and feelings further, challenge their own perceptions and, consequently, give their insight into their understanding of ‘normal life’ as a subjective and dynamic process to answer the main research question about making sense of ‘normal life’ in the post-conflict society.

As emphasised earlier, this topic has been largely missing in political science. In the Croatian context academic work mainly focus on transitional justice and reconciliation and partially on physical and psychological health of veterans, but leaves out other areas of life, or ‘normal life’ as defined by participants in this research including the feeling of being active and appreciated. This is why it was necessary to address this important theoretical gap in deconstructing and challenging the assumptions about ‘normal life’ as an aim for post-war individuals and societies. The previous research on forgiveness and reconciliation after the Homeland War⁴⁹⁹ has also not revealed much about Croatian defenders’ thoughts on central issues to peace-building such as reconciliation, forgiveness, revenge, amnesty, transitional justice efforts and others. Although I explore and analyse how ex-combatants make sense of ‘normal life’, I also address observations of ex-combatants relevant to specific peace-building themes such as truth and justice. To be more specific, this research focuses on understanding

⁴⁹⁷ Lederach, *Building Peace*, p. 25.

⁴⁹⁸ Jansen, ‘If Reconciliation Is the Answer, Are We Asking the Right Questions?’.

⁴⁹⁹ Milas, Rimac, Karajić, ‘Willingness to Forgive and Be Reconciled after the Croatian War of Independence in Croatia’, 1151-1173.

the veterans' perception on establishing 'normal life' in the post-conflict society where 'normal' transformed. This happened due to significant political and social changes while the root causes of the conflict remain unsolved. This brings truth and injustice to the surface as an important part of 'normal' regardless of their understanding within the peace-building field. Therefore, this research explores different shades of 'normal' through various layers of 'normal life' starting from the impact of past events, safety and the possibility of a new war with the same enemy to the personal experiences of Croatian defenders in terms of their recovering from violence through reintegration into civilian or 'normal' life, their relationship with the 'other' and the impact of injustice on 'normal'.

3.2. METHODOLOGY: A CHOICE OF METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

To achieve the aims of this study and answer my research questions, this research focused on the use of inductive qualitative research methods as the central research component. As explained earlier, due to the complexity of the topic the main research method were in-depth interviews with ex-combatants. As Boyce and Neale emphasised, in-depth interviewing 'involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation', thus, interviews are useful when detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviours is needed or new issues have to be explored in depth.⁵⁰⁰ This is not about 'finding out more' because, as Burman argued, 'the difference between qualitative and quantitative research is not quantitative, but arises from subscription to a different interpretive framework'⁵⁰¹. Using that method can help explain how and why things happen as it is rooted in the belief that there are 'multiple realities shaped by personal viewpoints, context and meaning'⁵⁰². For example, during the interviews these multiple realities in the Croatian context emerged as the 'outside' reality where armed conflict ended, but its location was shifted to the 'inside' where peace-building and 'normalisation' continue as the conflict still exists.

Apart from providing more detail, interviews were also the most suitable method to answer my research questions because they were conducted one-on-one enabling participants to have a conversation in a more relaxed atmosphere, and because they were more flexible

⁵⁰⁰ Carolyn Boyce and Palena Neale, 'Conducting in-depth interviews: A Guide for Designing and Conducting In-Depth Interviews for Evaluation Input', May 2006, p. 3, <http://www2.pathfinder.org/site/DocServer/m_e_tool_series_indepth_interviews.pdf> [accessed 26 June 2020].

⁵⁰¹ Erica Burman, 'Minding the Gap: Positivism, Psychology, and the Politics of Qualitative Methods', *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 53 (1997), No. 4, p. 794.

⁵⁰² Shema Tariq and Jenny Woodman, 'Using mixed methods in health research', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, JRSM Short Reports, 4(6), 2013, <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3697857/>> [accessed 26 June 2020].

when compared to a more structured approach. This was particularly important because not all participants have the same experiences and not all of them found some experiences equality important. For example, some of them had no difficulties with returning to ‘normal’ after the war while others struggled, thus the need for different sub-questions. Also, some participants had a previous experience of living next to a former enemy and they had more to say about this while others had no such experience. Some spent four years on the battlefield while some were there for a brief period so the obstacles they faced were different. The list of differences goes on demonstrating how important in-depth interviews are when researching a topic where no individual can fit into all boxes and, thus, a more personalised approach is needed. The aim was to gain a better understanding of the ex-combatants’ interpretation of and response to the different challenges of post-conflict recovery and normalisation processes that help moving on from ‘negative peace’ to ‘positive peace’. Only this way was I able to explore a whole range of emotions and ideas about ‘normal life’ and all its aspects from the perception of the Croatian veterans.

Emotional experiences can be positive or negative, depending on how we look at them, but regardless, they are influencing our life and a perception of a possibly different life we could have. Many of the themes in the interviews were deeply personal and, in some cases, buried under layers of problems participants have been trying to solve. Some commented on this saying, ‘you are asking me difficult questions’⁵⁰³, ‘nobody asks us anything’⁵⁰⁴, ‘nobody listens to our voice’⁵⁰⁵, ‘nobody cares about us’⁵⁰⁶ and ‘what’s the point of telling you this, Englishmen won’t understand anyway’⁵⁰⁷. Some of them cried as they finally felt able to express their feelings when someone was actually listening⁵⁰⁸ while some took the opportunity to reflect upon their thoughts, describing that experience as healing⁵⁰⁹. In some cases, the interviews had to be interrupted and continued later to give the participants time and space to think about the topics they wanted to explore further and to gather their thoughts. Others kept talking for hours as they wanted to say everything they could not express before. Of course, there were also those who kept their answers short as they did not want to delve into the past because they felt that nobody cares about what they say.

⁵⁰³ FO023. ND030. WS001. ES037. Another participant used a word ‘complex’ instead of ‘difficult’. ES050.

⁵⁰⁴ ES027. ES037. FO025, FO039, OTH026, OTH061, OTH072.

⁵⁰⁵ FO005.

⁵⁰⁶ ND017. FO022. ES012. Another veteran described this feeling as ‘nobody sees you, sees you or understands you; thus, you feel lost’. FO044.

⁵⁰⁷ WS009.

⁵⁰⁸ For example ES037.

⁵⁰⁹ ES003. This feedback was given at the later stage during an informal conversation.

Overall, as explained in the previous subchapter, this exploration of normal was a profoundly emotional process for participants as we had to analyse some of their most intimate thoughts and feelings which consequently led to some emotional situations where they openly expressed their sadness, anger, frustration, and disappointment but sometimes also joy and nostalgia when they remembered friends no longer alive and the good times they spent together. As an educated person, I understood that this was mainly due to their way of interpreting the world around them which was affected by their emotional state; how ‘normal life’ is experienced and lived is not just a cognitive process. These layers of emotions occasionally contradicted each other as they were rooted in rational thinking and their understanding of specific topics which did not match other beliefs they hold. For example, when participants spoke of forgiveness, they kept emphasising they are Catholics/Christians⁵¹⁰ so they should be able to forgive the enemy, but the pain caused by the lack of justice prevented them from following what they thought was the right thing to do which led to more frustration. This demonstrated that sometimes there can be a disconnect between what we think or believe is right, and how we actually experience the world around us.

This emotional experience of participants presented a challenge for me. As an autistic person, I have little understanding of emotions and I rely on my inner logic that can only make some sense of emotions in a practical way, by observing people and their behaviour. Thus, if participants raised their voice when speaking about their employment opportunities, for instance, I concluded that they were agitated and that these issues were important in their understanding of ‘normal’. This served as an additional guidance in the data analysis as it helped me when answering my research questions using research data while spotting some tiny details which would perhaps go unnoticed in cases when those were not discussed in length as participants did not want to engage in further discussion. In such cases, the importance of their short statements was highlighted by their emotional reactions. Beyond that, emotional situations that emerged in interviews, mostly presented an obstacle as they caused interruptions followed by silence while I waited for participants to calm down unable to offer any verbal comfort due to my inability to link words and emotions. This resulted in my own anger as I felt like I was letting people down after asking them to share their most inner thoughts. On the other hand, these events encouraged me to pay more attention to expressions of emotions in specific topics of the data analysis.

⁵¹⁰ For example FO040.

The interviews, supported with secondary sources such as government reports, provided sufficient data to draw a number of points on post-conflict recovery, reintegration of ex-soldiers and normalisation of life, enabling facilitated cross-triangulation and capturing different dimensions and perspectives. However, as Boyce and Neale warned, ‘when in-depth interviews are conducted, generalizations about the results are usually not able to be made because small samples are chosen’⁵¹¹. Thus, the use of other methods had not been dispensed and combining research methods added an extra layer to this research. All participants – 300 in total – were asked to fill out the questionnaire⁵¹² first and a larger number of questionnaires with 33 questions resulted in a wealth of data. As explained earlier, my research questions required broad information from veterans including quantifiable information allowing for statistical analysis of the responses to provide, as some researchers highlighted, ‘detailed assessment of patterns’⁵¹³. Using questionnaires for this purpose was particularly useful as it was an efficient way of obtaining a large amount of data from a larger sample of people to represent a veteran population more accurately and enabling the researcher some general insight into specific topics. Conducting interviews with all of them would be impractical and time-consuming. Questions were standardised, so all participants were asked the same questions in the same order to ensure consistency.

A questionnaire included open-ended and closed questions so it yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. The majority of closed questions were designed in a way which offered participants a selection of pre-decided categories, including yes/no answers and longer lists of options, although some of them provided an additional space for participants to explain their answer if they chose so. Some closed questions also provided ordinal data suitable for ranking such as those that required measuring the strength of their attitudes of emotions (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). However, this approach was limiting as the responses are fixed leaving participants unable to express their true feelings and thoughts. To address this problem, a smaller number of questions were open-ended, for example those involving a definition of ‘normal life’ or reintegration into civilian life. This approach enabled establishing a broader context where connections between the data collected from the interviews are more visible and their mutual impact clearer, thus resulting in more general conclusions applicable in other societies and conflicts. However, many open-ended questions

⁵¹¹ Boyce and Neale, ‘Conducting in-depth interviews’, p. 4.

⁵¹² See Appendix 3.

⁵¹³ David L. Driscoll, Afua Appiah-Yeboah, Philip Salib and Douglas J. Rupert, ‘Merging Qualitative and Quantitative Data in Mixed Methods Research: How To and Why Not’, *Ecological and Environmental Anthropology*, Vol. 3 (2007), No. 1, p. 26.

in the questionnaires remained unanswered due to participants not wanting to write in length or not finding the right words to express themselves on paper. Some answers were simply too short for any insight, for example ‘bad’⁵¹⁴ or ‘difficult’⁵¹⁵ when answering on reintegration into civilian life, which further emphasised the need for in-depth interviews.

As stated earlier, questionnaires included a broad range of topics focusing on the veterans’ experiences of post-conflict recovery in terms of security, roots of conflict, relationships with the enemy, historical truth and justice. This was based on the intellectual approach and a broader understanding of ‘normal’ within the frames of liberal and post-liberal peace-building. Some questions also addressed attempts to return to ‘normal’ and recover from violence whether described as ‘reintegration’ or not. Thus, this research is not based on an assumption whether Croatian veterans should reintegrate into society. Instead, this research takes a step back arguing that at the local level Croatian defenders, as members of Croatian society, should be perceived as an integral part of a post-conflict transformation, recovery and ‘normalisation’ of life in their own communities who could perhaps support building a sustainable peace in different ways due to their specific experiences.

Taking a mixed methods approach resulted in a variety of data although the study was predominantly qualitative with a small quantitative component as the emphasis was driven mainly by the research questions discussed earlier. Using this approach, I wanted to avoid what Kendall described as qualitative results being glossed over, ‘with these data forced into preconceived questionnaire categories’⁵¹⁶. This was particularly important in this kind of research where the main topic cannot be forced into specific categories which led to the multi-disciplinary approach and the main focus on qualitative data. Qualitative methods were used to explain complex questions such as ‘why’ and ‘how’, mostly generated from the quantitative data. The major challenge was to integrate the different types of data in the analysis. As highlighted earlier, the majority of open-ended questions in the questionnaires remained unanswered so these issues were addressed and explored in depth during the interviews.

Since I primarily wanted to use quantitative data for setting the scene and providing some more general explanations, they were analysed separately to generate statistical data. On

⁵¹⁴ ES004, ND038

⁵¹⁵ ES010, ES022, ES025, ES041, WS018, ND002

⁵¹⁶ Quoted in: Lois R. Harris, Gavin T.L. Brown, ‘Mixing interview and questionnaire methods: Practical problems in aligning data’, *Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation*, Vol. 15 (2010), p.11. Originally published in: Lori Kendall, ‘The conduct of qualitative interview: Research questions, methodological issues, and researching online’, *Handbook of research on new literacies* (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008), ed. by J. Coiro, M. Knobel, C. Lankshear & D. Leu, pp. 133-149.

the other hand, I used thematic analysis in the interview responses grouped in a meaningful way around different aspects of ‘normal’. Using this approach, as Tariq and Woodman concluded, ‘the integrity of each data is preserved whilst also capitalizing on the potential for enhanced understanding from combining the two data and sets of findings’⁵¹⁷. Another challenge working with thematic qualitative data was the flexibility of ‘normal’ since there were no fixed categories. Instead, the majority of statements demonstrated fluidity tackling different themes at the same time. Thus, the grouping of responses was more difficult and time-consuming. To make things easier due to my disabilities – primarily autism and dyslexia, those data were copied as a part of different themes and coloured to emphasise that they served as a link to another set of data.

The interviewees – 60 in total – were chosen based on questionnaire answers and the region they come from. This was done to ensure approximately the same number of participants for all the previously occupied areas as well as the free territory. Also, approximately 5 per cent of all participants and the same percentage of the interviewees were women as this percentage matches an approximate percentage of all female Croatian defenders (4.9 per cent in 2011)⁵¹⁸. Based on the questionnaires, participants who were more willing to participate in the study and who explicitly expressed willingness to participate in interviews were identified. Some described it as ‘therapeutic’ to write their thoughts on paper⁵¹⁹, while others highlighted they had much more to say than they could write, and even expressed their disappointment for not being able to discuss their answers in more depth⁵²⁰. Those participants were offered to be interviewed and they mainly accepted. However, there were also those who expressed their disagreements with some questions and the main ideas behind those questions, and those who simply felt annoyed by the idea of reconciliation with a former enemy not wishing to discuss it any further and skipping a larger number of questions. To avoid any inconvenience or stress, none of these were interviewed.

During the identification of potential interviewees from the questionnaires, I paid particular attention to the variety of data and diversity of thoughts. This approach gave me the opportunity to truly see the participants as individuals instead of a group of people who fit

⁵¹⁷ Tariq and Woodman, ‘Using mixed methods in health research’, p. 6.

⁵¹⁸ Zoran Šućur, Zdenko Babić and Jelena Ogresta, *Demografska i socioekonomska obilježja hrvatskih branitelja prema Popisu stanovništva, kućanstava i stanova 2011. godine* (Zagreb, 2017), p. 11, <https://www.dzs.hr/Hrv/publication/studije/Demografska%20i%20socioekonomska%20obiljezja%20hrvatskih%20branitelja_Web.pdf> [accessed 20 June 2020].

⁵¹⁹ ES003. Feedback was given at the later stage during an informal conversation.

⁵²⁰ For example, ND054 wrote that ‘it would take more paper to explain’ while FO021 asked, when answering the question of a definition of ‘normal life’: ‘Is it even possible to explain it in this tiny space and is it even possible to write it on a piece of paper?’

‘into the box’ as I aimed to avoid any generalisations, such as treating the participants as ‘numbers’, and encouraging their personalisation. The richness of data collected from the questionnaires and interviews, which will be presented in subsequent chapters, demonstrates the complexity of this field of study, revealing at the same time potential contributions of former soldiers to future peace-building efforts.

For the purpose of this research, the participants were divided into three categories:

1. Ex-combatants who lived in one of the war affected regions before the war broke out and had neighbouring ties with other locals, including the enemy,
2. Ex-combatants who inhabited one of the regions after the war; and,
3. Ex-combatants who fought in one of the locations and have some knowledge of the relations with the enemy during the war, but never lived in the area.

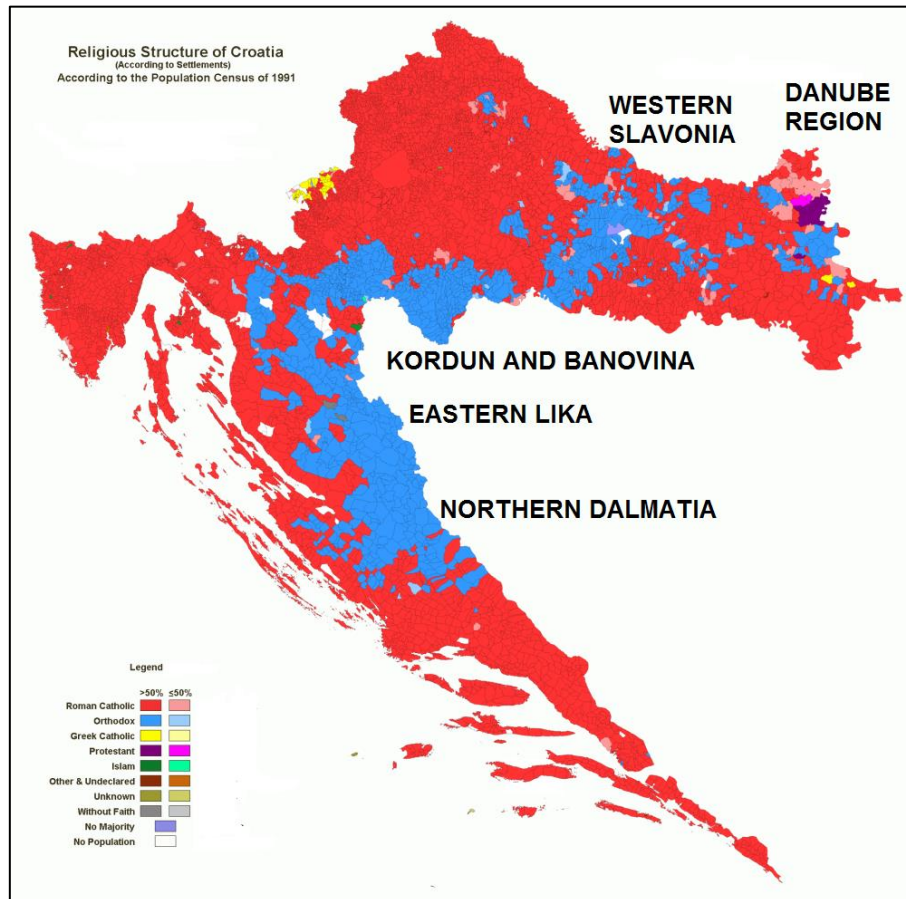
This enabled geographical diversity based on the set of variables such as significantly different conflict dynamics, demographics, and experiences in post-conflict transformation and development, which accurately reflect the veterans’ experiences. For example, the armed conflict broke out in Northern Dalmatia in August 1990 and attacks in several other regions followed. During that time, people of Slavonia mostly lived peacefully, until February and March 1991. The first major armed conflict between the Croatian police and Serb extremists occurred in the western part of that region. Shortly afterwards the ‘incidents’ escalated in Eastern Slavonia giving rise to the first mass crime. According to the 1991 census⁵²¹, there were almost 582,000 Serbs living in Croatia representing 12.16 per cent of total population. They largely inhabited regions in the border with Bosnia-Herzegovina from Vrlika in Dalmatia to Western Slavonia in the north and they were the majority of the population in most municipalities in that territory. This distribution of population along the border with military support in the hinterland, on Bosnian soil, had a significant impact on military operations in the Homeland War. After the war, some of these regions experienced dramatic demographic changes which possibly had an impact on the results of this research due to different neighbouring ties and identity perceptions. Knin in Dalmatia and Vukovar in Eastern Slavonia both have a symbolic meaning in the Homeland War. Knin was the place where the war started and was a symbol of a Serbian rebellion⁵²², while Vukovar became a symbol of the Croatian resistance and was named ‘Croatian Stalingrad’. In turn, while Vukovar

⁵²¹ See Appendix 4.

⁵²² This is also a region where the Serbian uprising in 1941 began in the exactly same locations and therefore it is an important part of the Croatian narrative.

remained a symbol of suffering and bravery, Knin became a symbol of victory and peace when it was liberated in 1995. Unlike Western Slavonia and Dalmatia, which were liberated in 1995, Eastern Slavonia is the only Croatian region that was peacefully integrated into Croatia, although this happened two and half years later.

Map 3: Religious structure in Croatia (1991) largely corresponded with the occupied territories⁵²³



Apart from exploring broader veteran populations in different parts of Croatia and avoiding potential biases in smaller geographical areas, another reason for dividing participants into three groups relates to distance and contact with the ‘other’, which was explained in the literature review. Based on this, I wanted to explore the process of normalisation of one’s life after the conflict from the perspective of those who live next to their former enemy as well as those who have no previous neighbouring ties with the specific

⁵²³ This map is available at https://bs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popis_stanovni%C5%A1tva_u_Hrvatskoj_1991.#/media/File:Croatia-Religion-1991.png [accessed 18 April 2021]. For the purpose of this study, I mainly focused on participants who live(d) or fought in Northern Dalmatia, Western Slavonia and Eastern Slavonia (Danube area).

location. This was done to establish whether distance is relevant to some aspects of ‘normal life’ such as safety and relationship with an enemy. Thus, distance is an important variable worthy of exploration when discussing normalisation after conflict. Using this categorisation, I was able to compare statistical data from questionnaires between each of these groups to investigate any significant differences.

The study population in this research are former soldiers who, due to different experiences in post-conflict Croatia, including the political situation, legal matters and their marginalisation, are often suspicious and reluctant to discuss what they have been through during and after the war. Hence, I approached the target population mostly through contacts with their former commanders and other trustworthy and reputable individuals, and, when necessary, their own local organisations were contacted. As stated earlier, while formerly conducting research in modern history, I developed contacts with many of these individuals. They were willing to be involved in this research and put me in touch with new contacts through a snowball technique. To reach ex-combatants from specific areas, I used different types of contacts to ensure that I spoke to a broader range of people. Participants therefore, are not just limited to friends, family members or members of the same military units, which helps avoiding possible selection bias.

The majority of those who were contacted, including their associations, responded positively with only one veteran organisation refusing to forward the questionnaire to its members explaining this decision by stating that they ‘were afraid that results that would be based on that kind of questionnaire could be interpreted as detrimental to Croatia, its people and history itself’. This was further justified by a comment that among their members there were also people of Serbian nationality and ‘in the war, we did not fight against the Serbs, we fought against the Greater-Serbia ideology that had been forced by some other Yugoslav ethnicities and not necessarily just ethnic Serbs’⁵²⁴. These concerns were related to questions on the identification of and relationships with their enemy where they were free to define the enemy in any way they like. Since that particular misunderstanding that the implied ‘enemy’ were the Serbs, it is important to note that among the participants in this research, including interviewees, there were veterans of different ethnic origin, including Serbs, Hungarians, Czechs and some veterans of mixed origin such as Italian and Croatian. As I discuss in the following chapters, the majority of participants identified their enemy in terms of former

⁵²⁴ Email received on 24 June 2017.

communist elites and the Greater-Serbia ideology sympathisers stating clearly that the ‘enemy’ is not the entire nation, in this case the Serbs, but the Chetniks.⁵²⁵

The individuals who refused to participate in the study mostly explained their decision by lack of time, unwillingness to remember hurtful past experiences, and poor health. Some encouraged their friends who had more free time to fill the questionnaire and stated that although they cannot participate, they would like to know more about the results and read the thesis one day. Others who participated and contacted me later asked if the thesis was going to be published. Although I approached approximately 1,000 people, whether they were potential participants or other contacts, the overall experience was positive not only with the veterans I contacted but also civilians who were also interested in the topic. Perhaps this interest exists because this is not just another book about a war but about something that everybody can relate to, particularly those who experienced any sort of crisis in their lives and who need time to heal and return to their ‘normal’. As I was finishing writing this thesis, some participants approached again saying that they had been reflecting more and more on events in society and their personal lives as participation in this research opened some new horizons and enabled them to rethink some processes we discussed and put them in a new perspective. One of them was surprised that he had never actually thought of ‘normal’ before which now pushed him in a new direction where he is reflecting upon his life and wishing to make some changes to live it to the fullest.⁵²⁶ Based on this feedback, it seems that at least some people came to the conclusion that they are indeed in the driver seat and with the shift in their mind-set they can create a new reality for themselves.

3.3. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As discussed earlier, this research project looked into grassroots peace-building and post-conflict recovery focusing on normalisation of life, and it was conducted in different regions in Croatia. Although statistical data from the questionnaires was used, due to the sensitivity of information and complexity of the topic the main focus was on one-to-one in-depth interviews with former soldiers.

⁵²⁵ Some (for example, ND024) also emphasised their strong support to the Croatian defenders of Serbian origin particularly focusing on Predrag Mišić, a veteran from Vukovar who was a Croatian soldier and who ended up in a POW camp after being captured. His own brother was on the other side and they have not heard from each other since the war. Danijela Mikola and Tina Ozmec-Ban, ‘Kao Srbin branio sam Vukovar dok ga je moj brat napadao...’, *24 sata*, 10 May 2019, <<https://www.24sata.hr/news/kao-srbin-branio-sam-vukovar-dok-ga-je-moj-brat-napadao-628651>> [accessed 17 May 2020].

⁵²⁶ ES037.

When I started this research, I thought carefully about several possible obstacles to this study. Firstly, I assumed it was highly likely that quite a few Croatian Army veterans experienced difficulties in the transition to civilian life which could possibly lead to PTSD and other health issues. This turned out to be correct as many of them emphasised this when asked about their reintegration into civilian life. Furthermore, I also assumed the possibility that discussing post-war recovery and past unsolved issues could bring back war memories causing more stress. Therefore, the possibility that participating in the research could cause discomfort was taken into account. This also proved to be correct as some participants refused to think about some events and chose to skip certain questions while some cried but still wanted to continue with the interviews as they felt the topic was important and their contribution relevant.

Apart from that, there were other important circumstances that had to be considered such as possible legal consequences and war crimes charges that some participants could eventually face. It was expected that the political situation and legal matters could lead to excessive concern that participation could cause them harm, especially because they are not familiar with ethical aspects of research at UK universities and, therefore, may think that their identity could be revealed. This also proved to be correct as a larger number of participants suspected they could be named. Thus, ethical considerations and university rules were highlighted, and interviews were organised to guarantee anonymity of all participants. It was emphasised that they would never be named nor would any personal details that could lead to their identification be revealed. All data they provided would be quoted using codes. The particular codes were chosen for pragmatic reasons and a future comparative data analysis between the different groups of participants. This resulted in the following codes: ES (Eastern Slavonia), WS (Western Slavonia), ND (Northern Dalmatia), FO (Fought only in those regions, but never lived there) and OTH (Others). Also, for each participant only one code was used; thus, linking a particular questionnaire with the same interviewee.

The majority of interviews were conducted one-on-one unless participants chose on their own to participate in group conversations with one to three other participants, chosen based on mutual trust and friendship. It seems that some participants felt more at ease when having a conversation with their friends rather than being alone with the researcher. Their conversation felt more relaxed, and although the researcher was present and occasionally interrupted with questions, participants were discussing the issues freely. My major concern was that a group conversation could lead to peer pressure where some interviewees could feel encouraged by others to support opinions different from their own. I faced the same dilemma

when I was thinking about focus groups as one of the options for conducting this research, but I disregarded it not only to avoid possible peer pressure, but also to reduce the possibility of participants finding out who else participated in the study, to ensure anonymity and to offer each participant a safe space where they could express their thoughts freely without fear of judgement by others.

This proved to be very important in some cases; for example, when he spoke of Franjo Tuđman, one participant said that ‘others would’ve eaten you alive if you said anything against him’⁵²⁷. This means that some thoughts he expressed during the interview may not come to light if he was surrounded by other veterans. The participants who chose a group conversation were older, their thoughts had been a result of their life experiences throughout the years, and they usually engaged in a very open discussion where they expressed different opinions. Instead of similar thoughts shaped by group pressure, the result was a very lively debate with a variety of contradictory thoughts which contributed to new questions discussed in more depth than the researcher hoped for. However, the vast majority of interviews were done one-to-one, and unlike group interviews, the participants were expressing their emotions more freely. This included occasional anger when they were asked about some topics or very deep grief when they remembered friends who were killed at war.

I was aware of the possibility this could happen before I started this research. This is why all participants were informed of all aspects of the project that could have been expected to influence their willingness to participate, and this research did not involve withholding information on the true objectives of the research, or deceiving participants in any way. Before individuals decided whether or not to participate, it was important for them to understand what their participation would involve and mean. They were asked to take time to read the participant information leaflet⁵²⁸ carefully, and talk to others about the study if they wanted to.

Firstly, they were briefed fully on the purpose of the study. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions about this research project, and I answered their queries honestly. Data collection was described clearly, and it was explained that some of them would be invited to the next phase which included in-depth interviews. Some participants worried their answers may not be ‘appropriate’ or that they may not ‘be suitable’ for the study, while others believed that the researcher may find their thoughts shocking and, therefore, judge

⁵²⁷ WS009.

⁵²⁸ See Appendix 1.

them.⁵²⁹ In cases like these, I explained the project in more detail. I emphasised that this study allows participants to tell their story and their experiences in their own words without relying on any sort of expertise. I also highlighted that there are no right or wrong answers, or ‘appropriate’ or ‘inappropriate’ thoughts, and that the only thing that matters is their honest opinion as their beliefs, feelings and opinions are valid. The majority of them had never participated in any research before, so this approach put them at ease, particularly when they noticed that ‘shocking’ statements such as those about a revolution and a military coup were acknowledged as equally relevant as any other.

Secondly, participants were told their participation was entirely voluntary, and they were free to withdraw from the project at any stage, for example, if their participation caused them any discomfort or stress. In situations when I noticed that this could be the case, participants were offered to take a break or stop the interview. In some cases, the interview was continued several days later, while some participants chose to finish with their answers in writing. One of them informed me later that he found filling the questionnaire therapeutic because that process gave him the opportunity to process some of his thoughts and feelings for the first time⁵³⁰.

Furthermore, participants were informed that there were no direct benefits for participating and that no payments would be made. As stated earlier, they were told that any information they shared would be treated as confidential, and their identity would be anonymised. As previously highlighted, this study focused on their experiences, which makes all data somehow ‘personal’, although not in a traditional sense. Therefore, huge effort was made to ensure that no identification of who produced which information was to be revealed to the public at any stage of the project or later. This effort included protecting participants’ privacy using codes replacing their names. Some participants were extremely supportive of this kind of research and wanted to encourage others to participate. I emphasised that it is the researcher’s responsibility to keep their personal information safe and not to reveal anyone’s participation to third parties, but if they wished to discuss anything with other people, it was their personal choice to do so.

Also, I explained to participants they are free not to answer any particular questions they may find uncomfortable or distressing. For some of them this was extremely important because they felt ‘unable’ to answer some questions. In some cases, they did not have an opinion on particular topics, while in others they felt they lacked knowledge or sufficient

⁵²⁹ These thoughts were expressed during informal conversations when my fieldwork started.

⁵³⁰ ES003.

information. They expressed their worry that they could not or should not participate in the research because of their ‘inability’ to answer all questions.⁵³¹ They felt relieved when they realised that answering all the questions was not necessary, and they were free to skip those they found difficult. Lastly, participants were informed about a complaint procedure at the University of Warwick, as well as different support systems in place in Croatia in case they felt discomfort or stress.⁵³²

Once all these issues had been discussed, and when participants acknowledged they understood everything clearly, they were asked to give their consent by signing a written consent form⁵³³. After that, participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire⁵³⁴ which took between 30 and 60 minutes to complete depending on how many questions they answered and whether they wanted to discuss either in depth. They submitted their answers in person or via email. In addition, a number of participants were asked to participate in more in-depth interviews, which were scheduled at a convenient time either on the phone, in Skype or via email, depending on the participants’ choice.

Interviews were also carried out with the prior consent of participants and an individual consent form was used with all interviewees. Before the interview, I familiarised participants once again with ethics in research, including the aspect which was the most important to them – confidentiality of their data and their anonymity. It was emphasised again that the details that would allow individuals to be identified would not be published or made available to anyone not involved in the research project unless explicit consent was given. Participants were also told that they have the right to withdraw their consent to participate in this research and that their interviews would also be ‘labelled’ with their own code, which would ensure protection of their identity. All data was stored on an encrypted hard drive and all personal information of participants was treated confidentially. The data remained confidential throughout the study and ten years from the completion of the project, the data will be destroyed⁵³⁵.

My own safety was also considered when conducting this research project. Certain measures had been taken such as maintaining regular contact with supervisors during

⁵³¹ These thoughts were expressed during informal conversations when my fieldwork started.

⁵³² See Appendix 1.

⁵³³ See Appendix 2.

⁵³⁴ See Appendix 3.

⁵³⁵ University of Warwick website. Available at

https://warwick.ac.uk/services/ris/research_integrity/code_of_practice_and_policies/research_code_of_practice/datacollection_retention/ and

https://warwick.ac.uk/services/ris/research_integrity/code_of_practice_and_policies/research_code_of_practice/datacollection_retention/record_keeping/ [accessed 23 June 2020].

fieldwork, being aware of where to meet interviewees, what their background was, and if there was any possibility that they could pose a threat. The majority of interviews were conducted online due to time and financial constraints and to ensure that participants felt comfortable in their own space and at the most convenient time.

3.4. CONCLUSION

The fieldwork for this research faced some obstacles which were discussed in this chapter and which were addressed in a timely manner. They were largely rooted in the participants' scepticism and disappointment which were a result of their past experiences and worries that emerged when an idea of 'normal life' was explored for the purpose of this study. My own origin proved to be helpful to build bridges with those participants who were unfamiliar with my previous research as I am a Croatian citizen who spent most of my life in Croatia and, thus, I had a better understanding of Croatian specificities which an outsider would not be able to attain fast enough. I was also able to conduct the interviews in the Croatian language and all questionnaires were in Croatian. This was an enormous advantage as the majority of participants did not have language skills to participate if the research had been conducted in a foreign language and they would have not been able to express their deepest thoughts.

In some cases, my origin was a disadvantage as participants often skipped to explain their ideas in depth commenting 'well, you already know what I mean' due to our shared background. In such cases I reminded participants I needed them to tell me in their own words what they meant because as a researcher I cannot 'assume' and write down their thoughts as I 'feel' it could be correct. This did not cause any problems in our communication and, in fact, in many cases it made participants laugh. Overall, my origin and my previous historical research granted me an access to the population whose trust is difficult to attain and many participants have stayed in touch. Furthermore, my autistic mind enabled me to approach this exploration of 'normal' from an 'abnormal' plane while understanding nuances and challenges the participants faced on their 'normal life' journey when being labelled as 'abnormal'. Reflecting upon this at a later stage, I realised that this acted as a bridge between the academic world and 'ordinary people' due to my oral communication being 'different' and 'simpler'; thus, enabling me to 'translate' academic issues into 'normal life' language and vice versa; hence, bringing them closer instead of talking past each other. Putting the participants at ease and approaching them as people whose voices are of utmost importance when discussing 'normal life' in a post-conflict society was followed by their willingness to

support this research and have their voices heard, in many cases for the first time. This resulted in a huge amount of data, far more than needed for this thesis. This indicates the wealth of directions that this research could have taken and the importance of the topic. Through my process of data analysis, in the empirical chapters I was able to focus on the key aspects that provide an important insight into the world of post-conflict 'normal'.

CHAPTER 4

IN PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS:

‘NORMAL LIFE’ AS AN (UN)REACHABLE DREAM

I was lost. I was 19 when the war started and 24 when it ended. Overnight I had to become a quiet, calm and pleasant person. Everything that was normal in war was no longer normal. The hardest thing was a lack of contact between people and pretending to be a normal person.

A member of MUP⁵³⁶

‘There is no more peace-building to be done, no puzzle that needs to be solved’, concluded Pol Bargués Pedreny arguing that ‘peace-building is increasingly adopting a turn to ontology’ as it is ‘opening up to the reality of conflict-affected zones’ instead of focusing on ‘questions related to the difficulties of closure’.⁵³⁷ As discussed in chapter 2, Bar-Tal concluded that occasionally people continue to live ‘normalised conflicted lives’⁵³⁸. In that ‘reality’ there is no closure, at least not in the way it is understood in liberal peace-building. In other words, perhaps there is peace as there is no armed conflict, but this does not mean that there is a stable peace where any kind of conflict is excluded. Furthermore, this version of ‘closure’ may not include reconciliation as one of the goals of liberal peace-building. As explored in the literature review, for some people the emphasis could be on something different and rooted in their everyday life practices. In such cases, the question is what ‘reality’ is and how we define it. If there is no closure, is there another goal which has been pursued and if there is, how do we know if we reached it or not? In this chapter I argue that

⁵³⁶ ND048.

⁵³⁷ Pol Bargués Pedreny, *From the Liberal Peace to Pragmatic Peacebuilding to the Reality of Post-conflict Zones* (2015). This article was published on the European Consortium for Political Research website and it is available at <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/7af8b485-6d09-4db8-8c42-8fa681439109.pdf> [accessed 22 January 2020].

⁵³⁸ Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, p. 46.

‘normal life’, which emerged as a concept in Jansen’s research, also came into the focus of participants in this study as one of the main objectives after the war or at the time when they left the army. Using my data, the aim of this chapter is to show that ‘normal life’ is a challenging concept to define as it is ever-changing and, thus, it is difficult to ‘measure’ it, particularly in terms of a ‘closure’. One participant in this research even argued that ‘there is no normal life; everything is just life in different circumstances’.⁵³⁹

One of those ‘circumstances’ is certainly a background related to one’s origin, history, tradition and upbringing as these explain how our identity and the understanding of the world around us, including ‘normal’, have been shaped. As stated earlier, all participants in this research were brought up in the same society as I was. During my first 14 years of life, I knew of nothing else but life in communism; that was my life ‘in different circumstances’. Addressing this issue, one participant said that, although his ‘normal life’ was the one before the war, this was because ‘we did not know any better than life in communism, but that was not normal because it was a communist dictatorship and you could live in peace only if you were quiet’⁵⁴⁰. Thus, from today’s perspective that version of ‘normal’ was missing something. Being silent was ‘normal’, but in a democratic society freedom of speech emerged as an important value which challenged previous experience of ‘normal’ and transformed it. Therefore, the previous version of ‘normal’ was defined by particular circumstances that were beyond one’s control and where securing the sanctity of the most private aspects of life was often challenged as it required some sort of sacrifice. For example, although I was indoctrinated at school⁵⁴¹, at home I was largely influenced by my grandmother whose mother was taken to a German concentration camp and never returned. After the war, her dad struggled to survive with four minor children. He was not a partisan and later, he refused to join the Communist Party although that was somehow expected or ‘normal’! My grandmother said this was due to his loyalty to the Catholic Church and his family. Consequently, his family had never received any financial support to rebuild their home and my great-grandmother was never registered as a war victim although her death was documented in 1944 and the document was found in 2014. She did not count because she was the wife of someone disloyal, an outcast. Over the years I found out that my parents were ‘disloyal’ too. They had a job, but they could not get a promotion and a flat, as many others did. Therefore, we had to rent and we spent many years living in a mouldy basement without a bathroom and

⁵³⁹ FO032.

⁵⁴⁰ ND025.

⁵⁴¹ What kind of indoctrination this was is explained in the footnote 170.

our toilet was in a backyard; thus, their political beliefs severely influenced our quality of life. We were punished because we were ‘abnormal’ as a silent opposition to the regime and our lives were very different from the lives of thousands of others whose ‘normal’ was better because they were loyal. As the interviewee quoted in the introduction of this thesis said, ‘there is a thin line between normal and abnormal as what is normal to one person may not be normal to another’⁵⁴². This blurred line often took place in private lives where people felt freer to explore who they really are and opting for preserving their ‘detrimental’ beliefs while being aware of the walls that had ears. But in the public sphere they had to meet a minimum of accepted ‘normal’ – this included being silent about ‘disloyal’ war victims to avoid punishment and potentially prison. This created a rift between a desired ‘normal’, an aspiration for what is ‘good’ and hidden within the boundaries of one’s ‘home’ – including various layers of ‘home’ as explained earlier, and ‘normal’ experienced in everyday life; thus, transforming that aspiration for a different ‘normal’ into a pursuit.

Due to this complexity, this chapter is partially influenced by the movie *The pursuit of happiness*⁵⁴³. In the movie, the main character accomplishes his dream despite all obstacles and argues that happiness is something we can pursue but perhaps we will never have⁵⁴⁴. Looking back at my data, I realised that this is how participants approached the idea of ‘normal life’ while happiness emerged in the context of ‘home’ discussed in chapter 1. ‘Normal’ is something which could be beyond our reach, something we pursue and keep pursuing, something that is hard to define, but we still speak of it as a goal in life. It is not only about living; it goes much further than that as it is often described through the lens of those things that we do and do not have at a specific point of time, and it keeps expanding through those different layers of ‘home’ that need to be protected in order for one to grow. Thus, ‘normal life’ is at the same time the reality that is currently being experienced and the ideal which has been pursued. As one participant put it, ‘normal life means to hope for the best and prepare for the worst’⁵⁴⁵. This is because living is a form of art, and each character in

⁵⁴² OTH010.

⁵⁴³ This is a deliberate spelling error. The word is written as it showed on the graffiti wall in the movie. The details about the movie are available at <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0454921/> [accessed 12 April 2020].

⁵⁴⁴ The main character Chris Gardner also commented on how strange it feels to see the word ‘happiness’ in the historical document and adding that Thomas Jefferson was an artist. This refers to the sentence in the US Declaration of Independence (1776): ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.’ Full text available at <https://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/> [accessed 12 April 2020].

⁵⁴⁵ FO033.

this ‘life movie’ is a sculptor who faces his own ‘disturbers of harmony’⁵⁴⁶ and shapes his own version of ‘normal life’. This way the idea of ‘normal life’ is rooted in a harsh reality where ‘disturbers’ are constantly challenging us to question the world around us while we keep looking for something better and our place in it. It is a journey of personal transformation and growth within the ever-changing environment.

In the context of peace-building, if there is one place where that harsh reality of all shades of ‘normal’ could be experienced years after the conflict, this can be found on the bottom of Lederach’s pyramid where, as Richmond argued, ‘peace and war are experienced most acutely’⁵⁴⁷. This is why Bargués Pedreny partially based his critique of peace-building on the works of Beatrice Pouligny who documented how the liberal approach to peace overlooks the ‘stories written at the community level’⁵⁴⁸. Pouligny analysed societies ‘from below’ by examining the complexity of everyday practices that resist organisational structures relying on a reflexive methodology.⁵⁴⁹ She paid careful attention to daily life to get as close as possible to the views of local actors. Therefore, participants in this research were asked to dig deep into their thoughts to figure out what it is they really want, and how they would like to achieve it. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, this was a profoundly emotional process for them and me as a researcher as together we had to explore some of their most intimate thoughts and feelings, including those that, according to their observations, they had never articulated before.

‘Daily’ or ‘everyday’ life is a complex arena where various actors of peace-building meet and interact. Having said that, I particularly had two arguments in mind when discussing ‘life’ with participants. I assumed that in the community where peace and war are experienced so severely, this highly likely had an impact on every or almost every segment of life; thus, I was interested in exploring this idea further including the transformation of life in different circumstances. Furthermore, Bargués Pedreny moves away from the ‘human-centred cul-de-

⁵⁴⁶ In the movie *The pursuit of happiness*, the main character mentions the need to identify your ‘disturbers of harmony’ and he identifies them as the things that keep you from moving forward, including people, thoughts, and notions that tell you that you cannot achieve something.

⁵⁴⁷ Richmond, *A postliberal peace*, p. 16.

⁵⁴⁸ Quoted in: Bargués Pedreny, *From the Liberal Peace to Pragmatic Peacebuilding to the Reality of Post-conflict Zones*, p. 2. Originally published in: Béatrice Pouligny, ‘Civil Society and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Ambiguities of International Programmes Aimed at Building ‘New’ Societies’, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 36 (2005), No. 4, 495–510.

⁵⁴⁹ Quoted in: Bargués Pedreny, *From the Liberal Peace to Pragmatic Peacebuilding to the Reality of Post-conflict Zones*, p. 2. Originally published in: Béatrice Pouligny, *Peace Operations Seen from Below: UN Missions and Local People* (London: Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2006).

sac that has trapped the liberal peace and its critique'⁵⁵⁰. In an attempt to conceptualise peace-building in terms of Graham Harman's object-oriented philosophy, he emphasises that reality runs independently from human understandings. Post-conflict zones are described as 'spaces saturated with subject *qua* objects that superficially relate, deliberate and quarrel over peace, while their deeper realities remain isolated'⁵⁵¹. Or, as discussed in the literature review, in the public domain, the emphasis is on peace, reconciliation and forgiveness; while privately people often feel nothing but grief and anger⁵⁵² which influences their personal reality and their experience of the current version of 'normal'. As Bargués Pedreny highlighted, 'openness to the myriad of objects, rather than looking for closure, seems to be the way forward'⁵⁵³. In that reality, all actors keep negotiating in search for new avenues of peace and interacting endlessly. This is a process that never ends and, therefore, 'there are no more theories of peace to be discussed'⁵⁵⁴. Having this in mind, I also concluded from my data that a concept of 'normal life' is a subject to a constant change meaning it never ends and if it has an impact on creating peace, then peace-building as a process never ends either. Thus, this research excludes particular goals of liberal peace-building, such as reconciliation, as a form of 'closure'. Furthermore, 'normal life' seems to depend on personal interpretation of the current reality making it subjective and occasionally even an isolated experience. This concept also includes feelings of disappointment and/or hope often rooted in the past which leaves it in constant 'under construction' mode because the transformation of our interpretation of reality can be swift and sudden.

To explore 'normal', in this chapter I focus on the first two research sub-questions. Firstly, I discuss which objectives the participants had after the war and what they desired the most; thus, answering the sub-question: Is 'normal life' a goal for people in post-conflict situations? Secondly, I explore the veterans' understanding of a new reality through their definitions of 'normal life' and the elements their lives require to be more than just 'living' and to become 'normal living'. Using these empirical data I answer the second research sub-question: What is their understanding of 'normal life' and what does it contain? As discussed in previous chapters, one of the main problems I faced here was the lack of definition of what 'normal life' is, including for those who survived a full-scale conflict. I wondered if

⁵⁵⁰ Bargués Pedreny, *From the Liberal Peace to Pragmatic Peacebuilding to the Reality of Post-conflict Zones*, p. 7.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁵⁵² Brewer, *Peace Processes*, p. 36.

⁵⁵³ Bargués Pedreny, *From the Liberal Peace to Pragmatic Peacebuilding to the Reality of Post-conflict Zones*, p. 9

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 10.

participants could even imagine what ‘normal’ feels like in the world where a new ‘normal’ could actually be everything that used to be ‘abnormal’ before the war, or perhaps a perception of ‘normal’ was severely disturbed by conflict. For example, one participant emphasised a strong impact of violence on ‘normal’ saying that ‘normal life is everything that is normal to those who did not experience war’⁵⁵⁵. This statement highlights how important safety is to create an opportunity for ‘normal’ even if we accept that ‘normal’ comes in different shades. Also, I try to establish what ‘normal life’ should or could be and using empirical data, I demonstrate its subjective nature.⁵⁵⁶ Lastly, I briefly explore how participants graded some areas of their lives to establish their level of satisfaction and I tackle the main problems that act as ‘spoilers’ to establishing ‘normal life’ in post-conflict Croatia. Therefore, this chapter will not only answer the first two research sub-questions, but also highlight obstacles that ‘normal life’ is facing in the specific peace-building context.

4.1. IN PURSUIT OF WHAT: ‘NORMAL LIFE’ AS A MAIN PRIORITY

In this subchapter, I briefly explore how ideas of ‘normal life’ emerged as central in analysis of the veterans’ post-war experiences and motivations; thus, answering the first research sub-question: Is ‘normal life’ a goal for people in post-conflict situations? This was based on one of the main questions in the questionnaire, which was also explored in-depth during the interviews. The results are presented in the table below.⁵⁵⁷ Given that the participants were allowed to choose up to three options, the total percentage added up to over 100.

⁵⁵⁵ ES017.

⁵⁵⁶ Due to lack of research in this study area, I had to rely on other sources, primarily those concerned about the quality of life and what individuals are capable of doing. Although I have drawn on peace-building literature to design the questionnaire, in my analysis of participants’ definition of ‘normal life’ I made a comparison to academic works in other fields, such as Martha Nussbaum (philosophy, law and ethics) and Abraham Maslow (psychology). My interest in both researchers has come from my research results which revealed some similarities to their work, and, therefore, they will be occasionally tackled in the empirical chapters.

⁵⁵⁷ The question about priorities after the war drew attention and led to a very high number of responses. Only four participants did not provide an answer to this question, while three of them said they were still in the military and therefore, unable to answer. Thus, 293 participants did answer this question, including only five who chose peace-building initiatives as one of their answers.

Table 1: What were the veterans’ primary concerns at the time when they left the Army? (in percentages)⁵⁵⁸

	TOTAL	EASTERN SLAVONIA	WESTERN SLAVONIA	SLAVONIA (EAST AND WEST)	NORTHERN DALMATIA	FOUGHT IN THOSE AREAS	FOUGHT ELSEWHERE
My personal relationships	15	18.51	9.67	15.29	15.85	23.40	9.30
My children	42.33	48.14	58.06	51.76	31.70	57.44	34.88
My social life and friends	22	18.51	16.13	17.64	21.95	25.53	24.41
Seeking justice	38.66	46.29	48.38	47.05	48.78	31.91	24.41
Wanting to know the truth about past events	14.33	14.81	12.90	14.11	17.07	12.76	12.79
My health	31.66	29.62	25.80	28.23	34.14	36.17	30.23
Getting on with ‘normal’ life	60	61.11	64.51	62.35	57.31	61.70	59.30
Getting a job	12	11.11	9.67	10.59	15.85	4.25	13.95
Getting involved in civil society	4.33	3.70	3.22	3.53	2.44	6.38	5.81
Getting involved in peace-building efforts	1.66	0	0	0	0	2.12	4.65

My data confirm that the veterans’ main priority was indeed ‘normal life’, as Jansen suggested. Sixty per cent of participants chose that option with minor differences between the regions although the analysis in the next subchapter shows that all possible answers somehow mapped onto ‘normal life’ depending on individual circumstances or preferences. Furthermore, a broader discussion about peace revealed a diversity of answers which demonstrated that in the Croatian context peace-building includes ending the war/violence, negotiation, refugees returning homes, demining, and other elements⁵⁵⁹ of the processes usually attributed to peace-making and peace-keeping as they enable the soldiers to go back to their civilian lives. As one participant said, ‘we won the war and that is our contribution’.⁵⁶⁰ This suggests ensuring that ‘home’ is safe as this is the place where ‘normal’ takes place. Therefore, participants had a clear idea of what peace-building means to them although this

⁵⁵⁸ Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Question 3.

⁵⁵⁹ ES001. ES007. ES051.

⁵⁶⁰ ND050.

idea does not necessarily map onto the liberal intervention model of peace-building activities. For them, what actually happens after the end of conflict is a pursuit for ‘normal life’ within ‘home’ instead of a pursuit for peace. When it comes to the ‘other’, ‘the opposite side does not want to talk honestly’⁵⁶¹; thus, emphasising the importance of truth.

This could imply that veterans were not interested in peace-building initiatives. However, looking back at the data, it is obvious that the problem is more complex. Some stated that ‘a smaller percentage of veterans who were active in the veterans’ associations did participate in peace-building’⁵⁶². Others emphasised that veterans were excluded from peace-building ‘because nobody has ever asked us about anything’⁵⁶³. Some suggested exclusion due to political reasons.⁵⁶⁴ One participant argued that ‘they do not let us be included because we are a burden to society and some people see us as a threat to their visions’⁵⁶⁵. He was not the only one who pointed a finger at political elites and their alleged reluctance to accept former soldiers as valuable peace-building partners. Hence, veterans believe that they were marginalised on purpose and by political actors that perceived them as ‘spoilers’ or simply irrelevant players in the political arena. Consequently, a new reality was created for people instead of with people, meaning they were excluded from designing a new reality on their local level and reshaping ‘normal life’. It also seems that they were convinced that the only way to support peace was through organisational and political structures, and once you were excluded, you were unable to influence this process as an individual on the local level and in everyday life; thus, leaving a pursuit for ‘normal life’ outside the peace-building context.

However, the data also revealed a tension between survival and peace-building as for some participants being involved in something that did not appear to directly contribute to everyday living seemed to be a luxury. Someone stated that only ‘local sheriffs’ had such a

⁵⁶¹ ND058.

⁵⁶² ES003.

⁵⁶³ OTH072. ES037.

⁵⁶⁴ Another one who also wanted to do the same said that ‘he wanted to help people, but ‘detudjmanisation’ prevented him from doing it and I was forcibly retired’. (ND045) A participant from Eastern Slavonia spoke in detail about his experiences and said that ‘I was not politically active and, therefore, I was unable to join the structures because they were distinctly party structures and you had to join the HDZ so I realised that there was nothing for me there and I gave up’. He also added that ‘those who were leaders of those structures had an idea how to do things, and they reject other opinions and due to centralisation they are not flexible to accept other ideas’. (ES040)

As explained earlier, the term ‘detudjmanisation’ refers to political and social changes which started after the death of the first Croatian President Franjo Tuđman in December 1999. Darko Hudelist, ‘Svi se na njega pozivaju, svatko ga tumači kako želi, ali ga malo tko razumije. Što je uopće tuđmanizam?’, *Jutarnji list*, 1 October 2019, <<https://www.jutarnji.hr/globus/Globus-politika/svi-se-na-njega-pozivaju-svatko-ga-tumaci-kako-zeli-ali-ga-malo-tko-razumije-sto-je-uopce-tudmanizam/9425042/>> [accessed 20 May 2020].

⁵⁶⁵ WS017.

privilege, while the rest of the population is struggling with everyday living and many veterans are without any income⁵⁶⁶. This implies that perhaps a larger number of veterans would have been interested in peace-building if their post-conflict lives had not faced obstacles that challenged their own survival. Although their lives were no longer in everyday physical danger on the frontlines, they still continued to live in conditions threatened by other struggles⁵⁶⁷. Here, the efforts to survive in peace emerged as a potential obstacle to participation in peace-building initiatives regardless of their definition. Thus, it is necessary to satisfy some basic needs to enable people to get engaged in those activities which are not perceived as necessary while in a survival mode. In the following subchapters, I take a closer look at what ‘normal life’ should be and which obstacles it faces.

4.2. WHAT IS ‘NORMAL LIFE’ AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT?

As discussed in the literature review, there is no definition of ‘normal life’ or discussion of what it should be and what it includes. In Jansen’s research, it emerged as a desirable priority in some societies where reconciliation shows up only on horizon, but a definition was still lacking. I address this important theoretical gap in deconstructing and challenging the assumptions about ‘normal life’. Therefore, in this subchapter I explore a range of definitions of ‘normal life’ and what this ideal could be; hence contributing to the second research sub-question: What is the participants’ understanding of ‘normal life’ and what does it contain? As stated earlier, our perception of ‘normal life’ varies as it becomes a spectrum of numerous shades depending on our experiences, desires and goals.

Given the research findings in the previous subchapter when it was established how ‘normal life’ was prioritised, it is necessary to look into the participants’ understanding of that concept. In my everyday life, I often hear the phrase: ‘I just want to have a normal life’ or ‘I just want to live normally’. The whole idea seems to be so simple, but this question posed a serious difficulty to participants and in many cases it went unanswered or participants questioned what ‘normal’ actually is. One veteran specifically stated that he ‘lost a sense for normal’⁵⁶⁸. Another one added that ‘it could sound strange, but back then I was like a lost child like many of us and, for starters, I had to find and rebuild myself’⁵⁶⁹. In both cases, it

⁵⁶⁶ WS016. ES003.

⁵⁶⁷ This included everything from putting food on their table, providing for their families, renewing or keeping their homes, struggling with health problems, looking for a job or trying to reintegrate into an old workplace to personal and professional relationships being broken and finding a new place in society.

⁵⁶⁸ ES021.

⁵⁶⁹ OTH058.

seems that the disruption due to the war – or its ‘abnormalities’, as Astore put it – caused in their lives, led to the moment where participants needed some time to realise what it was they truly wanted and to ‘find’ themselves again. This can explain why so many chose ‘normal life’ as their priority instead of focusing on specific aspects of ‘normal’ such as friends, job or health. They simply needed time to rethink their war experiences within their personal reality, put them into a new perspective and decide what to do next to lead more satisfactory lives.

Most participants who answered the question focused on the elements that, according to them, represent pieces of ‘normal life’. They include: family, including raising children, a sufficient income to support the family without sacrificing food or clothing in order to pay bills, an income which means living instead of surviving, good and friendly relationships with neighbours, socialising with friends, and enjoying life, such as travelling or visiting friends. Some participants highlighted having a job which ‘makes you happy’⁵⁷⁰ or ‘based on your abilities’⁵⁷¹. One interviewee included all these elements into his definition of ‘normal’ stating that ‘normal life’ is a ‘system’ that enables all the above.⁵⁷² Safety also plays an important role in building ‘normal life’; thus, one participant emphasised that the country needs ‘a strong army and it has to react to anomalies in society’⁵⁷³. Some veterans spoke of health, while others focused on morals and the role of religion in their personal lives such as ‘living according to the laws of God’⁵⁷⁴. One participant argued that there is no such thing as ‘normal life’ because ‘normal life would be to live by God’s Ten Commandments, but nobody does that today as everything around us is abnormal and immoral’⁵⁷⁵. Another expressed his anger with modern development of the world stating that ‘normal life is the one without perverted moral values, such as gender ideology, being imposed through the media and laws’⁵⁷⁶. These statements symbolise a clash between traditional and new or the unknown resulting in a sentiment of ‘normal life’ which can no longer exist as the moral values the participants cherish are gone. Reducing stress also plays a significant role in the definition of ‘normal life’. Some participants highlighted ‘living without stress’⁵⁷⁷ or ‘having a tiny house at the edge of the forest where I could occasionally run away from stress and recharge’⁵⁷⁸. Another interviewee added that in ‘normal life’ a person should be able to develop their own social,

⁵⁷⁰ ES046.

⁵⁷¹ ND003.

⁵⁷² OTH042.

⁵⁷³ WS002.

⁵⁷⁴ ND053.

⁵⁷⁵ ND048.

⁵⁷⁶ ND029.

⁵⁷⁷ ES043.

⁵⁷⁸ OTH058.

cultural, physical and intellectual needs.⁵⁷⁹ Someone described normal as ‘the ability to easily fit into your surroundings without any complexes’⁵⁸⁰ while another identified it as ‘having peace in your heart’⁵⁸¹; therefore, referring to inner peace which emerged in the introduction of this thesis when ‘home’ was discussed. All those wishes were described by some participants as reasonable desires, or something that should be expected in peace and a ‘normal’ thing to do. One veteran optimistically put it differently: ‘normal life’ is ‘a fixed situation with no need to fix it yourself in different ways’⁵⁸². Another said that ‘normal life’ is a life ‘without orders’ which are normal in the military, ‘but civilian life is something else’⁵⁸³. For statistical purposes, the most common keywords in these definitions were: family (37%), health (13.33%), job (12.66%), friends (8.66%), children (8.33%), life without stress (5.66%) and finances (4%).

As stated in the previous subchapter, this short analysis of participants’ answers is particularly important. When asked to choose between one and three primary concerns they had at the time when they left the army, participants were offered ten possible answers. Although only one of them was ‘getting on with normal life’, their definitions of ‘normal life’ included many possible answers: personal relationships (family), children, social life and friends, health, getting a job and getting on with normal life (peace/no stress). Thus, the number of participants who chose one or more options within a ‘normal life’ topic is significantly higher – 92.33 per cent⁵⁸⁴ Therefore, these data support Bargués Pedreny's argument about the necessity to open up to the reality of conflict-affected zones and they strongly confirm Jansen’s insight about ‘normal life’ being the focal point of post-conflict life regardless of its exact definition.

Perhaps many people around the world would agree that these results are not surprising at all. As I said, many of us often say that we want ‘normal life’. However, based on the answers given by participants, a human understanding of ‘normal’ varies and it can be significantly expanded beyond someone’s assumption of what ‘normal life’ could be as it is

⁵⁷⁹ ES040.

⁵⁸⁰ ND041.

⁵⁸¹ ES046.

⁵⁸² ND003.

⁵⁸³ WS006.

⁵⁸⁴ That means that only 16 participants who answered the question did not choose at least one of the ‘normal life’ options if we define a ‘normal life’ in a more basic term relying on two suggested models. Among them were nine who wanted justice, two who were seeking truth, one who wanted to get involved with civil society and one person who chose both justice and civil society. One participant was interested in his pension which could count as a ‘normal life’ element replacing employment, another one was thinking about what he was fighting for while some others were ‘robbing the country’ (WS017) and the other one got involved with politics.

very subjective and dynamic. As stated earlier, while discussing his ideas about ‘normal life’, one participant said that, although his normal life was the one before the war, this was because ‘we did not know any better than the life in communism’⁵⁸⁵. Reflecting upon his experiences in communism, another veteran stated, ‘although I got a degree and a job and that was a ‘normal life’, it is a different issue whether I was satisfied with that life in which I had to keep my mouth shut and think carefully about what I am going to say, where and in front of whom’⁵⁸⁶. This example shows how a perception of ‘normal’ at that specific moment of time was heavily influenced by the expectations of society which deemed different behaviour as ‘unacceptable’ and, even punishable. Thus, our experience of ‘normal’ is a subject to change due the circumstances which are often beyond our control and where the boundaries of ‘normal life’ are pushed beyond the limits of our personal space; hence highlighting a temporal element impacting our understanding of ‘normal’. Therefore, a pursuit for ‘normal’ does not necessarily mean returning to ‘old’ as it can emerge as a desire to construct something new that people believe would be more ‘normal’ in comparison to ‘old’.

The flexibility of the concept can be demonstrated by the participants’ vision of post-conflict Croatian society and the future in general. One veteran stated that he tried to live a peaceful family life, but he also aimed at ‘putting events in the context of a specific time when they occurred, including looking at the future instead of the past’⁵⁸⁷. Another participant believes that ‘normal life’ is ‘a normal inclusion in the community where I live because the Croatian defenders cannot be prisoners of war although that stays within’⁵⁸⁸. The emphasis in these cases is on dealing with the past, healing and moving forward; however, to do that learning the truth is needed. When participants tackled truth and justice, some argued that ‘if we had had a normal country, this would’ve been resolved by now’⁵⁸⁹. However, ‘we are all prisoners of former communist structures and their ‘truths’; and there is no justice in this world’⁵⁹⁰. Some lost faith that anything would ever change⁵⁹¹ as they find these goals ‘utopian’⁵⁹² while others believe that ‘justice is above all of us and eternal’⁵⁹³ because ‘none of us can avoid the last judgement’⁵⁹⁴. For some, ‘justice has to win and truth does not have

⁵⁸⁵ ND025.

⁵⁸⁶ ND025.

⁵⁸⁷ ES042.

⁵⁸⁸ FO036.

⁵⁸⁹ ES037.

⁵⁹⁰ ND047. ND020.

⁵⁹¹ ND003.

⁵⁹² ES046. ND025. ND047.

⁵⁹³ ND020.

⁵⁹⁴ ES016.

an alternative'⁵⁹⁵ because they are preconditions of 'normalisation'⁵⁹⁶ and 'a better future'⁵⁹⁷. These statements reveal that truth and justice are not only a part of a 'normal life' journey but also something that would have been accomplished if 'normal' was actually achieved. Without them, there is no 'complete normal'; there is only an aspiration for what 'normal' should be. If this fails, the only hope left is a spiritual realm where truth is known and justice can be served as it no longer depends on human beings. This realm belongs to the broader understanding of 'home', as discussed in the introduction of this thesis. As a former member of HOS stated, 'home' is also 'a spiritual house'⁵⁹⁸, the place where one becomes complete as there are no obstacles to this aspiration for a more perfect 'normal life'. Likewise, someone described 'normal life' as 'a life in which we have found a spiritual peace which gives us an opportunity to devote ourselves to other things, to our families, to people as a whole'⁵⁹⁹. According to him, that is life without uncertainty in which 'the truth of the past will overcome so we no longer have to discuss communist crimes and the life in which I can tell who I am and what I am without being labelled as a criminal'⁶⁰⁰. This definition tackles our identity and freedom to be whoever we are regardless of our past as a burden and this is experienced in the sanctity of 'home' as a 'spiritual' category.

Some participants focused on a sense of injustice experienced in everyday living. For example, one interviewee highlighted that 'normal life' would be the one 'where we all have equal and just opportunities for our merits' and 'where truth, justice and honesty are first and foremost, and valued'⁶⁰¹. Another participant said that 'a man should have enough and live in normal conditions' meaning 'having everything normal from birth to death, including an education and the right to work, instead of having planes full of people moving to Ireland'⁶⁰². This interviewee went a step further with a critique of the government as he emphasised the fact that in the past few years thousands of Croats moved to other EU countries leaving this participant with the belief that they had to leave their home in order to create conditions for 'normal life'.⁶⁰³ Moreover, 'patriots leave Croatia, and the scum stays', added another veteran concluding that he does not want to even think about the Croatian future.⁶⁰⁴ A female veteran

⁵⁹⁵ ES050.

⁵⁹⁶ ES042.

⁵⁹⁷ OTH055.

⁵⁹⁸ ES033.

⁵⁹⁹ ND019.

⁶⁰⁰ ND019.

⁶⁰¹ ES037.

⁶⁰² ND018.

⁶⁰³ ND018, ES003 and ES048.

⁶⁰⁴ WS030.

highlighted that ‘engaging in normal life was very difficult’ because she had come across ‘a number of bureaucratic obstacles’ in exercising her rights. Therefore, ‘injustice is present at all levels of society’ and support was available only within her family.⁶⁰⁵ This answer focuses on the barriers in society that act as ‘disturbers’ to having ‘normal life’. Due to dissatisfaction with official politics, one participant concluded that the path to ‘normal life’ should be done via a larger number of referendums as this would give people an opportunity to decide for themselves and shape a more beneficial ‘normal’.⁶⁰⁶ Another interviewee expressed his interest in ‘participating in the socio-political life’ of his local community while ‘respecting all legal norms of the Republic of Croatia’⁶⁰⁷. ‘If you do not participate, you are nowhere, but if you do participate, you can represent your interests and those of people you represent’, he said and concluded that ‘this contributes to normal living’.⁶⁰⁸ However, some said that ‘normal life’ is a life ‘without political pressure’⁶⁰⁹ or ‘a life which is not burdened by political problems’⁶¹⁰. These statements focus on the impact of politics on everyday life and questioning whether taking an active role is beneficial. What matters is to have ‘Croatia with truly Croatian authorities where Croats will not be second class citizens in their own homeland’⁶¹¹. In this example, the definition acts as a critique of political elites and government as the emphasis is on Croats not having all the rights they should have.

These aspects of ‘normal life’ also include some of the main issues of peace-building – truth and justice – including our freedom and the right to be whoever we would like to be. Therefore, if we accept previous broader definitions of ‘normal life’ including personal relationships, children, social life, job and health, and if we upgrade them with the elements of truth and justice as suggested here; that would mean that percentages represented in the previous table would be demonstrating an even stronger prevalence of ‘normal life’. What is more important, participants do not only speak of finding out the truth about events that took place during the Homeland War which they experienced. This goes much further, decades before most of them were even born. Participants speak of truth about the Second World War that still occupies Croatian media on an almost everyday basis and that led to 45 years of communist repression and human rights violations that were the overture to the Homeland War. They also speak of justice, but not only regarding historical wrongdoings that had

⁶⁰⁵ ES004.

⁶⁰⁶ ES048.

⁶⁰⁷ WS026.

⁶⁰⁸ WS026.

⁶⁰⁹ ES055.

⁶¹⁰ ES029.

⁶¹¹ WS030.

implications on the life of the entire nation or a larger part of it. Veterans' minds are focused on justice in terms of their own rights that have been denied or somehow affected, including the right to authenticity and freedom to speak out as Croatian defenders without being subjected to criticism or insults. This is a very personal experience of injustice which in many cases contributed to the sense of isolation within society, thus shaping their identity as 'Croatian defenders' identity and leading to their inability or struggle to leave the past behind and have the 'normal life' they desire.

Some participants went a step further. One veteran focused on 'positive relationships in the family and society'⁶¹². Another interviewee described 'normal life' as 'taking care of basic needs, understanding others and their contact with my life, giving and receiving love from them, not reacting negatively to things I don't want, and forgiving everyone who hurt me and not taking revenge'⁶¹³. He explained this by accepting God at the time when he faced his own mortality. One participant summarised it as 'doing good every day as much as possible and feeling fulfilled every morning when I look in the mirror'⁶¹⁴. Another veteran said that 'normal life' is 'Sunday lunch after Mass' and a 'willingness to sacrifice yourself for another'⁶¹⁵. Some added that 'normal life is like history, a battle for goodness'⁶¹⁶. Although answers like these are extremely rare, they show that among the veterans there are those who try to live in the present, unburdened by the past and not worrying about a future that they cannot control anyway. Instead, they focus on the reality in which their personal thoughts and feelings can create a better place for themselves, and perhaps for others making them an example of the mindfulness practice as the emphasis is on doing something beneficial now. Consequently, 'normal life' becomes a very profound personal experience of the world as they see it, the vision of reality which rejects evil and allows only the good to cross its boundaries. They do not necessarily speak of reconciliation, but they do speak of forgiving, finding their own peace and moving on. This is the shade of 'normal life' which could potentially lead to building new bridges towards reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

According to Nussbaum, different elements of a 'better life' should be supported by a democratic society. As stated earlier, Croatia has been a democratic country since the early 1990s. However, many participants whose ideas were explored in the previous paragraphs

⁶¹² ND047.

⁶¹³ WS012.

⁶¹⁴ WS015.

⁶¹⁵ WS014.

⁶¹⁶ ND020.

highlighted the obstacles they have been facing when trying to achieve ‘normal life’ even in the environment which is presumably supportive. Their responses did not only emphasise their desires, but also the reasons behind their disappointment with society and politics which somehow seems to miss some democratic values, such as seeing every man as equal. This lack of fulfilment of one’s hopes or expectations is even more visible in the answers of a smaller group of participants which were far less optimistic about ‘normal life’. One of them described it as something that is unreachable for him.⁶¹⁷ The reasons for this could be numerous, but one disruptive element is hidden in the fact that veterans face a fear of being a burden to society⁶¹⁸. This fear is partially based on reporting by the Croatian media which often emphasise their ‘privileges’, including pensions, housing and health care.⁶¹⁹ In a country which has been facing a huge economic crisis since 2008, there is a certain percentage of the public which disapproves of spending taxes on veterans thinking that this money should be spent more wisely.⁶²⁰ Humiliating and insulting comments are often present on social media and they fuel the sense of alienation and marginalisation that Croatian defenders experience.⁶²¹ Thus, one participant concluded that the ‘normal life of Croatian defenders should be like one of other members of Croatian society, and not a life in which you are impelled to be a burden’⁶²². When asked to clarify this during the interview, he stated that ‘the defenders did their part in the Homeland War and were ready to give their lives to defend the homeland; and for this participation, they were granted some rights called privileges which

⁶¹⁷ ES022.

⁶¹⁸ WS003, ND031 and FO035.

⁶¹⁹ Tomislav Mamić, ‘Jesu li branitelji privilegirani I trebaju li dobiti 7 posto dionica od prodaje HEP-a?’, *Jutarnji list*, 14 January 2017, <<https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/jesu-li-branitelji-privilegirani-i-trebaju-li-dobiti-7-posto-dionica-od-prodaje-hep-a/5503827/>> [accessed 15 April 2020]. ‘Osuda stigmatiziranja hrvatskih branitelja’, *HVIDRA official website*, <<https://www.hvidra.hr/2208/osuda-stigmatiziranja-hrvatskih-branitelja/>> [15 April 2020]. Ivan Miklenić, ‘Imaju li branitelji razloga za prosvjed?’, *Udruga hrvatskih branitelja Domovinskog rata policije Brodsko-posavske županije official website*, 3 January 2015, <https://www.udruga-policije-bpz.hr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=75:imaju-li-branitelji-razloga-za-prosvjed&catid=9&Itemid=101> [accessed 15 April 2020]. Anamarija Bilan, ‘Tražimo povrat umanjениh mirovina 2010. i 2014. godine’, *Zadarski list*, 28 November 2019, <<https://www.zadarskilist.hr/clanci/27112019/trazimo-povrat-umanjenih-mirovina-2010-i-2014-godine>> [accessed 15 April 2020].

⁶²⁰ ‘Održan okrugli stol o mirovinskom sustavu i mirovinama hrvatskih branitelja’, *Ministarstvo hrvatskih branitelja official website*, 9 October 2019, <<https://branitelji.gov.hr/vijesti/odrzan-okrugli-stol-o-mirovinskom-sustavu-i-mirovinama-hrvatskih-branitelja/3434>> [accessed 15 April 2020].

⁶²¹ ‘HVIDRA RH osuđuje govore mržnje saborskog zastupnika Kreše Beljaka i objave na društvenim mrežama usmjerene protiv hrvatskih branitelja’, *Informativni centar Virovitica*, 27 January 2020, <<https://www.icv.hr/2020/01/hvidra-rh-osuđuje-govore-mrznje-saborskog-zastupnika-krese-beljaka-i-objave-na-drustvenim-mrezama-usmjerene-protiv-hrvatskih-branitelja/>> [accessed 15 April 2020]. ‘Dr. Nenad Horvat: Džaba vam srebrna medalja kad ste govna, smeće i smradovi’, *Magazin Plus*, 20 July 2018, <<https://magazinplus.eu/dr-nenad-horvat-dzaba-vam-srebrna-medalja-kad-ste-govna-smece-i-smradovi/>> [accessed 15 April 2020].

⁶²² WS003.

are being presented as a burden to society at all times'⁶²³. He argued that 'some other groups also have special rights, such as pilots, miners, police officers, professional drivers, but yet, they have never been pressured like veterans' who, due to these reasons, have no conditions to have 'normal life'.⁶²⁴ Another interviewee added that he had not experienced 'normal life' since retirement because 'wherever we appear, others immediately label us as fools who lost our minds and they are ridiculing our contribution to the Homeland War, especially those who are in power and armchairs'⁶²⁵ and who have never tasted the war'⁶²⁶. 'The only thing we can do is to fight them'⁶²⁷, he concluded implying another very deep division – not the one between them and the enemy, but the one within society. Another participant summarised this feeling of being someone undesirable as a constant pressure 'to prove yourself in terms that you are not this or that' and this has a significant impact on family life and other aspects of 'normal life'.⁶²⁸ As a result, 'some people sank, some floated'⁶²⁹.

It is understandable that this leaves a bitter taste in the mouth of many veterans and strips them away from any possibility of having 'normal life', regardless of its' definition. This also explains why it was so hard to define what 'normal life' should be. 'What is normal life after the war, after everything I have been through and seen?', asked one of them concluding that he is unhappy when he sees what is happening with the country he fought for and that he is left with nothing but dissatisfaction.⁶³⁰ Another participant agreed with him and said: 'What is normal life today? It is gone, especially for us'⁶³¹. Furthermore, he commented on my questionnaire saying:

Let's use this example of testing. I can stop doing it because I don't feel good, but if it is going to help anyone, I will keep going as long as I can. For me, that is normal, but it is not normal life. In the background, I can hear music, to calm me down and periodically wake me up. I do not know what the definition of normal life is because I did not have one for 27 years. It is like looking at someone else's yard, it's a farce. Like a house with a beautiful façade, but inside there is nothing but dirt.⁶³²

⁶²³ WS003.

⁶²⁴ WS003.

⁶²⁵ In Croatia, the phrase about someone being in an armchair means that person is actively involved in politics and has power over others, but the position was not earned in a just manner.

⁶²⁶ WS017.

⁶²⁷ WS017.

⁶²⁸ WS004.

⁶²⁹ WS004.

⁶³⁰ ES051.

⁶³¹ WS004.

⁶³² WS004.

In this case, even an attempt to define ‘normal life’ provoked stressful thoughts. Another veteran said that ‘normal life should be a life with a smile, a life in which you can be carefree and stupid’⁶³³. Based on the answers of other participants, it would be difficult to expect veterans to have a life with no worries. How difficult it is to imagine what ‘normal life’ should be, demonstrated another interviewee who simply said that ‘normal life’ is ‘my life before the war’⁶³⁴. He explained this by saying that he used to be a pacifist and a hippy and he used to read a lot, which is something he does not do anymore because ‘I cannot’.⁶³⁵ This statement indicates that for a certain percentage of the veteran population ‘normal life’ may never be a possibility because the war did take place, and it changed the course of their lives forever. It changed them as people and took away some small pleasures they once had and which made their lives ‘normal’. That same pessimism was significantly emphasised by another veteran who said that ‘normal life’ is ‘a lie and deception’⁶³⁶ while another concluded that he did not have ‘normal life’ for 27 years⁶³⁷ as ‘it ended when we went to war’⁶³⁸. ‘We all had dreams and planned something different’, he highlighted expressing a feeling that at some point in life everyone’s life was ‘destined by someone else’⁶³⁹. These data demonstrate that ‘normal life’ is indeed a complex topic and a very personal one, and its perception depends on personal experiences and circumstances. Hence, there is no unique and definite definition.

4.3. ‘NORMAL LIFE’ FACES OBSTACLES

In the previous subchapters, I relied on Jansen’s observation that in Bosnia he had found ‘normal life’ as an object of hope. I focused on exploring this topic in the Croatian context and I discussed how participants identified ‘normal life’ as their main priority after leaving the army and which aspects of their lives the definition of ‘normal life’ included. It was also emphasised that many struggled with finding the words to explain what it is they truly hoped for and those who managed to do so often spoke of obstacles they faced and kept expressing their disappointment. I came to the conclusion that there is no unique definition of ‘normal life’ as it is a very flexible concept that largely depends on someone’s experiences, circumstances and interpretation of reality. If something is difficult to define and if no

⁶³³ ES034.

⁶³⁴ WS013.

⁶³⁵ WS013.

⁶³⁶ ND048.

⁶³⁷ Meaning from 1990.

⁶³⁸ WS004.

⁶³⁹ WS004.

definition matches all cases, it could be nearly impossible to measure how accomplished it is. That is why in this subchapter my goal is not to establish how achievable ‘normal life’ is, but to explore how satisfied participants are with theirs as this would give me an indication of the participants’ interpretation of the part of their reality focused on their living conditions and some basic needs based on Maslow’s hierarchy. As a result, this subchapter further contributes to answering the second research sub-question while adding an additional layer which does not explore what ‘normal life’ should contain. Instead, this subchapter highlights those aspects of the current experience of ‘normal’ which act as obstacles to a desired ‘normal life’.

For the purpose of this research, all participants were asked to answer the question ‘How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your life today?’ which focused on some key topics that emerged from their definitions of ‘normal life’ such as job, finances, family and health. They were also asked to grade their life in general on a scale from one to five, where one meant unsatisfied and five meant satisfied.

Table 2: How satisfied the veterans are with the following aspects of their life (with an average grade)⁶⁴⁰

	TOTAL	EASTERN SLAVONIA	WESTERN SLAVONIA	SLAVONIA (EAST AND WEST)	NORTHERN DALMATIA	FOUGHT IN THOSE AREAS	FOUGHT ELSEWHERE
Job	2.94	3.15	3.11	3.13	2.80	3.05	2.81
Finances	2.61	2.84	2.83	2.84	2.39	2.51	2.64
Family	4.12	4.34	3.72	4.12	3.74	4.45	4.28
Health	2.62	2.47	2.60	2.51	2.69	2.56	2.69
Life in general	3.23	3.34	3.06	3.23	3.10	3.45	3.21

From the data represented in the table above, it can be concluded that participants are particularly unhappy with their financial situation. This issue was graded as below average (below 3) in all Croatian regions. Their health was graded slightly better, but once again with a below average grade. Those participants who are already retired chose not to grade job related issues. Those who did, gave an average grade of 2.94 with an above average grade (3.13) in Slavonia. This could potentially imply better employment opportunities in the North which is surprising given that in the past few years, Croatian media has often reported about

⁶⁴⁰ Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Question 5.

abandoned villages in Slavonia and mass exodus to other EU countries.⁶⁴¹ Another surprising result was such a low satisfaction with job prospects and finances as a very small percentage of participants focused on their employment at the time when they left the army, as shown in table 1. This discrepancy could be due to the fact that in the majority of cases this was over 20 years ago when they were younger and perhaps believed that they would not struggle with finding a job. This is something I can relate to because I clearly remember the rush of adrenaline I felt in the first months and even years after victory when I was fully confident that the future ahead of me was bright. At the time, I felt that the worst was behind me and in my homeland which fought for its' independence for five years only beautiful things can happen in the future, including happiness and prosperity. However, I ended up being unemployed and with occasional, temporary jobs for another 12 years despite two bachelor degrees and a master's degree. In the UK, I finally received an opportunity for professional growth and living which was more than just mere survival. Due to these personal experiences, I can understand why many participants were not concerned about a job in the victorious 1990s as they believed this was something that would be sorted out because society would not leave the victors poor and hungry. As emphasised in the literature review, an extensive study of the people's expectations in Northern Ireland revealed that employment opportunities contributing to a 'better life' were among the most expected results of the peace process in those communities that were directly influenced by violence.⁶⁴² However, it seems that a 'better life' for Croatian citizens remains another distant object of hope, and based on this, a shift of the perception of employment problems is understandable. Many veterans grew old while waiting for that future to come and in a situation when burdened by health issues, age and other problems, an impact of the lack of financial means keeps growing as well. The only 'normal life' element which is a source of their satisfaction was family which was graded as very good (4) with minor deviations in Western Slavonia and Northern Dalmatia. Given that 37 per cent of all participants defined 'normal life' in terms of family and 44.33 per cent said it was their family who supported them at difficult times, it can be concluded that satisfactory personal life is relevant to the normalisation of someone's life. However, an average grade (3) given to their lives in general demonstrate that family is not everything and more is needed to have a truly accomplished 'normal life'. This certainly needs to include better health care for

⁶⁴¹ 'Prazna sela i napuštena zemlja: Situacija u Slavoniji je loša ali ne kao što predstavljaju mediji', *Net.hr*, 15 March 2017, <<https://net.hr/danas/hrvatska/prazna-sela-i-napustena-zemlja-situacija-u-slavoniji-je-losa-ali-ne-kao-sto-predstavljaju-mediji/>> [accessed 16 March 2020]. Mislav Pislak, 'Prazna Slavonija, Mladi odlaze i odvođe cijele obitelji', *Global*, 22 June 2019, <<https://www.globalnovine.eu/reportaza/prazna-slavonija-mladi-odlaze-i-odvođe-cijele-obitelji/>> [accessed 16 March 2020].

⁶⁴² Atashi, 'Challenges to conflict transformation from the streets', p. 51.

army veterans, employment opportunities which were particularly highlighted by Dobrotić in the literature review, further schooling and developing new skills to increase employability, and sufficient income that can support a ‘normal’ standard of living, without sacrificing its’ quality.

In 2017, the Ministry of Croatian Defenders published a report titled *Demographic and socioeconomic features of Croatian defenders*, the first of its kind since the end of the Homeland War.⁶⁴³ The study demonstrated that there are no significant differences between the living standard of veterans and the general population and that the percentage of retired veterans is only slightly higher than in the general population.⁶⁴⁴ At the same time, they are actually more active in terms of employment and there is a smaller percentage of unemployed veterans compared to the general population. However, 6 per cent of the veteran population has no income. These data show that veterans are not privileged, as some media reports have been presenting it to the public. Their living standard differs according to the area where they live, but this is due to the economic development of the particular region. These differences are important as they encourage development of a programme for lifelong learning which would equip the veterans with new skills strengthening their potential and employability. Overall, these research data support the belief of participants in my research that they are indeed not a ‘burden’ to society.

The same research analysed health issues veterans are facing. The results showed that 23 per cent of the veteran population has difficulties in carrying out everyday tasks due to long-term illness, age or disability. Also, the data revealed that 56.3 per cent have damaged internal organs, while 36.3 per cent have difficulties with mobility. This explains the dissatisfaction of army veterans with their health which was expressed in my research. However, it is important to note that data about their health also show that veterans are overall more mobile than the general population. This does not mean that their specific health needs should be neglected. In fact, they should be recognised on time in order to receive proper treatment. This is in line with my research results where veterans expressed their wish for better health care as part of pursuing ‘normal life’.

⁶⁴³ The data were collected during the most recent population census in 2011. M. Šu., ‘Studija pokazala: Branitelji nisu drugačiji od ostalih i nisu privilegirani’, *Tportal.hr*, 1 July 2017, <<https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/studija-pokazala-branitelji-nisu-drugaciji-od-ostalih-i-nisu-privilegirani-20170701>> [accessed 18 May 2020].

⁶⁴⁴ Šućur, Babić and Ogresta, *Demografska i socioekonomska obilježja hrvatskih branitelja prema Popisu stanovništva, kućanstava i stanova 2011. godine*, p. 55.

It is obvious from the previous table that achieving a better quality of ‘normal life’ is difficult, and there is more to be done, at least from the perspective of those who experienced violence most acutely. The data demonstrate veterans’ disappointment with many aspects of their personal lives. However, the definitions of ‘normal life’ given by participants revealed how deeply one’s personal sphere interconnects with other issues in the entire society, such as safety. To understand this better and to identify potential obstacles veterans are facing when trying to achieve ‘normal life’, participants were asked to think about some problems Croatia has been currently facing and to grade them on a scale from one to ten where one is extremely serious and ten is the least serious problem(s). They were offered ten different issues that could be grouped around several topics – or ‘disturbers of harmony’. The first one was political (in)stability which focused on three potential problems related to past, present and violence: a) Instability and threats of war in the region; b) Political turnabouts in the country, and c) Unsolved issues from the recent past. The second group was law and order with two issues: a) Crime and corruption, and b) General insecurity and lawlessness. The third one was about a quality of life, including: a) Unemployment, b) Low standard of ex-combatants and material deficiencies, and c) Care for war victims and Croatian defenders. The final group focused on the potential for improvement with two basic ideas: a) Lack of moral and traditional values, and b) Lack of hope and faith in a better future. The data are presented in the table below with an average grade for each topic in each category:

Table 3: The most serious problems Croatia is currently facing (with an average grade)⁶⁴⁵

	TOTAL	EASTERN SLAVONIA	WESTERN SLAVONIA	SLAVONIA (EAST AND WEST)	NORTHERN DALMATIA	FOUGHT IN THOSE AREAS	FOUGHT ELSEWHERE
Unemployment	3.00	3.24	2.86	3.10	2.95	2.97	2.95
Low standard of ex-combatants and material deficiencies	4.20	4.94	4.13	4.65	4.04	4.21	3.90
Lack of moral and traditional values	3.17	4.31	2.76	3.76	2.97	2.63	3.05
Care for war victims and Croatian defenders ⁶⁴⁶	3.86	4.66	4.72	4.70	3.36	3.60	3.65
Instability and threats of war in the region	5.82	6.05	5.93	6.01	5.78	6.32	5.26

⁶⁴⁵ Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Question 8.

⁶⁴⁶ One participant stated that ‘in the beginning care was organised well, but this lasted only until 1995 and over time it got worse’. ND047.

Political turnabouts in the country	4.67	5.33	3.76	4.77	4.70	5.32	4.15
Lack of hope and faith in a better future	3.77	4.72	3.73	4.37	3.33	3.84	3.52
Crime and corruption	2.68	3.77	1.93	3.10	2.36	2.46	2.63
General insecurity and lawlessness	3.61	4.28	3.42	3.96	3.36	3.84	3.35
Unsolved issues from the recent past	3.80	4.35	3.56	4.07	3.59	4.02	3.61

A lower average grade represents extremely severe problems. Looking from the perspective of participants, these are crime and corruption (2.68) described by one veteran as ‘a source of all evil’⁶⁴⁷, then unemployment (3.00) and lack of moral and traditional values (3.17). In the next group are general insecurity and lawlessness (3.61), lack of hope and faith in a better future (3.77), unsolved issues from the recent past (3.80) and care for veterans and war victims (3.86). Low standard of veterans (4.20), political turnabouts (4.67) and threats of new war in the region (5.82) were identified as the least severe problems.

When compared with particular themes mentioned earlier, it is clear that topics relevant to the quality of life were graded quite differently. Unemployment is one of the most difficult issues Croatia faces. This result confirmed the data I already discussed when participants expressed their dissatisfaction regarding their employment. Given the fact that a very small percentage of participants prioritised getting a job after they left the army, this discrepancy was explained by a temporal shift. In the majority of cases, they returned to civilian life in the second half of the 1990s which means approximately 20 years before this research was conducted. As they grew older, their health deteriorated and became one of their concerns as well. At the same time, many of them got married or had more children meaning they had to provide for their families. Hence, the circumstances changed over time and due to the temporal element those issues that were not that ‘relevant’ immediately after the war, such as employment and health, became more serious; thus, the benchmark for ‘normal’ is influenced by a certain quality of life over time and according to circumstances.

Care for war victims and veterans was in 7th place, while low standard and material deficiencies of Croatian defenders was 8th. Having the last two elements in such a low place is actually in line with the previously mentioned research study *Demographic and*

⁶⁴⁷ ES016.

socioeconomic features of Croatian defenders which showed that there are no significant differences between the living standard of veterans and the general population. My data show that although the veterans who participated in this research may not be satisfied with their lives, they do not identify their problems as the most important ones in Croatian society, and instead they focus on general issues which the entire society is experiencing, such as high levels of unemployment which led to mass exodus to other EU countries in the past few years. This can be linked to nepotism and corruption in the country which were identified as the most severe Croatian problem. Also, crime can be a consequence of a lack of morality, which was also graded with a very low average grade, and in the end, all these factors lead to general insecurity, identified as the 4th most important problem.

Although some issues had been tackled during Croatia's accession negotiations with the EU⁶⁴⁸, such as corruption (2.68) and lawlessness (3.61)⁶⁴⁹, it seems that from the perspective of 'ordinary people' – in this case army veterans – the situation on the local level has not changed sufficiently or the progress is too slow to be noticeable. Consequently, this diminishes faith in a better future and the cycle ends here. The post-conflict reality has not met people's expectations and this causes a slippage between the two ideas explored in this chapter – 'normal' as an ideal and the way it is actually experienced. If people lack hope and faith in the future, they can hardly imagine what their better life should be. If there are no jobs or if workers are underpaid, they cannot support their families, especially their children and their education. If their children are not educated well, the question remains as to what kind of future they will have. If they cannot find a job, perhaps they will have to leave their country, and if too many people leave the country, the question is whether there will even be a country – or 'home' identified as 'mother' in the *Himna HOS-a* – the participants in this research fought for. In this situation, where people face unemployment and financial difficulties combined with poorer health and an inability to adequately support their families, 'normal life', especially a 'better life', can indeed become an 'abnormality' which is difficult to define. This leads us back to the veteran who said that his priority after leaving the army was giving some thought 'about what we had been fighting for'⁶⁵⁰. If the ideal of a fair and democratic society as Nussbaum's landscape for a 'better life' in which every individual

⁶⁴⁸ This took place between 2005 and 2011.

⁶⁴⁹ Marta Szpala, 'Croatia: accession negotiations with the EU overshadowed by parliamentary elections', *OSW Commentary*, No. 48, 29 February 2011, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_48_0.pdf > [accessed 12 January 2020]. Corina Stratulat, Graham Avery, 'Croatia: Pathfinder for EU enlargement', *European Policy Centre*, 30 June 2011, <<https://epc.eu/en/Publications/Croatia-pathfinder-for-EU-enl~1c1768>> [accessed 12 January 2020].

⁶⁵⁰ WS017.

should have the right to achieve their full potential based on their own merit has not been achieved, this would explain why participants in this study graded their life with the grade three. The only element of their lives which was graded with the grade above three was their family, their most private circle where they can have more control over things that are happening to them.

There were three issues directly related to the most recent conflict that were also tackled in the previous table. These were unsolved issues from the recent past (3.80) in 6th place, political turnabouts (4.67) in 9th place and threats of a new war in the region (5.82) in last place. Although the final two were identified as the least severe problems, these are both linked to safety of the entire society. In the definitions of ‘normal life’ which I discussed earlier, safety was one of the key words that appeared, and according to Maslow, it is one of the basic human needs. Hence, the possibility of a new conflict and political issues that could potentially lead to one will be analysed in the next chapter where I explore how participants feel about their own role in building a more stable peace. I also tackle unresolved problems from the recent past. Although the historical roots of the conflict were already explored in the introduction of this thesis, in the next chapter I discuss the specific micro topics, such as the lack of lustration and the continuity of the Greater-Serbia ideology, and their impact on the intractability of the conflict. Here, the emphasis is on the issues that were identified by participants as the most critical ones and those that often find their place in Croatian media and politics. Thus, I analyse how these problems prevent participants from moving on and how they influence everyday life and challenge veterans’ sense of normality.

4.4. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I discussed the main priorities participants in this research had after the war or at the time when they left the army and tried to return to their civilian lives; thus, focusing on answering the first two research sub-questions in this thesis. I argued that peace-building remained on the margins of their interest due to various reasons. Most participants defined the term in a very broad way which included aspects of peace-making, peace-keeping and peace-building, starting from prisoners of war exchanges and humanitarian issues, to winning the war and participating in some activities after the war. A very small number of people spoke of peace-building initiatives how they are understood in liberal peace-building. Instead, the vast majority of participants spoke of other priorities with the focus on ‘normal life’ and its elements such as family, job, health, religion, children and social life. Some

expanded this understanding of ‘normal life’ and upgraded it with the elements of truth and justice, while some went a step further and spoke of the spiritual realm, goodness and the relationship with humanity. This exploration of ‘normal’ was not equally successful for all participants as some indeed struggled to define what a post-war ‘normal’ should be, mainly due to feelings of exclusion and isolation. One participant emphasised that ‘the main obstacle to normal life is society’ in which ‘everything needs to be changed’ because not everybody is equal.⁶⁵¹ Another interviewee added that ‘normal life’ should be ‘harmony of society and family’.⁶⁵² These statements summarise an overall sentiment that ‘normal life’ relies on a personal space, but it is also strongly impacted by external influences that exist beyond our boundaries. If there is something wrong in that reality, its negative influence spills over into our personal reality leaving us unable to preserve our vision of ‘normal’ and pursue a desired ‘normal’.

The data explored in this chapter strongly support theories of the relevance of ‘normal’ everyday life in a post-conflict society. Moreover, they emphasise that many veterans are being excluded from peace-building and society fails to recognise their potential as active partners. Addressing this issue would enable them to fully participate in those peace-building activities that are relevant to one’s understanding of ‘normal life’ and their priorities after the war. Consequently, this would minimise a feeling of exclusion as it would provide the veterans with opportunities to actively contribute to building a post-conflict society and a new ‘normal’ according to their vision, desires and expectations; thus, creating a ‘home’ they fought for as a safe place where they could explore what life has to offer and live it to the fullest. This way those who were ‘For Home Ready’ as ‘sons’ who defended and protected their ‘mother’ would be in a better position to nourish and support the ‘mother’ in peace. But, instead, they are largely being pushed into their personal space where they struggle with pursuing their ‘normal life’ with a feeling of being stripped of any power to significantly change it. Jansen’s suggestion about asking by whom, for whom, and for what reconciliation is being desired⁶⁵³ can be applied here as this exclusion of the veterans from the broader social context means that apart from asking ‘what is normal life’, we also need to ask ‘where

⁶⁵¹ OTH055.

⁶⁵² ES016.

⁶⁵³ Elisabeth Porter wrote about two cases which support Jansen’s conclusion. Emir Suljagić, one of the few male survivors of the Srebrenica genocide, said: ‘I never wronged anyone. I did nothing wrong. Reconciliation means we have to meet halfway, but that’s offensive. I was wronged and almost my entire family was killed. I care about justice and truth’. Horacio Verbitsky, a Chilean journalist, made a similar point when he asked: ‘Reconciliation by whom? After someone takes away your daughter, tortures her, disappears her, and then denies having ever done it – would you want to reconcile with those responsible?’ Porter, *Connecting Peace, Justice & Reconciliation*, p. 199.

is it' and 'how is it distinguished from an abnormal life'. In the following chapter this will be explored in depth through the exploration of the clash between the inner world which is private and the external world in which different actors interact; thus influencing a personal understanding of the main social issues and a pursuit of a different 'normal'.

CHAPTER 5

‘NORMAL’ IN DANGER:

NEW WARS, OLD ENEMIES

The best drivers look at the rear-view mirror 90 per cent of the time. This is more important than looking ahead because if you don't see what's behind you, there is no clear path forward.

A member of HOS⁶⁵⁴

This opening quote was a response from a participant in this research when asked to comment on Brewer's statement about a rear-view mirror as a metaphor for looking at the past while trying to build a better post-conflict future. 'A car driven by looking only in the rear view mirror will not get to the end of the driveway', Brewer argues.⁶⁵⁵ However, there is no 'positive peace'⁶⁵⁶ without a resolution of the root causes of conflict, as discussed in chapter 2. The past is a part of one's life and the memory of the entire collective; or as one participant stated, 'normal life' is not about 'living in the past' but about 'not forgetting'⁶⁵⁷. Thus, the past cannot be separated from who we are and where we are going while progressing on the long path of post-conflict recovery. During the Homeland War, the memory of the profound pain experienced in the past which left a deep wound on the soul of the nation emerged in patriotic songs; thus, it was used to inspire 'sons' to defend their 'mother' and encourage them not to give up. For example, in the march song *Hrvatine*⁶⁵⁸ by Đuka Čaić, the author emphasised that the previous 'wounds don't hurt us'. Another 'historical' thought was revealed in the song *Domovino*⁶⁵⁹ by Siniša Vuco as 'nobody can

⁶⁵⁴ OTH055.

⁶⁵⁵ John Brewer, *Remembering forwards: or how to live together in the future with divided memories*, Paper presented at Memory and the future in Dublin (Ireland, 2016), p. 11, <https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/38572205/Remembering_forwards.pdf> [accessed 10 April 2020].

⁶⁵⁶ Galtung, 'Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding', 282-304

⁶⁵⁷ ND056.

⁶⁵⁸ Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2YSR1k8nuI> [accessed 25 May 2020].

⁶⁵⁹ Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dqc0Jb_D8LQ [accessed 25 May 2020].

bring years of despair back'. In *Himna HOS-a*, those painful memories were highlighted by asking the 'mother' not to cry because 'the graves will sing again' suggesting hope and healing. Brewer's argument about the rear view mirror makes sense because nobody can live entirely in the past. However, the past is there to be dealt with, to learn from it, especially if danger is still lurking from its shadows, and to find strength to move forward. This explains the opening quote of this chapter.

Knowing and understanding the past can make a journey to the future smoother. As explained in chapter 2, facing new knowledge can be stressful, thus causing resistance to alternative ideas, including those that challenge previous preconceptions.⁶⁶⁰ This brings to the surface defence mechanisms such as avoidance and denial leading to diffusion of responsibility.⁶⁶¹ Combined with trauma that disrupts linearity of time, dealing with the past represents another obstacle to successfully dealing with the conflict and moving away from it. However, without addressing the root causes of conflict, there can be no 'positive peace' as 'normal life' continues in the shadows of fear, anxiety and doubts. Thus, it is important to determinate which past influences have a particular impact on how people perceive their present while trying to heal. To establish the relevance of specific historical events and processes in Croatia, participants were asked to grade seven historical issues from their perspective of 1995 when the war ended and 2017 when this research was conducted, including four pre-war issues, two war and post-war topics, and one issue that are often present in the Croatian everyday life and media.⁶⁶² The results are presented in the table below.

⁶⁶⁰ Bar-Tal describes this process as 'unfreezing' and it begins on an individual level. Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, pp. 327-331.

⁶⁶¹ Diffusion of responsibility has been broadly discussed in the context of another topic 'why people do (not) kill?'. Christopher Browning finds reasons for killings in a basic obedience to authority and peer (group) pressure: 'Once entangled, people encounter a series of "binding factors" or "cementing mechanisms" that make disobedience or refusal even more difficult. The momentum of the process discourages any new or contrary initiative. The "situational obligation" or etiquette makes refusal appear improper, rude, or even an immoral breach of obligation'. Normal individuals enter an 'agentic state' in which they are the instrument of another's will and they no longer feel personally responsible for the content of their actions, Browning concludes. Therefore, authority and conformity not only act as forms of pressure on a person but also as a form of release since responsibility is diffused. Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men, Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 173. Slim, *Killing Civilians*, pp. 221-222. For further reading also see Florence R. Miale and Michael Selzer, *The Nuremberg Mind, The Psychology of the Nazi Leaders* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1977).

⁶⁶² These were: the Greater-Serbia ideology that emerged in the 19th century; the Second World War and the communist crimes against Croatian citizens, especially those that took place in the first months after the end of the war; Communist Yugoslavia and the power and influence of former communists in today's Croatia; and the Homeland War and the influence of former enemies on Croatian society.

Table 4: The most important historical issues from the perspective of 1995 and 2017⁶⁶³

	1995			2017
1	The Greater-Serbia ideology and politics		1	There was no lustration and the former communists still have power
2	The Homeland War and atrocities committed during that time		2	The Chetniks were allowed to return to Croatia, get jobs and participate in political life
3	There was no lustration and the former communists still have power		3	The Homeland War and atrocities committed during that time
4	Repression of the communist regime in the former Yugoslav		4	Bleiburg and the massacres committed against Croats after the Second World War
5	The Chetniks were allowed to return to Croatia, get jobs and participate in political life		5	The Greater-Serbia ideology and politics
6	Bleiburg and the massacres committed against Croats after the Second World War		6	Repression of the communist regime in the former Yugoslavia
7	Second World War		7	Second World War

As shown above, between 1995 and 2017 the impact of different historical processes changed significantly. For the purpose of this study and in the context of safety as a basic human need and a requirement for peaceful ‘normal life’, I was particularly interested in three issues.⁶⁶⁴ The lack of lustration, implying the former communist are still in power, jumped from 3rd to 1st place becoming the most significant historical issue in Croatia. This is

⁶⁶³ Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Question 33

⁶⁶⁴ Here, I briefly explain the relevance of other historical issues which are not necessary for understanding the context of this chapter. The Second World War in general remained in 7th place, as the most insignificant event. However, some episodes of that conflict have been described as far more important. For example, the communist crimes against Croatian people which took place in Bleiburg, Austria, and elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia in 1945 moved from 6th to 4th place. The impact of repression by Tito’s regime dropped from 4th to 6th place. Furthermore, the Homeland War and crimes committed during that period dropped from 2nd to 3rd place. Although some perpetrators who committed crimes during the Homeland War were tried and punished, none of those committed by the communists were. Many mass graves from the Homeland War were located and excavated, while thousands from the Second World War and post-war period remain hidden. Croatia is still searching for almost 2,000 citizens who went missing in the early 1990s, while the number of those who disappeared during the Second World War and in the post-war period is measured in thousands. Therefore, thousands of families never had a chance to bury their loved ones, have some closure, heal and move toward ‘normal life’. Moreover, people still struggle with expressing their thoughts on those events because speaking openly about those crimes is often challenged as ‘revisionism’ in the most negative sense as it is being equated with negationism. As a result, this shift in the past events influencing Croatian society from the perspective of 1995 and 2017 reveals a larger impact of those that occurred at the time when participants had not been born yet, but their grandparents or even parents witnessed them and perhaps keep looking for any data on their missing loved ones.

particularly important in the context of ‘normal life’ because, as I show in the following subchapters, the lack of lustration emerged as one of the obstacles to safety; thus, putting new ‘normal’ in danger. Also, participants’ perception of the stronger impact of the communists on life today reveals why a new ‘normal’ free of the communist influence has not happened yet and remains a work in progress. This keeps people with one foot in the old ‘normal’ while trying to deal with the wounds from the past. Furthermore, the relevance of former enemies, meaning the Greater-Serbia sympathisers, jumped from 5th to 2nd place emerging as another significant threat to safety and ‘normal life’. This can be explained by their return to Croatia in the post-war years. These results also reveal that, according to the participants, former communists in Croatia have a greater influence than the enemies from the Homeland War. Moreover, the Greater-Serbia ideology, which previously took 1st place, was only 5th in 2017; thus, its influence is weaker although it emerged in interviews and the Croatian Security-Intelligence Agency⁶⁶⁵ reports showed that the impact of that ideology has been rising in the past few years. Overall, these observations left some participants with a feeling that the conflict indeed continues as they feel like they are being pushed back into the past burdened by the communist legacy instead of moving forward. This contributes to leading a normalised conflicted life in which there is no closure and a sense of insecurity persists; thus, diminishing the prospects of pursuing a peaceful, ‘normal life’ in which safety, which will be analysed in this chapter through different layers, as a requirement, would be met.

The importance of security was explored in the introduction of this thesis when I discussed the ideal of ‘home’. According to one participant, ‘home’ is literally ‘safety and peace in the country’⁶⁶⁶; once ‘home’ is in danger, safety becomes a priority and people are ready to defend themselves; once ‘home’ is safe again and people are free, they can find their peace and life can flourish. This strong emphasis on security when bare survival is in question was demonstrated during the Homeland War when defence was prioritised; thus, ‘home’ primarily referred to the homeland. In *Hrvatine*, the author spoke of ‘home’ in the context of a fight for freedom and a necessity to protect a family, for example when referring to ‘mother’ and ‘sister’. In *Himna HOS-a* homeland is a ‘mother’ with the reference to its citizens as ‘sons’ and ‘the casts of Croatian falcons’ who are coming to help.⁶⁶⁷ *Domovino* also refers to homeland as a ‘mother’ who is ‘in pain’; thus, her ‘sons’ are willing to protect it and die for it.

⁶⁶⁵ Abbreviated SOA – Sigurnosno-obavještajna agencija.

⁶⁶⁶ ES037.

⁶⁶⁷ A member of HOS who participated in this research used similar wording when he said, ‘we are children of our mother, and that is Croatia’. OTH055.

In this context, security implies the most immediate physical safety but, as I show in this chapter, a sense of insecurity can persist after conflict even in the absence of violence. Here, people focus on everyday living possibly expecting a new conflict due to the lack of trust in top level actors, middle-range actors and the 'other' which leaves them feeling unsafe and, thus, stripping away a sense of security. Consequently, 'normal life' cannot be explored to the fullest due to this anxiety. This can furthermore undermine safety and lead to more violence or another expression of dissatisfaction due to unfulfilled expectations of improvements in the quality of life, as Atashi and Smyth argued⁶⁶⁸.

All these elements which contribute to a sense of insecurity came through in my data demonstrating how participants experience and explore safety within 'normal life' while living with the trauma inflicted upon them and pain that permanently scared them. Bloom argued that trauma shatters 'the assumptions upon which we all base our sense of safety and freedom in the world'.⁶⁶⁹ This can encourage people to perceive the world as benevolent and themselves as helpless or even hopeless.⁶⁷⁰ A memory of traumatic experience can come back and persist; thus, undermining a sense of safety and keeping people in the constant survival mode unable to live to the fullest. Reflecting upon my grandmother's thoughts which influenced this thesis, I realised that she found her shelter in a world she never experienced, but she perceived it as safer. Her words that 'life was better in the Habsburg Monarchy' are often repeated in my family circle. She claimed that she heard this from adults when she was a child. Due to her personal traumas, in her eyes the world became an evil place where an individual can win some smaller battles, but will still be defeated at war. In her case, the sense of helplessness was buried under another feeling that something 'good' can exist even if it is hidden in the past she never witnessed; thus, finding her refuge point in the unknown. Building upon Bloom's insight, it can be concluded that my grandmother's traumatic experiences indeed shattered her sense of safety and freedom because her comfort was hidden in the country that no longer existed; thus, limiting her experience to live freely in the present. This link between safety found in a nostalgic vision of something that could have been and 'normal life' could explain why so many people struggled when asked to define 'normal life'.

In this chapter, I start with a question: How are the participants' ideas of 'normal' affected by questions of insecurity rooted in the conflict that continues on some level thus

⁶⁶⁸ Atashi, 'Challenges to conflict transformation from the streets', p. 49.

⁶⁶⁹ Sandra L. Bloom, *Creating Sanctuary: Toward the Evolution of Sane Societies* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.76.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

creating obstacles to a different ‘normal’? This is followed by a broader discussion about what causes a sense of insecurity in the current Croatian context. As stated earlier, participants spoke of historical influences on the current experiences of safety and among them were those processes which still have a significant impact on ‘ordinary people’. Therefore, it is analytically beneficial to explain a broader context in the years before this research took place and while it was conducted as this can help to understand feelings and thoughts expressed by the participants when addressing safety concerns and when asked about possibilities of a new war with the same enemy. Furthermore, I also explore how the participants can address these problems and support the creation of a safer society. This analysis will provide sufficient data to answer the third research sub-question: What are the key elements of ‘normal life’ in the peace-building context? As stated earlier, in the previous subchapter the focus was on exploration of ‘normal’ more generally, while in this chapter I specifically focus on some crucial problems ‘normal life’ is experiencing in the particular peace-building context. Using examples of lustration, ideologies, external actors and safety, I highlight key aspects of the current experience of ‘normal’ in the Croatian setting while indicating where the mismatch between that ‘normal’ and a desired one is. In the final subchapters I focus on overcoming these issues and the role of the Croatian Army veterans in that process with a goal of opening the door to freely pursuing a desired ‘normal’ in the peace-building context. Overall, this chapter contributes to a better understanding of the individual internal experiences with the external world that other agents are constructing and reveals an inner struggle ‘ordinary people’ are facing while trying to claim back some of the narrative and pursuing their desired ‘normal’.

5.1. IS THE WAR OVER AND CAN WE EXPLORE A PEACEFUL ‘NORMAL’?

In the introduction of this thesis, I discussed ‘normal’ as a spectrum that includes various shades, potentially even violence as the darkest one. Thus, conflict may be a part of life although safety as a requirement emerged as a necessity when the concept of the post-conflict peaceful ‘normal’ was explored in the previous chapter. Signing peace agreements does not necessarily mean peace, at least not in terms of Galtung’s ‘positive peace’. If local problems persist, they may contribute to new instabilities. In the Croatian context, this issue was highlighted in the 2015 SOA report stating that ‘unemployment, especially among youth, as well as dissatisfaction due to personal difficulties, can cause resignation and disappointment in the legal system of the Republic of Croatia, which can then become a risk

factor in the development of extremism'⁶⁷¹. Moreover, 'the consequences of war traumas and unresolved inter-ethnic relations that may become fertile soil for the strengthening of extremism can also have an impact on the state of security'⁶⁷². Therefore, this report highlights three critical issues relevant to this chapter: unfulfilled expectations, a painful past and the root causes of war remain unaddressed. If this is emphasised by fear for personal safety or a lack of trust in the ability of authorities to deal with a threat, a community which is still trying to heal from the previous conflict can find itself on the brink of another one instead of pursuing a desired 'normal'. As highlighted earlier, this leads to a normalised conflicted life, and peace becomes strange, as Brewer noted⁶⁷³. The question is what this means in the society where the war has never been officially declared and where there is no consensus on the start date and the end date of the conflict leaving the lines between war and peace blurred.⁶⁷⁴

My data revealed that it is the end date of the conflict which caused some worries among participants leaving many of them with a feeling that a stable peace was not achieved and that war continues by a different means. Moreover, some believe that 'a stable peace is impossible because geopolitical circumstances are subject to constant change'⁶⁷⁵. Others spoke of a 'geostrategic repositioning'⁶⁷⁶ which leaves Croatia exposed to local conflicts, but also those potentially caused by other external actors. Some argued that 'the source of the future conflict is in London'⁶⁷⁷ because it is London which 'creates a crisis' and controls 'the chess board in the Balkans'⁶⁷⁸. 'If Turkey or Russia get involved, this can lead to unthinkable outcomes', someone concluded.⁶⁷⁹ One veteran underlined that 'looking at the history of the region, approximately every 50 years such things happen cyclically in our neighbourhood'⁶⁸⁰.

⁶⁷¹ SOA, 'SOA Public Report 2015', *SOA official website*, p. 11, <<https://www.soa.hr/files/file/Public-Report-2015.pdf>> [accessed 24 April 2020].

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ Brewer, *Peace Processes*, p. 36.

⁶⁷⁴ As explained in the introduction of this thesis, the exact dates of when the Homeland War in Croatia started and ended have never been established which means they usually depend on a personal and subjective perception. For some, the beginning of the Homeland War can be placed in 1990 while for others this was in 1991. On the other hand, the end of the war is celebrated in August although it was in October 1995 when the final battles of the Croatian Army occurred with Eastern Slavonia being peacefully reintegrated in January 1998.

⁶⁷⁵ ES046.

⁶⁷⁶ WS003.

⁶⁷⁷ WS014.

⁶⁷⁸ WS014.

⁶⁷⁹ OTH058.

⁶⁸⁰ ES001.

Thus, in one way or another, the Balkans remains ‘a barrel of gunpowder’, as often described in the media⁶⁸¹, and a normalised conflicted life becomes another shade of ‘normal’.

To establish whether Croatia remains unstable and exposed to violence, participants were asked: ‘do you think that the military victory in 1995 resulted in a stable and lasting peace in Croatia and another similar conflict with the same enemy could never happen again?’. Two thirds replied ‘no’ because ‘absence of war doesn’t mean absence of conflict’⁶⁸². This percentage is even higher among the veterans in Slavonia. The only Croatian region where that number was significantly lower and where almost 43 per cent believe that Croatia achieved a stable peace, was in Northern Dalmatia which could partially be explained by the post-war demographic changes in that area.⁶⁸³

Table 5: Was a stable peace achieved in Croatia in 1995?⁶⁸⁴ (in percentages)

REGION	YES	NO	DID NOT REPLY
Eastern Slavonia	25.92	72.22	1.85
Western Slavonia	25.80	74.19	0
Northern Dalmatia	42.69	56.09	1.21
Fought in the these regions	19.56	78.26	2.17
Fought elsewhere	31.11	63.33	5.56
TOTAL:	31.33	67	1.66

Furthermore, among those who replied ‘yes’, not all were convinced that ‘a stable peace’ is indeed ‘stable’ as only 40.42 per cent of them rated the possibility of a new conflict with a zero. In total, only 12.66 per cent of all participants believe in a permanent peace. Some veterans stated that ‘Croatia won the war and that’s the end of the story’⁶⁸⁵ or ‘they have been defeated; that’s peace’⁶⁸⁶. Others argued that the ‘positioning of Croatia as a war victor has not been implemented in such a way to be recognised in the world’ and, therefore, Croatia has

⁶⁸¹ Željko Trkanjec, ‘Balkan je opet bure baruta’, *Jutarnji list*, 15 March 2008, <<https://www.jutarnji.hr/arhiva/balkan-je-opet-bure-baruta/3873534/>> [accessed 5 April 2020].

The same was expressed by the participant OTH058.

⁶⁸² ES046.

⁶⁸³ It is important to emphasise here that among participants from that region were those who are originally from that area and the veterans who moved there after the Homeland War, mostly from Bosnia-Herzegovina, and, therefore, did not experience the war in the same way as pre-war locals, particularly regarding relations with Serbs, and, therefore, they could have different expectations from a post-war ‘normal’. However, the percentage of the veterans from Bosnia-Herzegovina was 7.5 which is still insufficient to explain this discrepancy in data.

⁶⁸⁴ Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Question 9.

⁶⁸⁵ ND057. ND058. A similar answer was given by WS006.

⁶⁸⁶ ND050. A similar answer was given by ND054.

been treated the same as an aggressor.⁶⁸⁷ One veteran emphasised that, ‘the victor doesn’t allow equating the aggressor and the victim⁶⁸⁸, and the victims clearly name that aggressor’; if not, history repeats itself.⁶⁸⁹ This belief links a stable peace to historical truth and, therefore, it supports the relevance of truth in the context of safety and ‘normal life’. On the other hand, one participant questioned what the victory actually means because ‘it depends on how high your standards are’ and what expectations in peace are, arguing that ‘victory of the state doesn’t mean victory of its citizens as they all lost something anyway’⁶⁹⁰. This statement significantly expands the meaning of victory as it does not include only physical safety and the end of armed conflict. This observation also tackles Atashi’s and Smyth’s argument that unfulfilled expectations regarding the improvements in the quality of life can lead to more tensions or violence⁶⁹¹. Thus, a true victory would be the end of conflict once those expectations are addressed and people can pursue their ideal of ‘normal life’.

If we analyse things from this perspective, it is not surprising that over half of those who believe in a stable peace do not exclude a possibility of internal conflicts⁶⁹² or another war. For example, one participant stated that ‘we did win the war, but I am not satisfied because what I see on TV and in the media is terrible, therefore, it’s true that it’s peace, but this is only because there is no armed conflict and apart from that, the situation is the same as it was’⁶⁹³. Furthermore, some believe that the future conflict will be with another enemy, perhaps with Bosnian Muslims and, therefore, ‘it’s necessary to strengthen alliances with the USA and Israel, as well as strengthening the Croatian Army’⁶⁹⁴. Discussing the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, another veteran stated that the Dayton Agreement resulted in ‘three dissatisfied parties, and therefore, an accumulation of frustration is expected, especially among the Croats’⁶⁹⁵. One participant believes that a stable peace was achieved between the countries as ‘we won’t fight wars with each other anymore’; instead this will be done within NATO or other associations.⁶⁹⁶ These answers demonstrated that even within the idea of a stable peace there is a lot of flexibility as the main question remains what ‘stable’ is and using the word ‘temporary’ would make more sense. Some participants clearly expressed their

⁶⁸⁷ FO036.

⁶⁸⁸ According to some participants, this has been done by the international community. FO036. ES003.

⁶⁸⁹ ES042.

⁶⁹⁰ ES046.

⁶⁹¹ Atashi, ‘Challenges to conflict transformation from the streets’, p. 49.

⁶⁹² ND024.

⁶⁹³ ND050.

⁶⁹⁴ ND045.

⁶⁹⁵ WS014.

⁶⁹⁶ WS006.

belief in the current stable peace, but also revealed their doubts in a future stable peace saying, for example, ‘there is no war and for me that’s peace, but I don’t know what will happen in 5, 10 or 20 years’⁶⁹⁷. A war is always an option which pushes it from Astore’s death of normalcy to the spectrum of ‘normal’, although as its darkest shade.

In total, 59.57 per cent of those who believe that a stable peace was achieved chose to answer the next question presented in the table below.⁶⁹⁸ All participants were asked about likeliness of a new conflict with the same enemy on a scale between 1 and 10 where 1 is highly unlikely and 10 is extremely likely. Approximately 15 per cent did not answer this question, meaning 254 answers were recorded. Broken down to specific percentages, these were the results.

Table 6: How likely is a new conflict with the same enemy? (in percentages)⁶⁹⁹

Highly unlikely									Extremely likely
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11.42	9.45	7.48	6.69	14.17	6.69	5.51	9.05	7.09	22.44

These data show that just over half participants (50.78 per cent) believe that a new conflict with the same enemy is moderately or extremely likely, with approximately 35 per cent of those who believe it is moderately or highly unlikely and 14 per cent of those who positioned themselves somewhere in the middle. However, looking at the same data specified by region, clearly there are significant differences. The highest percentage of those who believe that a new conflict is extremely or moderately unlikely and the lowest percentage of those who believe the opposite is in Western Slavonia. Furthermore, the lowest percentage of those who believe conflict is unlikely and the highest number of participants believing that a new war will occur was recorded in Eastern Slavonia.

⁶⁹⁷ WS006.
⁶⁹⁸ One quarter of those participants rated a likeliness of a new conflict with the same enemy with 5 to 10 which means that another conflict is more or less highly likely.
⁶⁹⁹ Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Question 11.

Table 7: Likelihood of a new conflict with the same enemy by region (in percentages)⁷⁰⁰

	1	2	3	4	5	1 – 4 total
Eastern Slavonia	4.54	13.63	4.54	9.09	9.09	31.80
Western Slavonia	18.51	11.11	11.11	0	11.11	40.73
Northern Dalmatia	10.60	3.03	13.63	10.60	13.63	37.86
Only fought in Northern Dalmatia and Slavonia	10.81	2.70	2.70	13.51	18.92	29.72
Fought elsewhere	13.75	15.00	5.00	1.25	16.25	35.00

	6	7	8	9	10	6 – 10 total
Eastern Slavonia	4.54	6.81	11.36	6.81	29.54	59.06
Western Slavonia	11.11	0	0	0	37.03	48.14
Northern Dalmatia	3.03	3.03	10.60	6.06	25.75	48.47
Only fought in Northern Dalmatia and Slavonia	8.11	8.11	2.70	16.22	16.22	51.36
Fought elsewhere	8.75	7.50	12.50	6.25	13.75	48.75

Eastern Slavonia was the area that experienced what we may describe as total destruction, but it was the only peacefully reintegrated Croatian region. According to my data, the peaceful resolution does not necessarily mean peace itself as the veterans in this region live their lives expecting another war more than others; thus, leading more ‘normalised conflicted lives’. This could be explained by the proximity of the Serbian border, the larger Serbian population including former enemies being pardoned and returned to that area as well as public demonstrations of the Greater-Serbia ideology.⁷⁰¹ For example, the Croatian public

⁷⁰⁰ Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Question 11.

⁷⁰¹ In late August 2019, Vukovar Deputy Mayor Marijan Pavliček emphasised that high-ranking members of the Independent Democratic Serb Party (Abbreviated SDSS – Samostalna demokratska srpska stranka) whose president is Milorad Pupovac, ‘were participating in Serb provocations in the Vukovar area’ and accused them of

was outraged when media reports about a monument to war criminal Vukašin Šoškočanin⁷⁰² were published. This was followed by a letter from Croatian citizen Petar Sović published by the press, which stated:

I cannot accept that our country pays tribute to the same people who destroyed, burned and killed, and who caused numerous tragedies in the early 1990s during their fight for the 'Fatherland', and that the same 'loyal Croatian citizens' who pay homage to these fighters expect us, who returned to our homes, to indifferently accept their glorification and remembrance of the memory of the Serbian armed rebellion in Croatia, and that this will also be one of the foundations for building a better future, coexistence and inter-ethnic tolerance. Isn't that a great hypocrisy, provocation and insult based on the unrealised dreams of the early 1990s?⁷⁰³

This quote portrays well the sentiment of some Eastern-Slavonian inhabitants and the roots of the pessimistic future they imagined when they found a new conflict likely. This can be supported by my data as the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia emerged as one of the reasons undermining their faith in a stable peace. One veteran linked this to a strong sense of injustice saying that 'peace was perhaps achieved, but not justice although Tuđman promised everything to be resolved with the peaceful reintegration'⁷⁰⁴. However, 'former police officers in the so-called Serb-occupied Krajina became Croatian police officers, and therefore, peace is just a deception'⁷⁰⁵. 'They received good jobs and they will have excellent pensions while people like me were discharged from the police force', someone added.⁷⁰⁶ One veteran argued that 'those who participated in the rebellion still behave like they are in Serbia

wanting to equate the aggressor and the victim, and change history. 'This disrupts already fragile relations between the Croatian majority and Serbian minority in Vukovar', concluded Pavliček. An.S./Hina, 'Dogradonačelnik Pavliček: Dio istaknutih ljudi SDSS-a u Vukovaru ponovno promovira velikosrpske ideje i politiku', *Tportal.hr*, 26 August 2019, <<https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/dogradonacelnik-pavlicek-dio-istaknutih-ljudi-sdss-a-u-vukovaru-ponovno-promovira-velikosrpske-ideje-i-politiku-20190826>> [accessed 13 March 2020].

In January 2013, media also reported video footage taken during orthodox Christmas celebration in Borovo near Vukovar. The footage, available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyB-LqeuRRg>), shows locals with Chetnik insignia carrying flags of the so-called 'Krajina' and listening to music glorifying violence and intolerance. 'Sankcionirajte četnikovanje u Vukovaru', *Hina/Tportal.hr*, 10 January 2013, <<https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/sankcionirajte-cetnikovanje-u-vukovaru-20130110>> [accessed 13 March 2020].

⁷⁰² He was the so-called commander of Borovo Selo at the time when Croatian police officers were captured and brutally murdered on 2 May 1991.

⁷⁰³ Sandra Sabljak Gojani, 'Sramota – spomenici koji veličaju krvnika, a omalovažavaju žrtvu', *Večernji list*, 23 April 2011, <<https://blog.vecernji.hr/sandra-sabljak/sramota-spomenici-koji-velicaju-krvnika-a-omalovazavaju-zrtvu-3436>> [22 March 2020].

⁷⁰⁴ WS009.

⁷⁰⁵ WS009.

⁷⁰⁶ WS017. ND024.

instead of Croatia'⁷⁰⁷. He believes that they should be 'driven away' and then 'other Serbs would be willing to accept Croatia as their homeland'⁷⁰⁸. These opinions revealed that pardoning former enemy soldiers is not only perceived as an injustice but also as a potential root of a new conflict⁷⁰⁹. Therefore, the peaceful reintegration of that region as an attempt of 'normalisation' did not meet expectations of the local people; thus, acting as a different version of the death of normalcy.

Other participants felt that with the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia something was taken away from them as they did not liberate it. One veteran argued that 'if the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia hadn't happened, we would have peace now; therefore, this is a Pyrrhic victory as heroes were turned into losers'⁷¹⁰. Another participant said that he wanted 'the Croatian flag on the Vukovar water tower' because if "that was done by a soldier, that would be the end of the war"⁷¹¹. Someone agreed emphasising that in that region there are Chetnik monuments; thus, 'we should ask ourselves how it would look if after the Second World War the Germans build monuments to Wehrmacht soldiers in the occupied territories'⁷¹². Even a veteran who believes in a stable peace said that 'Vukovar was not liberated by military means and many veterans believe that the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia will cause a new conflict'⁷¹³. Therefore, 'victory at war is the best cure and a path towards reconciliation'⁷¹⁴. For these participants, a real victory means safety, and safety, as Bar-Tal argued, would be the first step towards reconciliation.⁷¹⁵ Here, war as Astore's death of normalcy emerges as an opportunity to reset a desired shade of 'normal' if it is won.

As stated earlier, the exact start date of the Homeland War also remains unclear. However, for the purpose of this study, the end date is more important as it should indicate when the post-conflict 'normalisation' was supposed to begin and whether the conflict is indeed over. The data revealed that a new conflict is expected primarily in Eastern Slavonia which was peacefully reintegrated. It can be concluded that this distrust in official 'normalisation' is rooted in a strong belief that the former enemy who was welcomed back was not punished for war crimes. Instead, they were pardoned and moved on like nothing had

⁷⁰⁷ ES014.

⁷⁰⁸ ES014. ES051.

⁷⁰⁹ WS009.

⁷¹⁰ ES022. ES003.

⁷¹¹ ND052.

⁷¹² WS011.

⁷¹³ ND051.

⁷¹⁴ ND052.

⁷¹⁵ Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, pp. 378, 390.

happened which undermines a sense of justice, faith and safety. The lives of the former enemies continued so ‘normally’ that the Chetnik insignia known from media footage from occupied Vukovar became widely spread even among youth born after the war. For some participants this is a result of segregated schooling and studying ‘parallel histories’⁷¹⁶ written by ‘anti-Croatian elements who have infiltrated everywhere and who decide what children will learn’⁷¹⁷. At the same time, ‘one of the commanders of Vukovar’s defence is dying in prison while war criminals from Vukovar are sitting in Croatia’s parliament’; hence, causing anger, disappointment and hopelessness within the veteran population.⁷¹⁸ This leaves the participants with a feeling of living in abnormal circumstances as war symbols representing hatred towards Croats are used without any consequences while the Croatian salute as a symbol of the fight for freedom and ‘normal’, discussed in the introduction of this thesis, is being disputed. Moreover, this also happens in the region which they were denied to liberate. Thus, the war for liberation and ‘normal’ continues.

However, it would be wrong to conclude that ‘abnormalities’ in Eastern Slavonia are the only reason for the lack of faith in a stable peace and ‘normalisation’ as the reasons are much broader. As one participant summarised, ‘there are a larger number of unresolved issues in Croatia including its borders, former enemies in the police force, pardoned Chetniks including war criminals, and war damage but Croatia doesn’t bother to resolve them’⁷¹⁹. Consequently, Croatia loses the war in peace and ‘its diplomacy is failing’⁷²⁰, but not because of peace. Instead this happens because of ‘the atmosphere created after the war by the structures that are getting more aggressive and keep attacking’⁷²¹. They exist in the shadow and ‘have mechanisms that can be activated and the willingness to kill Croatian people which they label as fascists, clero-fascists, and Ustasha’⁷²². This is ‘a special warfare with the aim of destroying Croatian sovereignty and statehood, and ending with genocide’⁷²³. According to some, these ‘treacherous’ structures have multiple plans in case one of them fails and they ‘rely on time, money, people and the media’ in a country where political elites cannot resist these ‘attacks’ as the left-wing is ‘anational’ and the right-wing is ‘compromised’⁷²⁴. Croatian

⁷¹⁶ ND024.

⁷¹⁷ ES003.

⁷¹⁸ WS012.

⁷¹⁹ ND003. ND048.

⁷²⁰ WS004.

⁷²¹ ND029.

⁷²² OTH058.

⁷²³ ND020.

⁷²⁴ ND047.

political structures are intersected by these ‘parallel structures’⁷²⁵ which include ‘communists, Greater-Serbia sympathisers and British politics’⁷²⁶ and they ‘treat us like a Serbian colony’⁷²⁷. In the following subchapters, I explore these influences and their impact on ‘normalisation’.

5.2. LUSTRATION AS A WAY OF MOVING ON FROM THE PAST ‘NORMAL’ TOWARDS A NEW ‘NORMAL’

In the introduction of this chapter I discussed how the lack of lustration emerged as the crucial problem in post-war Croatia. This is an important change compared with 1995 when this was the third most important issue; thus, over time participants recognised the social issues as being linked to former political elites. British historian Robin Harris emphasised that ‘Croats are proud of their country which they shed their blood for 25 years ago, but are outraged at the incompetence, bureaucracy and endemic corruption they have been trying to endure’ and concluded that ‘this is the legacy of communism, which is still pervasive’⁷²⁸. Although the West is prone to proclaiming that communism was destroyed by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, ‘the party chameleon just changed colours and new faces emerged’⁷²⁹. Therefore, communism has never been defeated in Croatia and communists never admitted their crimes.⁷³⁰ As one participant stated, ‘in Croatia, the Berlin Wall has not yet fallen’⁷³¹, while another described this as dealing with ‘a mind-set that was the same before and after the war, the principles are the same, but the colour has changed, and now we have blue’⁷³² instead

⁷²⁵ OTH058.

⁷²⁶ ND020.

⁷²⁷ ES052.

⁷²⁸ Robin Harris, ‘EU se mora pridružiti borbi protiv novog komunizma u Hrvatskoj’, *Narod.hr*, 19 December 2019, <<https://narod.hr/hrvatska/robin-harris-eu-se-mora-pridruziti-borbi-protiv-novog-komunizma-u-hrvatskoj>> [accessed 12 February 2020].

⁷²⁹ Ibid. This problem was also tackled by a HSP vice-president Ante Paradžik who was murdered in September 1991. His last speech held on the day of murder is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhedYrVGpDY> [10 April 2020].

⁷³⁰ This is another Harris’ statement supported by some participants in this research. ES050. ES001.

Instead, the prosecution of perpetrators of communist crimes and those who continuously kept violating human rights between 1945 and 1990 remains impossible as they are still celebrated as the ‘victors’ whose contribution should not be questioned. For example, 27 July is still celebrated as an unofficial national holiday although that was the day when in 1941 the first communist massacres happened. Between 1945 and 1990, that day was celebrated as the Day of the Uprising of the Peoples of Croatia and the murder of several hundred Croatian villagers, including women and children, was forgotten. Matkovich, *Croatia and Slovenia at the end and after the Second World War*, p. 146.

Although some former communists who participated in assassinations of Croatian emigrants were sentenced to life in prison in Germany in 2016, Harris argues that this did not encourage research of communist crimes in Croatia. Harris, ‘EU se mora pridružiti borbi protiv novog komunizma u Hrvatskoj’.

⁷³¹ OTH015.

⁷³² Blue is a colour of the ruling party HDZ.

of red'⁷³³. Therefore, 'lustration is impossible because those who decide on passing the law are the same ones who should be subjected to lustration'⁷³⁴.

These statements are relevant in the context of 'normal life' as many participants highlighted the role of former communists as the major obstacle to safety, stability and peace although there is no actual conflict on the outside. Instead, conflict becomes an internal struggle which is not independent from macro-politics. Consequently, the old 'normal' cannot be transformed due to the wider political structures that are kept in place. Their activities disable attempts to pursue a new 'normal' in a truly democratic society where all the values of 'normal' within 'home' as a sacred place would be supported. Hence, the worst enemies are internal ones as they undermine 'a fight for transformation of society from a totalitarian regime to democratic society'⁷³⁵ as one of the goals of the Homeland War. Even the laws are 'still Yugoslav as the authorities are unable to make laws tailored to the Croats'⁷³⁶. Hence, '1995 was only the end of one process called the Homeland War and that's all, but the real war for an independent democratic and prosperous state continues'⁷³⁷. One participant highlighted that 'Tuđman could have saved us the trouble if he had encouraged lustration in the late 1990s and we would have called him a statesman and a leader, but instead he left us a cuckoo egg'⁷³⁸, and, thus, a new conflict is just a matter of time'⁷³⁹. For the purpose of understanding this 'cuckoo egg' and its layers relevant to 'normal life', I analyse lustration from several perspectives which reveal a very disperse conflict that cannot be located in terms of one specific place or issue. A brief overview of past events that led to this situation is given in the footnote⁷⁴⁰.

⁷³³ OTH055.

⁷³⁴ ND029.

⁷³⁵ OTH055.

⁷³⁶ ND018.

⁷³⁷ FO043.

⁷³⁸ This is a common Croatian expression that means something negative that was planted as something positive.

⁷³⁹ WS009.

⁷⁴⁰ After the democratic changes in 1989 and 1990, lustration laws which regulated the participation of former communists in politics and the civil service were passed in the Czech Republic (1993), Slovakia (1996), Hungary (1994 and 1996), Albania (1993 and 1995), Bulgaria (1992), Lithuania (1991), Latvia (1995 and 1996), Estonia (1992 and 1995) and Poland (1997). The only two former communist countries, and today European Union member states that have not passed lustration laws are the Republic of Slovenia, where they voted against the adoption of such a law at the parliamentary debate in 1997, and the Republic of Croatia, where in 1998 and 1999 the *Proposal of the Law on the Elimination of Consequences of the Totalitarian Communist Regime* by the HSP was removed from the agenda of Parliament by a vote, so MPs did not even discuss it. Unlike some other Eastern European countries where communism was installed with the help of the Soviet Army, Yugoslav Partisans had gained power without the help of Soviet troops, although the Red Army provided its' support in the final months of the Second World War. The communist government of Yugoslavia was not imposed by a foreign power but was a result of internal factors. This is one of the reasons why the successor states of Yugoslavia have such problems to come to terms with the communist past and why former communists could often continue their careers under now democratic conditions preventing any attempts to pass a lustration law.

The first layer of the lack of lustration is a political one and linked to two main ideas: the communists are still powerful in Croatian society and their presence encourages spreading of the Greater-Serbia ideology; thus, posing a constant threat to safety and even survival of the nation.⁷⁴¹ Hence, ‘we are going backwards instead of forward’ because ‘the lies from the past keep in power those political structures that are irreversibly indoctrinated by communism, and therefore, they need to confront the truth, lustrate and be removed from power’⁷⁴². Furthermore, this would enable the development of better relations between Croats and Serbs⁷⁴³ resulting in more prospects for a stable peace. If lustration was done, ‘the Greater-Serbia sympathisers would finally realise that their puppets in Croatia are gone’⁷⁴⁴. Consequently, the Greater-Serbia ideologists would disappear as their efforts to conquer Croatia would become futile and ‘normal Serbs would take over power’⁷⁴⁵. If lustration of the entire system, including the judiciary, does not happen, ‘we will keep tapping in the dark’⁷⁴⁶, and ‘nothing will ever be resolved’⁷⁴⁷. Having control over the judiciary was explained by one interviewee who concluded that the communist elites used it ‘to nullify the effects of the

The Lustration Law is mostly supported by smaller political parties, such as the HSP, HČSP and NGOs who argue that the de-communization of Croatian society is essential for social and political change. Among them are also members of the Croatian Society of Historians, ‘Dr Rudolf Horvat’ from Zagreb, who explored certain aspects of the process of exposing and coping with the totalitarian communist past and lustration of society, and who identified ten problematic areas or topics within the lustration process. They concluded that a thorough, objective and expert approach to this problem is necessary in order to achieve:

- a true confrontation with the past that burdens Croatian society on a daily basis,
- identification of the historical truth and the progress of Croatian historiography, which has been contaminated with a long-standing ideological and selective approach, and
- the comprehensive protection of human rights and the general democratization of Croatian society.

Source: Blanka Matkovich, *Croatia and Slovenia at the end and after the Second World War*, pp. xxii, 145-146. For further reading also see HDP ‘Dr Rudolf Horvat’ official website (www.croatiarediviva.com).

The first and the third argument are particularly relevant in the context of a ‘normal life’ as they emphasise healing, moving away from the troubled past towards the present and a new ‘normal’ and building a society which will truly support, promote and protect those values expressed by the participants in this research when they spoke of their ideal of ‘normal’ and ‘home’. Such an approach is not only needed in terms of some sort of punishment for perpetrators and justice for victims, or identification of truth for the entire society, but also as a way to indeed humanise each victim giving them back their dignity and acknowledging that what once happened was wrong.

Source: Izida Pavić, Blanka Matković, ‘27 godina čekamo na Zakon o lustraciji’, *Hrvatski Tjednik*, 6 July 2017, pp. 34-37, <<http://croatiarediviva.com/2017/07/09/dr-sc-izida-pavic-mr-sc-blanka-matkovic-27-godina-cekamo-zakon-lustraciji/>> [accessed 10 January 2020].

For further reading see Mark S. Ellis, ‘Purging the Past: The Current State of Lustration Laws in the Former Communist Bloc’, *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 59 (1996), 181-196.

⁷⁴¹ OTH058. ND047.

⁷⁴² WS012.

⁷⁴³ WS012.

⁷⁴⁴ ND047.

⁷⁴⁵ ND047.

⁷⁴⁶ WS013.

⁷⁴⁷ WS017.

military defeat' in 1995, and, consequently, 'those ideas from 1941 are stronger than ever'⁷⁴⁸. '90 per cent of the media is anti-Croat'⁷⁴⁹, argued another veteran; thus, they should be lustrated too as 'they wish to portray Croatian defenders in a negative light in order for people to hate them'⁷⁵⁰. Overall, participants agree that the lack of lustration leaves Croatia vulnerable and exposed to new threats; thus, keeping people cemented in the conflict and the old 'normal'. This minimises people's chances to pursue a desired 'normal' within 'home' which is in danger due to both ideologies – communism and the Greater-Serbia ideology – fuelled by historical myths and propaganda. To resist this danger, a more homogenous approach of the Croatian people is needed because 'nobody would dare to touch a unified Croatia'⁷⁵¹; therefore, the emphasis is on dealing with the past and ensuring the survival of the nation and 'home' to open space for a new 'normal' to emerge. It is 'the lies from the past' that keep the entire nation on a roller coaster; to break this cycle of insecurity, lustration is essential.

Therefore, the second layer of the lack of lustration is linked to truth and justice because 'we are prisoners of old communist' structures and their versions of the truth'⁷⁵² as 'we have been brainwashed for 70 years'⁷⁵³. One participant stated that he had not included truth and justice among his priorities because Croatian society is still being controlled by 'people from intelligence services such as the UDBA and KOS'⁷⁵⁴; hence, there is no hope for truth and justice.⁷⁵⁵ 'Lustration would open space for truth in all spheres of society, and many topics would be the subject of debate among professionals instead of being a matter of political divisions among people', claims another veteran⁷⁵⁶. Without lustration, 'we live in a historically distorted lie because history was written by the victors'⁷⁵⁷ and we learned that version; therefore, history needs to be corrected and given to truth'⁷⁵⁸. Hence, history needs to be returned to the values of a better version of 'normal' as opposed to the old 'normal' where official history served politics.

This idea suggests a complete transformation of the relationship between the truth/history and the nation. However, this is not easy because challenging prescribed political

⁷⁴⁸ ES034.

⁷⁴⁹ ND024. WS026.

⁷⁵⁰ ND024. WS026.

⁷⁵¹ ND047.

⁷⁵² ND047.

⁷⁵³ ND048.

⁷⁵⁴ The Yugoslav Counter-Intelligence Service.

⁷⁵⁵ WS026.

⁷⁵⁶ ND047.

⁷⁵⁷ This refers to the Second World War.

⁷⁵⁸ ND018.

dogmas about the Second World War and post-war period is often seen as ‘negationism’, particularly by political elites.⁷⁵⁹ As a result, society is divided among many lines even within families while stereotypes and their psychological consequences are preventing them from dealing with the past, healing and moving on. These divisions are influencing ‘normal life’ as people are exposed to Second World War debates almost on a daily basis, instead of focusing on their present and future. Hence, national reconciliation could be an even bigger issue than reconciliation with the enemies from the Homeland War. For those who are trapped in that circle of manipulations and myths, past events become one of the vital parts of their everyday life where many topics are based on the ‘us versus them’ mind-set and this can lead to new conflicts or instabilities. This way of thinking can easily be transferred to new generations through a history curriculum, or within families where oral history can have a greater significance since it is mirroring personal experiences of truth leading to similar experiences I described earlier using my childhood memories. Furthermore, the lack of lustration leads to injustice; the reason why Croatia is losing the war in peace is ‘because people still matter due to their political beliefs being acceptable to the regime, and not because they are competent and skilled’⁷⁶⁰. Hence, this causes inequality and, therefore, ‘lustration must be implemented as a pattern to address injustices in a democratic state’⁷⁶¹. Injustice and the absence of truth are so painful that some believe they are ‘the main reason behind all those suicides’⁷⁶².

These statements reveal moral values as the main argument for pursuing truth and justice; thus, encouraging the development of a better ‘normal life’. This includes different issues such as letting professionals deal with the past, focusing on skills, qualifications and competences over political beliefs, removing obstacles to establishing a truly democratic society, and creating a fairer society in which pursuing an ideal ‘normal’ within ‘home’ would be normal instead of ‘abnormal’. Finally, in the current ‘abnormality’ moral values are

⁷⁵⁹ For example, the former Croatian president Stjepan Mesić compared it with ‘celebrating Fascism’ and argued that this might prevent Croatia from joining the EU. Matkovich, *Croatia and Slovenia at the end and after the Second World War*, p. 147. Stjepan Mesić, ‘S rastućom zabrinutošću pratim drugu ofenzivu povijesnog revizionizma’, *SEEBiz*, 15 October 2011, <<http://www.seebiz.eu/stjepan-mesic-s-rastucom-zabrinutoscu-pratim-drugu-ofenzivu-povijesnog-revizionizma/ar-15671/>> [accessed 14 May 2020]. ‘Argumentima protiv povijesnog revizionizma’, Savez antifašističkih boraca i antifašista RH official website, Zagreb, 7 November 2012, <http://www.sabh.hr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=54:predsjednitvo-saba-rh-argumentima-protiv-povijesnog-revizionizma-&catid=5:novosti&Itemid=14> [accessed 15 April 2020].

At the same time, researchers are exposed to political pressure which aims to prevent impartial and thorough research, and therefore, the ‘historical truth’ keeps disappearing behind a politically motivated smokescreen of half-truths, distorted facts and manipulated victim numbers. Moreover, different interpretations of historical events that do not necessarily reflect evidence that support particular historical facts have been imposed by the media that often adopt a political and ideological approach. Matkovich, *Croatia and Slovenia at the end and after the Second World War (1944 – 1945)*, p. 147.

⁷⁶⁰ OTH055.

⁷⁶¹ ND003.

⁷⁶² ND047.

reversed as truth becomes ‘unacceptable’ and justice becomes ‘a wrongdoing’. This has a detrimental impact on those who dare to question; thus, undermining their attempts to think critically, develop intellectually and explore their full potential as human beings.

Another layer of the lack of lustration is related to economic problems, development, corruption and unemployment because ‘the enemy is the same in politics and economics’⁷⁶³. One veteran believes that the communists do not pose a threat in terms of the mass killings that took place in 1945 because they died or they are too old, and, thus, their influence has waned.⁷⁶⁴ However, ‘the negative economic effect on the entire nation is being carried out for the most part by former communists and their followers’, and in that context they are significantly stronger than in the 1990s.⁷⁶⁵ Hence, lustration is needed because ‘red thieves’ constantly harm ‘Croatia’s wellbeing’⁷⁶⁶. With regards to this, one participant goes a step further saying that the ‘Serbs were taken advantage of and robbed by their non-lustrated communist elites just like us, and the reality is that without lustration we will probably not have our country in the future’⁷⁶⁷. He explained that these old communist structures are closely linked to secret services in the region and they are trying to finish the job in secrecy encouraged by the lack of insurgency among people. As explained in the previous chapter, crime and corruption emerged as the most critical problems Croatia faces. Therefore, another veteran is calling out for ‘lustration of privatisation and private property’⁷⁶⁸. This was supported by other participants who concluded that in the process of privatisation ‘the communist elites swam like fish in water’⁷⁶⁹, and, thus, with lustration, ‘we would solve crime and corruption’⁷⁷⁰. Also, ‘we need to get rid of the old mentality of socialism, be creative and innovative, and come up with new projects, but those old bureaucratic structures inhibit any progress’.⁷⁷¹ As these statements reveal, this layer of lustration is strongly linked to prosperity such as economic growth, employment, creativity and better opportunities for people to have a life of better quality where their material needs will be met and, consequently, they will be able to pursue other dreams instead of constantly struggling to survive.

The fourth layer of the lack of lustration is reintegration into civilian life. One participant argued that reintegration is pointless as long as there is no lustration of ‘politics

⁷⁶³ ND018.

⁷⁶⁴ WS014.

⁷⁶⁵ WS014.

⁷⁶⁶ WS014.

⁷⁶⁷ ES034.

⁷⁶⁸ WS017.

⁷⁶⁹ ND020.

⁷⁷⁰ ES016.

⁷⁷¹ ND020.

and politicians in power, including those who fought on the opposite side in the Homeland War⁷⁷². Another said that ‘a real defender still defends the country from anti-Croats because those in power are not Croats at all, in hope that at least our children will be able to have a normal life’⁷⁷³. He added that ‘thieves and mobsters are everywhere in society and it will be very difficult to fix that in the next 50 years’⁷⁷⁴. One veteran believes that ‘it would be best for politicians if we all die as there would be more for them to steal’⁷⁷⁵. Furthermore, for some, reintegration is problematic due to ‘injustice’. Someone said that the key elements of reintegration should be laws, the legal system, fairness and, in the end, democratization of the entire society.⁷⁷⁶ However, ‘we have just moved from a single-party to multi-party single-mindedness where the regime remained the same, mutated and evolved to make things worse’⁷⁷⁷. Another participant argued that ‘the communists came to power, desecrated all our holy things, and portrayed the defenders and patriots as parasites’⁷⁷⁸. This layer is obviously linked to several issues, particularly crime and various injustices, identified by the participants as relevant to their return to civilian life. Therefore, they feel a need to remain Croatian defenders; thus, protecting their ‘home’ and a future opportunity for an ideal ‘normal’ instead of accepting the reality which is being cemented in the past due to old political structures being in place.

The final layer is the most intimate one – an inner peace, introduced in the introduction of this thesis as a layer of ‘normal’ and ‘home’. Inner peace is being disturbed by the rift between reality and a desired ‘normal’ prolonging the conflict on a deeply personal level. This was revealed when different topics in our conversations were tackled and when participants asked what they actually fought for. The same dilemma emerged in the context of lustration when one participant argued that ‘this was not the Croatia I dreamed of’⁷⁷⁹; thus demonstrating connections between macro-political structures and the intimacy of a private world where a profound dissatisfaction with the reality that was currently being experienced is overwhelming. This reality is burdened by ‘a deep moral crisis and this is the worst crisis and most difficult one to cure in any society because it is heavier than economic, social or political ones and the responsibility for that crisis lies not with the aggressor, but the Croatian

⁷⁷² WS017. ND048.

⁷⁷³ OTH055.

⁷⁷⁴ OTH055.

⁷⁷⁵ OTH058.

⁷⁷⁶ FO043.

⁷⁷⁷ FO043.

⁷⁷⁸ ND019.

⁷⁷⁹ WS017. ND048.

traitors, including non-lustrated former communists, UDBA and KOS⁷⁸⁰. Hence, people feel unable to create a new ‘normal’ where certain values would be cherished instead of being dismissed; thus, ‘the only thing we have left is our honour and pride’⁷⁸¹. Therefore, in this context lustration is needed as a tool to address all issues discussed earlier, but from the perspective of finding inner peace as a key to living ‘normally’ within ‘home’.

It is difficult to pinpoint who should be subjected to lustration. In general, the participants spoke of communists who were officially in power between 1945 and 1990, and some later. Only one interviewee felt that those communists who were relevant at that time are no longer alive and, thus, it is too late to do anything.⁷⁸² Some participants emphasised that ‘everybody should be lustrated even if it means another war’⁷⁸³ or even a coup ‘as there is no other way out of this Croslavia’⁷⁸⁴, while some believe that ‘all politicians since 2000’ should be lustrated as this was the period when communists restored their power.⁷⁸⁵ Thus, the pursuit for the ideal ‘normal’ started to crumble only a few years after the war. Events that took place afterwards not only slowed down that pursuit for a new ‘normal’, but they actually forced the nation to go backwards into the old ‘normal’ or at least a new version of the old. As one participant summarised, ‘we created a child, and then left it to the street which turned it into a junkie’⁷⁸⁶. Thus, ‘today’s Croatia is more Yugoslav than Croatian, as we missed the opportunity to create a Croatian Croatia’⁷⁸⁷, or a Croatian ‘home’ as opposed to the Yugoslav reality where that ‘home’ was in danger together with the ideal ‘normal’ which was silenced and prosecuted. Therefore, lustration is supposed to apply to all those who created the obstacles towards a desired ‘normal’ and ‘home’ as an ideal veterans fought for.

⁷⁸⁰ FO043.

⁷⁸¹ FO043.

⁷⁸² ES046.

⁷⁸³ ND048.

⁷⁸⁴ ND029. ES052. Croslavia is a term used to describe Croatia with a Yugoslav and communist mentality. It is often used by the former member of the Croatian parliament General Željko Glasnović. Snježana Šetka, ‘General Željko Glasnović: Narode moj, ne daj se više idiotizirati! Ovu državu možemo slobodno zvati Croslavija!’, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 2 August 2016, <<https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/general-zeljko-glasnovic-narode-moj-ne-daj-se-vise-idiotizirati-ovu-drzavu-mozemo-slobodno-zvati-croslavija-321737>> [accessed 15 January 2020].

⁷⁸⁵ ND024. They explain this by the political processes that started after Tuđman’s death in December 1999. This period of the last two decades is often described as detudjmanisation, and by one of the participants, it has been identified as a period when former communists restored their power. ‘This is why lustration is more needed today than it was in 1995’, he says, ‘although all communists should be lustrated, and also some who were not communists, but they deserve it as it turned out that they are perhaps even more dangerous to the Croatian state’. ND045. Also ND047.

When asked about a stable and lasting peace, another participant stated that Croatia started to lose the war in peace in 2000 and ‘we keep losing it’. ES037.

⁷⁸⁶ ND018.

⁷⁸⁷ ES052.

5.3. EXTERNAL THREATS TO ‘NORMAL’: FROM THE GREATER-SERBIA IDEOLOGY TO THE GREAT POWERS

As discussed earlier, most participants believe that a stable peace was not achieved. Hence, the nation largely lives a normalised conflicted life where conflict continues by different means. In this context, the lack of lustration emerged as the most serious problem Croatia faces. Although the impact of the Greater-Serbia ideology is reduced when compared to 1995, this topic was extensively discussed during the interviews and linked to internal threats when the representatives of the Serbian minority in Croatia were mentioned and external threats when participants reflected upon the statements of Serbian officials. As shown in the previous subchapter, participants also linked this to the impact of the former communists as they serve as a barrier to the total defeat of the Greater-Serbia ideology. In this subchapter, I explore how this influences a sense of safety⁷⁸⁸ and a pursuit for a desired ‘normal’ while ‘Croatia keeps wandering in the fog without a clear goal’⁷⁸⁹.

As explained in chapter 1, the Greater-Serbia ideology has been present since the 19th century; thus, becoming a ‘normal’ part of political relations between Croatia and Serbia. As one participant emphasised, ‘the genesis of the conflict with the same enemy has been going on for over a century, and detrimental solutions have been continually imposed on the Croats although they were neither fair nor realistic; therefore, the possible problems in defining our relations should not be ruled out’⁷⁹⁰. Moreover, Serbian official politics is ‘on the same original foundations of the 19th century imperial politics that leads to conflicts with

⁷⁸⁸ Addressing the safety problem, SOA reported that ‘through its membership in the EU and NATO, Croatia has enhanced its capability for maintaining a high level of security’. However, it was recognised that ‘being a part of the Euro-Atlantic political framework brings numerous economic, political and security advantages on both the internal and foreign political levels, but at the same time presents the Republic of Croatia with new challenges through its participation in political and security activities of the EU and NATO’. Furthermore, ‘in recent years, the Republic of Croatia, due to its NATO and EU membership, and geo-political position, has been exposed to intelligence activities of states which perceive the EU and NATO as security threats or challenges’. ‘SOA Public Report 2015’, p. 8-11.

These security challenges rooted in the Croatian membership in NATO and the EU were further highlighted in more recent reports. In 2016, SOA reported that ‘intelligence interests of other countries in regards to Croatia are directed at gathering information on internal security-political circumstances and mutual open issues, as well as information related to Croatia’s NATO and EU membership’, adding that ‘sympathizers of the Chetnik movement also promote extremely anti-NATO viewpoints’. Reflecting upon foreign intelligence activities in Croatia, SOA noted that ‘particular attention is devoted to the collection of information on dissonant views within the EU and NATO regarding crises and energy projects’ and abusing Croatian media in their ‘attempt to influence public opinion in regard to NATO’s and the EU’s roles in current crisis hotspots, presenting Croatian foreign policy and Croatian allies in negative terms’. ‘SOA Public Report 2016’, *SOA official website*, p. 8-13. Available at <https://www.soa.hr/files/file/SOA-Public-Report-2016.pdf> [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁷⁸⁹ WS005.

⁷⁹⁰ WS015.

neighbouring countries'⁷⁹¹. For example, 'it is enough to hear Serbian politicians' rhetoric, led by Vučić who was a follower of the Chetnik vojvoda Šešelj'⁷⁹². Thus, 'there is no reconciliation'⁷⁹³.

These beliefs about the Greater-Serbia ideology being a persistent threat to Croatian security have been supported by the SOA reports which have been published since 2014 and which have been tackling the problem of Chetnik activities and individuals advocating the Greater-Serbia ideology in the years preceding this research. In 2015, SOA reported that 'followers of the Chetnik movement are still active in neighbouring states and beyond'⁷⁹⁴. In addition, 'sympathizers are also in contact with like-minded individuals in the Republic of Croatia and other organizations and individuals advocating the Greater-Serbia ideology'⁷⁹⁵. However, 'the threat (...) is limited as the number of supporters is negligible and they have no organizational structure in Croatia'⁷⁹⁶. In 2017 when this research was conducted, SOA

⁷⁹¹ ND020.

⁷⁹² ND054. WS011.

For example, Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić stated that 'it is understandable that Serbs rebelled against Croatian authorities 30 years ago' and added that 'Serbia would help its people in Croatia' without specifying what exactly that means. 'Vučić: Razumljivo je da su se Srbi pobunili protiv Hrvatske', *SEEBiz*, 24 August 2019, <<http://www.seebiz.eu/vucic-razumljivo-je-da-su-se-srbi-pobunili-protiv-hrvatske/ar-197730/>> [13 May 2020]. This rhetoric reminded Croats of that which they had heard from Milošević and other Serbian politicians in the years before the Homeland War when inflammatory statements coincided with the gathering of weapons.

⁷⁹³ ES052.

⁷⁹⁴ 'SOA Public Report 2015', p. 11. In 2015, the Higher Court in Belgrade officially pardoned Draža Mihajlović, the leader of the Chetnik movement in the Second World War, who was sentenced for his crimes and executed in 1946. Foreign press reported that 'in the 1990s, Serbian paramilitary forces, who identified with the Chetnik movements, committed violence against the same communities', meaning Croats and Bosnian Muslims. The decision made by the Belgrade court opened the door to public demonstrations of Mihajlović's sympathisers in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. 'Rehabilitacija Draže Mihajlovića odjeknula u cijelom svijetu, Evo što pišu najuglednije strane agencije', *Jutarnji list*, 14 May 2015, <<https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/rehabilitacija-draze-mihailovica-odjeknula-u-cijelom-svijetu-evo-sto-pisu-najuglednije-strane-agencije/386089/>> [accessed 3 May 2020].

⁷⁹⁵ 'SOA Public Report 2015', p. 11.

⁷⁹⁶ 'SOA Public Report 2016', p. 8. In this report, it was also repeated that, 'organizations and followers of the Chetnik movement are still active in the neighbouring states' and they are also 'in contact with like-minded individuals in Croatia' promoting at the same time extremely anti-NATO viewpoints. 'SOA Public Report 2016', p. 12

Apart from the Chetnik activities in the neighbourhood, in late 2016, Croatian daily *Jutarnji List* published an article focused on the 'government of the Serbian Republic of Krajina in exile'. In the letter dated 25 July 2016, sent to Croatian president Kolinda Grabar Kitarović, members of the 'government' labelled Croatian Army veterans as 'the heirs of Ustasha' and 'arsonists, destroyers, robbers, savage killers and persecutors of Serbs' sponsored by NATO and The Vatican. Operation *Storm* was described as a 'criminal action'. The journalist who approached the 'government' was informed that 'the world will no longer be unipolar, but multi-polar as Russia will get stronger'. Therefore, 'we rely very much on Putin believing that he is indeed able to reason with the Croats'. The members of the 'government' admitted that they expect the West to attack Russia who will support them in regaining 'their country', meaning former Croatian occupied territories. Darko Hudelist, 'Ovo je Vlada Republike Srpske Krajine u progonstvu, Uskoro će Rusija ojačati, a onda će Putin urazumiti Hrvate I pomoći nam da vratimo u SAO Krajinu', *Jutarnji list*, 28 October 2016, <<https://www.jutarnji.hr/globus/Globus-politika/ovo-je-vlada-republike-srpske-krajine-u-progonstvu-uskoro-ce-rusija-ojacati-a-onda-ce-putin-urazumiti-hrvate-i-pomoci-nam-da-vratimo-u-sao-krajinu/5195447/>> [accessed 16 January 2020)].

highlighted ‘the rise of Greater-Serbian extremism continues’⁷⁹⁷. The 2018 report emphasised that ‘the southeast neighbourhood of the Republic of Croatia is still unstable and not fully consolidated in terms of security and politics’⁷⁹⁸. Consequently ‘the impact of the legacy arising from the breakup of the former Yugoslavia and the wars of the 1990s is still evident, as well as the impact of many years of inter-ethnic tensions’.⁷⁹⁹ Moreover, ‘the societies of countries in the southeast neighbourhood are still burdened with religious and national extremism’, and ‘Greater-Serbia-related extremism has been continuously present in the neighbouring countries, as well as the denial of territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia’.⁸⁰⁰ Thus, it is not surprising that one participant concluded that ‘the enemy is not giving up of their goals regarding Croatian territory’⁸⁰¹ while Chetnik activism is encouraged by the ‘political needs of some political parties and interest groups’⁸⁰². Obviously, this undermines a sense of safety and creates life filled with anxiety where peace, the way it is understood in the political science, becomes indeed ontologically strange.⁸⁰³ This could change if Serbia ‘transforms within and removes from politics those whose rhetoric is inflammatory’⁸⁰⁴. Furthermore, ‘they have to honestly accept the existence of the Croatian state’⁸⁰⁵; however, an example of Eastern Slavonia which was peacefully reintegrated shows

⁷⁹⁷ ‘SOA Public Report 2017’, SOA official website, p. 7. Available at <https://www.soa.hr/files/file/SOA-Public-Report-2017.pdf> [accessed 16 April 2020]. The events that followed showed that he could be right. In March 2019, France24 reported that Chetniks had gathered in the Bosnian town of Višegrad, where mass crimes were committed during the Second World War and during the war in the early 1990s, singing about how the ‘River Drina will be bloody again’. The EU ambassador to Bosnia, Lars-Gunnar Wigemark, condemned the gathering and tweeted that the ‘disturbing events in Visegrad, glorifying violence and inciting hatred took the region further from reconciliation’. ‘Chetnik gathering in Visegrad spark outrage in Bosnia’, *France24*, 10 March 2019, <<https://www.france24.com/en/20190310-chetnik-gathering-visegrad-spark-outrage-bosnia>> [accessed 15 January 2020].

In May 2017, Bosnian general Atif Dudaković warned that the ‘war is not over; only the shooting was ceased’. An. S., ‘Atif Dudaković: Rat nije završen, već je samo prestala pucnjava’, *Tportal.hr*, 31 May 2017, <<https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/atif-dudakovic-rat-nije-završen-vec-je-samo-prestala-pucnjava-20170531>> [accessed 16 January 2020].

⁷⁹⁸ ‘SOA Public Report 2018’, SOA official website, p. 17. Available at <https://www.soa.hr/files/file/Public-Report-2018.pdf> [accessed 12 April 2020].

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20

⁸⁰¹ The territory is not the only thing the Greater-Serbs are after as the enemy’s goal is to take over Croatia’s ‘natural beauty and economic resources’. ES037.

⁸⁰² FO036.

⁸⁰³ While speaking at the recent Day of Homeland Gratitude in August 2019, the new president of the Serbian National Council in Croatia Boris Milošević highlighted that ‘the war is over, but only formally because it is still happening in the media, in schools, in Croatian society, in the streets’. ‘Milošević: Srbi se suočavaju sa činjenicom da rat nije završen Olujom’, *Ekspres*, 4 August 2019, <<https://www.ekspres.net/vesti/milosevic-srbi-se-suočavaju-sa-cinjenicom-da-rat-nije-završen-olujom>> [accessed 17 January 2020].

4 August 2019. A similar thought was expressed by participant OTH058.

⁸⁰⁴ FO040.

⁸⁰⁵ ND025. WS013.

that the other side is still loyal to the Greater-Serbia ideology instead of pursuing reconciliation.⁸⁰⁶

There is not much hope for change to happen. Some participants emphasised that the Greater-Serbia sympathisers are trying to achieve their aims by different means such as provocation, manipulating the truth, destabilisation of neighbouring countries, declaring all Croats as Ustasha, rehabilitating the Chetnik movement and celebrating their war criminals which consequently ‘influences us and threatens peace’.⁸⁰⁷ One participant described this as ‘a silent war’⁸⁰⁸; others labelled it as ‘Memorandum SANU 3’⁸⁰⁹. Furthermore, ‘one of these propaganda wars against Croatia is the one about the Homeland War described as a civil (fascists war) allegedly with the aim of cleansing Croatia of Serbs as Croatia allegedly did during the Second World War’ and portraying Croatia as a country where ‘it is still dangerous to live and where Serbs have been harassed’.⁸¹⁰ This too was supported by SOA. The 2017 report noted that ‘some attempts to misrepresent the Republic of Croatia in the international community have been recorded’ and ‘these include attempts to deny and misrepresent facts related to the Homeland War and its defensive and liberating character’.⁸¹¹ Furthermore, ‘we also witnessed incidents involving certain football supporters’ groups from Serbia who display anti-Croatian, pro-Chetnik and Greater-Serbia symbols at sporting events’ and ‘such incidents include the participation of certain individuals who hold Croatian citizenship’.⁸¹² These details reveal the situation when this research was conducted. Therefore, some participants, especially those who live in regions where Chetnik propaganda was more pronounced, were experiencing this as a part of everyday life; thus, shattering a sense of post-war ‘normal’ and taking participants back to traumatic war experiences. As someone noted, ‘Serbia has not experienced a catharsis and it has been led by the same people who participated in the aggression against Croatia which makes normalisation of relationships between the two countries impossible’⁸¹³ instead of ‘facing their past and their crimes’.⁸¹⁴

⁸⁰⁶ ND020.

⁸⁰⁷ ND019. ES003. Another participant added that ‘for all of them, the defenders are Ustasha’. ES037.

⁸⁰⁸ WS004.

⁸⁰⁹ WS013.

⁸¹⁰ ES007.

⁸¹¹ ‘SOA Public Report 2017’, p. 7.

In the 2018 report, SOA warned again that ‘for certain topics, media releases include notions that seek to undermine the international reputation of the Republic of Croatia and expand the narrative about illegal and illegitimate activities of Croatian institutions, both today and during the formation and liberation of the Croatian state during the Homeland War’. ‘SOA Public Report 2018’, p. 16.

⁸¹² SOA Public Report 2017’, p. 10.

⁸¹³ ES034. ND025.

⁸¹⁴ WS012.

This catharsis, described by someone as ‘purging the memory from evil’⁸¹⁵, should include Serbian intellectuals who ‘have to renounce the SANU project and the regime that attacked Croatia’ because as long as this is not done ‘reconciliation remains impossible’⁸¹⁶. This belief explicitly emphasises the importance of truth because without it there can be no peace or ‘normal life’ as its lighter shades stay beyond reach.

Some participants doubt ‘that their people will become aware of the need to admit truth and repentance without tasting the absurdity of war themselves’.⁸¹⁷ Moreover, ‘the Serbs are conflicted people who always wished for a Greater Serbia’⁸¹⁸, ‘an unconditional enemy’⁸¹⁹ and, therefore, ‘we cannot expect anything good from them’⁸²⁰. One participant emphasised that the Serbs ‘are raised to hate us and to take from others’⁸²¹, while another added that ‘our children have not been raised in hatred, while Serbian children have been raised in the spirit of Chetnik ideology’⁸²². A participant of non-Croatian origin emphasised that ‘the rest of us, minorities, accepted Croatia as our homeland and Serbs should do the same instead of teaching their children to hate everybody’⁸²³. This too was supported by the SOA reports where potential problems with other minorities were not mentioned. What particularly raised concern in the 2016 report was ‘the fact that members of the younger population have been noticed to express sympathies toward the Greater Serbia and Chetnik extremism’⁸²⁴. This was again highlighted in 2017 as ‘a smaller section of the younger Serbian demographic in Croatia has been identified as supporters of Greater-Serbia and Chetnik ideology and symbolism, active particularly on social media’⁸²⁵. Although ‘their activities currently do not represent a threat to national security’ they ‘undermine the security situation in local communities’.⁸²⁶ This was the first time SOA emphasised safety on the local level and this was published in the same year when this research was conducted; thus, possibly influencing participants’ answers.

⁸¹⁵ ND020.

⁸¹⁶ ES034.

⁸¹⁷ WS012.

⁸¹⁸ ES013. Serbs were described as ‘prone to warfare’ by another participant. ES004.

⁸¹⁹ WS030.

⁸²⁰ ES003.

⁸²¹ ND028. A similar point of view was expressed by another participant who said, ‘you can always expect evil from Serbs’. WS002.

⁸²² WS004.

⁸²³ WS017.

⁸²⁴ ‘SOA Public Report 2016’, p. 8.

⁸²⁵ ‘SOA Public Report 2017’, p. 10.

⁸²⁶ Ibid.

Based on these insights, one veteran concluded that ‘the enemy believes that the Homeland War was only a lost battle and, they prepare for winning the war’.⁸²⁷ Therefore, ‘the war is not over yet as we keep losing the battles for Croatia which are being led in various propaganda ways and lobbying while in Serbia the Chetniks organise training camps and prepare their youth for war against Croatia which they hope to start soon’⁸²⁸. Hence, ‘peace is not possible due to lies and the misrepresentation of history in the last 100 years or more, supported by *Načertanije*⁸²⁹ and the SANU Memorandum; it is only possible on an equal footing and renunciation of Serbia’s aggressive expansionist politics’.⁸³⁰ These statements reveal that, in the context of safety, coming to terms with the past and ending anti-Croatian propaganda is essential. Also, Serbia needs to renounce aggressive politics and pretensions to Croatian territory⁸³¹ and learn ‘to communicate with their neighbours in a healthier way’⁸³². Otherwise, there can be no progress towards peace and a peaceful ‘normal’. It is difficult to say how long that phase of ‘normalisation’ could take. ‘Some things could be resolved in the next 30 years if both parties are interested’, but at the moment ‘there is no progress, no responsibility and as long as problems are not solved, there will be tensions’⁸³³; thus, leaving the participants cemented in the conflict and unable to explore a new ‘normal’ free of the historical burden.

The Greater-Serbia ideology is not alone in this narrative. Apart from Russian influence, it also emerges as ‘an exponent of British politics’⁸³⁴. Some participants highlighted that ‘France and England are against Catholicism and Catholic nations, and to control the Balkans they chose a partner which doesn’t respect truth or honour’⁸³⁵. Moreover, ‘without the involvement of the Great Powers, the Serbs would not dare to attack Croatia

⁸²⁷ ES007. WS014.

⁸²⁸ ES007. WS014.

⁸²⁹ The idea of territorial expansion of Serbia was formulated in 1844 when Ilija Garašanin published a booklet *Načertanije*, a political programme according to which the Serbian state should include Montenegro, Northern Albania, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. For further reading see: Dušan T. Bataković, ‘Ilija Garašanin’s “Načertanije”, A reassessment’, *Balkanica*, vol. 25 (1994), No. 1, 157-183. Also available at https://web.archive.org/web/20140107164026/http://www.rastko.org.rs/istorija/batakovic/batakovic-nacertanije_eng.html [accessed 13 December 2019].

⁸³⁰ ND047. ND025. OTH058. *Memorandum of SANU* was briefly explained in chapter 1.

⁸³¹ FO040, ES050, WS011 and ES001.

⁸³² ES003.

⁸³³ WS004.

⁸³⁴ WS014. Also, ES037 who described the Greater-Serbia ideology as an English ‘angry dog that has always been kept on their chain, but every now and then it’s been released little by little whether it is England or Russia as they both have their interests’.

⁸³⁵ WS012. France and England were described by another participant as ‘mortal enemies’. WS016. One participant added Italy. WS006.

again⁸³⁶ and ‘chances for reconciliation would be higher’⁸³⁷. Thus, the Greater-Serbia ideology needs to be recognised in Europe as a threat to security ‘to prevent bloodshed’⁸³⁸. However, there is little hope for this to happen because ‘England orders Serbia and also imposes those leaders in Croatia who don’t love their people, such as Plenković⁸³⁹ and Milanović^{840,841}. As shown here, foreign powers are not appreciated among the participants. They are perceived as the key players in the international community (described as ‘hypocrites’⁸⁴², ‘garbage men’⁸⁴³, ‘charlatans’⁸⁴⁴ and ‘monsters’⁸⁴⁵) who ‘don’t understand the historical context of the conflict’⁸⁴⁶ and who ‘lost its credibility at the beginning of the war’⁸⁴⁷ when they ‘showed how much they cared about us when they imposed an arms embargo’⁸⁴⁸. The international community ‘diminished the importance of the aggression against Croatia in order to distance Serbia from Russia and to get it on their side’⁸⁴⁹. ‘They would’ve stopped the war if they really wanted peace’⁸⁵⁰ but they were not willing ‘to accept an independent Croatia’⁸⁵¹ and they did it only ‘when they realised that there was no other choice’⁸⁵². What the international community truly wants today is ‘a new Yugoslavia’⁸⁵³. Thus, they keep ‘promoting reconciliation’⁸⁵⁴ with the support of ‘foreign intelligence’⁸⁵⁵ and ‘different organisations’⁸⁵⁶. These include ‘the so-called anti-fascists, and in reality militant pro-Yugoslav and Greater-Serbian organisations, which are a permanent source of instability and represent a serious threat to peace and survival of the Croatian people and their homeland as they oppose Croatian statehood’⁸⁵⁷. To achieve their political goals, foreign powers also need to rely on domestic political actors. Arguing that ‘the people actually have a diametrically opposed view of normalisation than the politicians who run the country’, one veteran

⁸³⁶ ND048.

⁸³⁷ ES048.

⁸³⁸ ES051.

⁸³⁹ Current Croatian prime minister.

⁸⁴⁰ Current Croatian president.

⁸⁴¹ WS012.

⁸⁴² ND052.

⁸⁴³ ND047.

⁸⁴⁴ WS030.

⁸⁴⁵ OTH058.

⁸⁴⁶ ND003.

⁸⁴⁷ ND020.

⁸⁴⁸ WS009.

⁸⁴⁹ WS003.

⁸⁵⁰ WS011. OTH055.

⁸⁵¹ ES050.

⁸⁵² ES001.

⁸⁵³ WS013.

⁸⁵⁴ ND025.

⁸⁵⁵ OTH058.

⁸⁵⁶ ND047.

⁸⁵⁷ ES052.

emphasised that this is due to ‘Croatian politicians being servants to foreign centres of power, such as Washington and Bruxelles as they blindly carry out their orders at the expense of Croatian sovereignty and the interests of the Croatian people’⁸⁵⁸. This leads to a situation where parallel versions of ‘normal’ exist – one imagined by top level actors and another one pursued by ‘ordinary people’; thus, causing dissatisfaction and potentially new tensions, as Atashi and Smyth suggested⁸⁵⁹. Therefore, from the perspective of the participants, the top level actors in the international arena are acting as ‘disturbers’ that tend to control the situation in the former Yugoslav republics and promote a form of reconciliation that implies another ‘Yugoslav’ unity and brotherhood; thus, putting in danger Croatian sovereignty, working against a different version of reconciliation that would imply Serbia coming to terms with the past and diminishing the chances of having ‘normal life’ within the Croatian ‘home’.

5.4. TRANSFORMING CROATIA: HOW TO ADDRESS POSSIBLE SECURITY THREATS AND MOVE TOWARDS AN IMPROVED ‘NORMAL’?

In the previous subchapter, I discussed possible external threats to Croatia and their links to domestic actors. Veterans spoke of Croatia not being assertive enough regarding its needs and goals. Furthermore, ‘some political elites are purely Yugoslav although cloaked in a liberal agenda with the aim of weakening Croatia and subordinating it to foreign interests’⁸⁶⁰ instead of meeting the expectations of people in the post-conflict society and contributing to ‘normalisation’. Some participants even concluded that ‘since 1995 internal enemies are the worst ones as nobody caused us more damage than them’⁸⁶¹. Therefore, ‘we need to show people that the entire power of the fifth column in Croatia is in the hands of the HDZ which survives feeding our enemies, just like the SDP’⁸⁶².

The fifth column is not a new problem because ‘while we were fighting, the fifth column tore Croatia apart materially, but also morally and in every other sense’⁸⁶³. Some participants linked the fifth column and psychological warfare with the spread of Chetnik ideas, highlighting Milorad Pupovac, leader of the SDSS and the Serb National Council⁸⁶⁴, as ‘a legitimate propagator of such politics’⁸⁶⁵. Another interviewee added that ‘looking at

⁸⁵⁸ ES034.

⁸⁵⁹ Atashi, ‘Challenges to conflict transformation from the streets’, p. 49.

⁸⁶⁰ ND047.

⁸⁶¹ OTH055.

⁸⁶² OTH058.

⁸⁶³ WS030.

⁸⁶⁴ Abbreviated SNV – Srpsko narodno vijeće.

⁸⁶⁵ FO043.

Pupovac I have to ask myself who the real victor is in the Homeland War⁸⁶⁶. To have victory in peace, ‘it is necessary for all pieces of the puzzle to come together’⁸⁶⁷. Thus, ‘we must actively destroy the fifth column and their myths at every turn, but we also need to spread awareness of ourselves as a people worthy of the state and life which again comes down to debunking myths about evil and stupid Croats’⁸⁶⁸. One veteran summarised this stating that ‘1995 was just a completion of a process called the Homeland War and that’s all, while the real war for an independent democratic and prosperous state of Croatia is in progress because Croatia has never really been created; only preconditions were’⁸⁶⁹. This was supported by another participant who believes that ‘the war is entering its final phase as the enemy offensive⁸⁷⁰ is getting stronger and Croatia is awakening’ although ‘a critical mass that would encourage changes does not exist, despite a recession and emigration’⁸⁷¹. Some believe that this final phase is ‘about survival as the danger is even greater than during the war’⁸⁷² meaning that protecting ‘home’ in terms of safety becomes priority again, and, therefore, keep postponing the pursuit for a desired ‘normal’.

As participants emphasised, the focus is on Croatia itself as the battle is being waged within its borders and primarily among domestic actors although they are supported by foreign players. ‘There are too many politicians in Croatia who were on the enemy’s side’⁸⁷³ whether this is about the communists or those who supported the Greater-Serbia ideology as both ideologies ‘have not been defeated yet’⁸⁷⁴. To achieve the necessary changes and transform society, lustration which was discussed earlier is needed because ‘the titoists⁸⁷⁵ will not remove themselves’ and this needs to be done on all levels of Croatian society; ‘otherwise, we will perish as a nation’⁸⁷⁶. Another important issue, described as ‘a key to peace’, is reintegration of the Serbian minority into Croatian society.⁸⁷⁷ Both are equally relevant to stability, post-conflict transformation and ‘normalisation’ because, currently, these problems cause a lack of trust in the authorities and former enemies as well as a lack of hope in a better future and an improved ‘normal’. Therefore, I explore both issues from the

⁸⁶⁶ ND048.

⁸⁶⁷ OTH055.

⁸⁶⁸ OTH058.

⁸⁶⁹ FO043.

⁸⁷⁰ Such as prosecution of the Croatian Army veterans and spreading Chetnik ideology, as he explained. WS012.

⁸⁷¹ WS012.

⁸⁷² WS012.

⁸⁷³ WS017.

⁸⁷⁴ ND025.

⁸⁷⁵ Followers of Josip Broz Tito.

⁸⁷⁶ ND047. ES003.

⁸⁷⁷ WS026.

perception of participants before I discuss their thoughts on how to contribute to solving them.

A sense of hopelessness caused by dissatisfaction with the current leadership often appeared in the participants' answers. 'Our homeland must have leadership whose basic premise will be that Croatia was created in the Homeland War (...) and that politicians should have in mind only a deeply national and sovereign thought'⁸⁷⁸; however, this appears not to be the case, at least not from the participants' perception. Some argue that 'Croats don't hold positions of power in their country'; instead these positions belong to 'UDBA and national minorities' and this can be 'changed only by a revolution'.⁸⁷⁹ Others added that 'Croatian politicians simply do not lead Croatian politics which is clear from their attitude towards the war and Croatian defenders'; therefore, Serbs 'won the first half' as the root causes of the war have never been tackled.⁸⁸⁰ One veteran agreed saying that 'the root causes of the bloody war have not been analysed yet and the Greater-Serbia idea continues to live alongside with the fifth column in Croatia; therefore, we are not even close to closing a chapter about security of the country and people'⁸⁸¹. This is extremely important because 'the cause of all Balkan conflicts has always been the Greater-Serbia expansion politics', but 'this has been camouflaged to present the Croats as the main cause of all the troubles'⁸⁸². This has been done by the enemy on the Serbian side and 'left-wing sympathisers and the so-called reputable intellectuals in Croatia'⁸⁸³. Although the war victory was followed by 20 years of silence, 'we can finally say that the consciousness of people is awakening and we are on the right path to retrieve lost memories and fix injustices while insisting on history established only in truth'⁸⁸⁴. Thus, 'disabling the fifth column that dominates the media is a matter of life and death' and that battle includes the destruction of historical myths because 'truth liberates'⁸⁸⁵. Hence, it is necessary to 'vote for politicians with character who would find a way to deal with Croatian enemies' and to 'raise awareness among the Croatian people about the true nature of the largest political party – the HDZ' as it is they 'who feed the cancer with letting enemies destroy everything which is Croatian'⁸⁸⁶. Marginalising the HDZ and defeating it in elections would force that party to 'tectonic changes and self-lustration' in

⁸⁷⁸ WS015. A similar thought was expressed by another participant (ES037).

⁸⁷⁹ WS030.

⁸⁸⁰ ND025. WS017.

⁸⁸¹ OTH058.

⁸⁸² OTH058.

⁸⁸³ OTH058.

⁸⁸⁴ OTH058.

⁸⁸⁵ OTH058.

⁸⁸⁶ OTH058.

order to survive.⁸⁸⁷ Another participant emphasised this idea saying that ‘Croatia is a prisoner of its past, and the keys to the shackles are held by the HDZ-SDP⁸⁸⁸ party’ which ‘successfully conducted reversed lustration of Croatian patriots’⁸⁸⁹. These statements capture the main ideas expressed earlier starting with the importance of historical truth and debunking myths to lustration among the key internal top level and middle-range actors, to open space towards a society where the expectations of people will be met; thus, enabling a different version of ‘normal’.

However, the problem does not remain within the boundaries of political parties. The ‘enemy’ has the same goal, but ‘it’s us who don’t know who we are and what we want because politicians led the people to hopelessness and decreased unity and the moral of Croats’⁸⁹⁰. ‘The biggest problem is us’⁸⁹¹, because ‘we have our country and we cannot always blame others’⁸⁹². This happened due to ‘the majority of Croats losing their homeland Yugoslavia in 1990 and a minority gaining Croatia as seventy years of brain-washing did the trick’⁸⁹³. Thus, to achieve stability and peace, it is necessary to conduct lustration and reveal the real truth about the suffering of Croats as well as improve living standards and retrieve faith in the homeland’⁸⁹⁴. The entire society and its mind-set have to transform; to defeat the communists in Croatia, another war is an option although, ‘they would step back if faced with a real Croatian political option’⁸⁹⁵. This statement emphasises divisions in Croatian society between those who support an independent Croatia and the ‘Yugoslavs’. Moreover, ‘these divisions have never been deeper as Yugoslavism keeps spreading again’⁸⁹⁶. These beliefs suggest that, as stated earlier, the transformation of the mind-set is needed as it would enable a more assertive approach of those political options whose goal is not safety of any ‘home’, but a Croatian ‘home’, meaning the ‘home’ based on the expectations of its people instead of external actors and political elites. Instead of focusing on others, some participants suggest taking control of their lives and putting more effort into the transformation of society by ‘ordinary people’ supported by pro-Croatian top level and middle-range actors.

⁸⁸⁷ OTH058.

⁸⁸⁸ Used to describe HDZ and SDP as political parties of the same origin.

⁸⁸⁹ FO043.

⁸⁹⁰ ND048.

⁸⁹¹ WS004. ND020.

⁸⁹² ES040.

⁸⁹³ ND048.

⁸⁹⁴ ND048.

⁸⁹⁵ ND048.

⁸⁹⁶ WS016.

Furthermore, Serbian war criminals should be prosecuted.⁸⁹⁷ One participant emphasised that he is ‘hoping for another war to end those dirty games’ and clarified that the ‘destruction of Serbian extremists is needed because they will always have Greater Serbia in their mind’⁸⁹⁸. By no means has this applied to the Serbian national minority because there were Serbs who fought for Croatian independence as well as Croats of an Orthodox denomination.⁸⁹⁹ He added that the SPC supports the Greater-Serbia ideology and ‘as long as this problem is not solved, we can only have an apparent peace; thus we can discuss whether a military solution is needed or not, or whether the problem can be solved with police forces’⁹⁰⁰. The impact of the SPC was visible during the Homeland War when ‘they consecrated tanks that went to Vukovar to kill the innocent and today when they indoctrinate children’⁹⁰¹; and ‘encourage war, hatred and killings’⁹⁰². Therefore, ‘as long as the SPC as an autocephalous church operates in Croatia, we can only have co-existence without reconciliation and that co-existence is nothing’⁹⁰³. This can be changed if the Croatian Orthodox Church is acknowledged as the only Orthodox Church in Croatia which ‘would preach true religion’⁹⁰⁴. Here, the emphasis is on religion as a relevant part of everyday life but with awareness that any trace of extremism needs to be removed while encouraging a more tolerant approach which will open a space to mutual understanding and cooperation within the borders of the same homeland – Croatia. This would lead to ‘normal life’ for all citizens within the Croatian ‘home’, regardless of their nationality or religion.

As long as these requirements are not met, the Greater-Serbia ideology remains a threat ‘to neighbours’⁹⁰⁵ and there is no hope for a permanent peace⁹⁰⁶. To address this threat, Croats need a strong army instead of relying on the EU and NATO⁹⁰⁷ which ‘Croatia joined to run away from the Balkans’⁹⁰⁸. Although some participants stated that NATO membership means it is highly unlikely that the former enemy ‘would try the same again’⁹⁰⁹, others believe

⁸⁹⁷ WS002. The participant suggested following the example of Israeli forces implying the prosecution of Nazi war criminals.

⁸⁹⁸ WS004.

⁸⁹⁹ WS004.

⁹⁰⁰ WS004. ND052.

⁹⁰¹ ES050.

⁹⁰² ND018.

⁹⁰³ ND024.

⁹⁰⁴ ND024.

⁹⁰⁵ ND051.

⁹⁰⁶ ES052.

⁹⁰⁷ ND028. This idea was supported by another army veteran who concluded that ‘we need to arm ourselves’.

⁹⁰⁸ WS012.

⁹⁰⁹ ES039.

that this is insufficient because ‘it takes several weeks to deploy NATO troops and that period could be devastating for many Croatian towns’⁹¹⁰. The army needs to be lustrated as well because ‘many generals and officers used to work against their people in the communist regime’⁹¹¹. Moreover, ‘due to the broken security clearance system’, there are pardoned Chetniks within the Croatian police force and ‘their children keep joining the Croatian Army; thus we are creating a part of a future enemy force’⁹¹². In the context of security forces, each citizen is expected to be loyal to the only ‘mother’, which is Croatia, and to be willing to defend it as one of its ‘falcons’ as expressed in *Himna HOS-a*; thus, acknowledging loyalty to ‘home’ as ‘normal’.

Apart from strengthening the army, some participants added that the Serbian minority should love and accept their homeland Croatia⁹¹³ or at least respect it⁹¹⁴ instead of seeing it as ‘a necessary evil’⁹¹⁵ and trying to dictate behaviour in ‘somebody else’s yard’⁹¹⁶. Also, they should not have such a huge impact on Croatian politics⁹¹⁷. Unfortunately, ‘they do not wish to integrate into Croatian society’⁹¹⁸ as they still mourn Yugoslavia where ‘they held positions of power’⁹¹⁹. Another participant clarified that the impact of the Serbian minority on the majority in Croatia’s parliament should be reduced by fairer laws⁹²⁰, but ‘it is our dirty politics that gives them legal options as if they are afraid of them and this creates fertile soil for extremism’⁹²¹. This was supported by a veteran who emphasised that Serbia is using the Serbian minority in Croatia in an attempt to ‘get privileges that they couldn’t gain with the war’.⁹²² Therefore, an attempt to have ‘normal life’ is being disrupted by those in Croatia who still promote the Greater-Serbia ideology, as SOA reports confirmed. Some participants emphasise that it is not the entire Serbian minority in Croatia they have a problem with, but

⁹¹⁰ ES007.

⁹¹¹ ES007.

⁹¹² WS004.

⁹¹³ ND028, ND003 and ND025.

⁹¹⁴ ES051. OTH055.

⁹¹⁵ ES003.

⁹¹⁶ ES001.

⁹¹⁷ ND028, ND003 and WS012.

⁹¹⁸ WS026.

⁹¹⁹ WS026. WS012.

⁹²⁰ FO040. ES052. At the moment, the Serbian minority in Croatia is automatically entitled to three representatives in Croatia’s parliament. According to the last population census in 2011, 7.67 per cent of people in Croatia are national minorities. 4.36 per cent are Serbs. ‘It’s not fair that we have nine minority representatives in parliament, but only three representatives for the diaspora; it should be vice versa’, argued one participant concluding that ‘cooperation between the diaspora and Croatia should be better because people from the diaspora could use their knowledge and experience to revive Croatia’. ES003.

⁹²¹ ES050.

⁹²² FO040.

their current representatives such as Pupovac who is ‘a puppet of political elites’⁹²³ and ‘who is constantly recruiting those who support Greater Serbia’⁹²⁴. The organisations he leads ‘don’t do anything to improve intra-national relations’ because they ‘only care about their own interests, while honest Serbs and their leaders don’t have access to the media’ as they try to distance themselves from Pupovac.⁹²⁵ For example, ‘I don’t have a problem with Predrag Mišić⁹²⁶; he is a patriot who loves this country’⁹²⁷.

Some participants believe that this transformation within the Serbian minority is impossible as long as there is no lustration in the entire society as both processes are strongly interlinked. The goal is ‘completely purging the administration of anti-Croats and anti-Serbs’ meaning those who keep taking advantage of the Serbian minority for Greater-Serbian and personal goals.⁹²⁸ The problems with Serbia that keep threatening peace are rooted not only in the past but also in ‘those satellites such as communists, UDBA, Pupovac – they are all Greater-Serbian’⁹²⁹. Therefore, ‘after lustration, the Greater-Serbia clique would realise that they no longer have their players on the Croatian team and they would accept that they cannot touch us anymore’⁹³⁰. Over time, ‘the Serbian leaders would lose their positions of power and normal Serbs would take over’⁹³¹. Hence, ‘normalisation’ of politics among the Croatian Serbs is needed to distance the Serbian minority from those politicians who, according to participants, do not serve the Croatian interests and the interests of all Croatian citizens, including local Serbs. In this context, the pursuit of ‘normal life’ emerges as a need to open

⁹²³ ES001.

⁹²⁴ ES050. Pupovac stated that the ‘Croatian state, because of its obsessive hatred against Serbs and the inability of political and religious elites could experience the same fate as the puppet state from 1941 to 1945’, meaning it could disappear. A former Croatian minister of foreign affairs and a representative in the Croatian parliament Miro Kovač replied to Pupovac saying, ‘for Croatian society and a co-existence between the Croatian majority and Serbian minority it would be healing if Pupovac distanced himself from Aleksandar Vučić’s statements’. Kovač stated that in 2017 there were 25 hate crimes in Croatia compared to 34 in Slovakia, 47 in Czech Republic, 233 in Hungary, 866 in Poland, 302 in Austria, 875 in Belgium, 3,499 in the Netherlands, 1,505 in France and 7,913 in Germany. ‘Therefore, it is rightly expected from my fellow MP, when speaking to the Croatian and international public, to take into account the statistics on hate crimes committed in Croatia and speak soberly and objectively about the Croatian reality. Unfortunately, instead of that, these days we are witnessing a return to irresponsible exaggerations’, concluded Kovač. Goran Borković, ‘Pupovac: Hrvatska postaje država koja svakodnevno krši manjinska prava’, *Portal Novosti*, 23 August 2019, <<https://www.portalnovosti.com/pupovac-hrvatska-postaje-drzava-koja-svakodnevno-krsi-manjinska-prava>> [accessed 23 January 2020]. S.S., ‘Brojkama na Pupovca: Hrvatska spada u kategoriju europskih zemalja s manje zločina iz mržnje’, *Tportal.hr*, 26 August 2019, <<https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/brojkama-na-pupovca-hrvatska-spada-u-kategoriju-europskih-zemalja-s-manje-zlocina-iz-mrznje-20190826>> [accessed 23 January 2020].

⁹²⁵ ES050.

⁹²⁶ Predrag Mišić is a Vukovar defender of Serbian origin.

⁹²⁷ ND024.

⁹²⁸ WS012.

⁹²⁹ ND018.

⁹³⁰ ND029.

⁹³¹ ND029.

public space for those Serbs whose ‘home’ is within the Croatian borders and whose contribution would be essential for a better communication with Croats and other minorities in Croatia.

Others emphasised that taking a more determinate attitude, including foreign policy towards Serbia, is necessary as it would potentially force the enemy to step back.⁹³² After all, ‘war is a continuation of politics by other means’⁹³³, so when weapons are silenced, you have to continue fighting with different methods if you wish to preserve what was accomplished or achieved; if not, you will lose in peace because the threats never cease to exist and we need to be ready’⁹³⁴. Therefore, conflict, whether it is armed or not, is accepted as part of ‘normal’ life, although as its darker shade. Consequently, being ‘for home ready’ is normal too as a way of protecting the lighter shades of ‘normal’. Furthermore, Croatia also ‘needs to show more self-respect and be determinate about our national interests’⁹³⁵ because ‘when our government starts talking sovereignly to others and from clear national positions, then the internal situation will change for the better’⁹³⁶. Historical truth plays an important part in that process because ‘Croatia should document with historical facts and demonstrate to the EU and the world how Serbia has always been hostile to Croatia, how much the Croatian people suffered, and that such attitudes towards Croatia have not changed’⁹³⁷. Linking the role of historical truth to a sense of justice, some believe that this would make a difference in foreign politics as ‘the EU and the world would interpret insults from Serbia as a threat and put pressure on Serbia, thereby ensuring peace in the region’⁹³⁸ and, consequently, enabling a more peaceful ‘normal life’ for all. As stated earlier, others believe that the role of the international community has been negative, emphasising that ‘the Hague tribunal actually exposed the victims to repeated mutilation by their executors’⁹³⁹; thus, the result of trials ‘deepened a sense of betrayal’⁹⁴⁰. Consequently, fighting for the historical truth emerges as an important goal as it represents a powerful weapon against all internal and external enemies because ‘we are losing the war, but we cannot lose it because truth is on our side’⁹⁴¹. Some

⁹³² WS012.

⁹³³ The thought that war is politics by other means was originally introduced by Carl von Clausewitz. ‘Clausewitz: War as politics by other means’, *Online Library of Liberty*, <<https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/clausewitz-war-as-politics-by-other-means>> [accessed 20 September 2020].

⁹³⁴ ES046.

⁹³⁵ WS011.

⁹³⁶ WS015.

⁹³⁷ WS003.

⁹³⁸ WS003.

⁹³⁹ ES034.

⁹⁴⁰ ND053.

⁹⁴¹ ES037.

believe that this battle for truth should be done ‘with partners on other sides’⁹⁴². For example, ‘loyal Serbs should be included in revealing truth and, consequently, promoting peace between Croatia and Serbia’⁹⁴³. However, ‘this is currently not happening’⁹⁴⁴. Therefore, Croatia needs to be clearer and explicit regarding its goals and communicate with Serbia as an equal partner while pursuing ‘normal life’ which would be beneficial to all its citizens. This is not about reconciliation as it is understood in political science; it is about ‘normal life’ as a two-way street between the former ‘warring parties’ based on truth, justice, respect and understanding with the guaranteed safety of each ‘home’ as the key element.

The question remains how to achieve these goals where there are so many obstacles and so little good will as identified by the participants. Those negative perceptions were confirmed when participants were asked about who had been contributing to processes of reconciliation and forgiveness. They were offered ten options to choose from which they rated from 1 to 5 where 1 means ‘did not contribute at all’ while 5 means ‘contributed exceptionally’.⁹⁴⁵ The lowest average grades were given to Serbian politicians (1.17), SPC (1.19), the Serbian representatives in Croatia (1.26) and the Hague tribunal (1.32). The media and NGOs were rated a bit higher, 1.79 and 1.82 respectively. Croatian politicians were rated slightly better with 2.42. The remaining options – the Catholic Church, Croatian defenders and the general population – were rated significantly better. One participant argued that this was because ‘of all those on the list the general population and the veterans are the most interested in normalising their lives while others are not interested in co-existence because their existence is rooted in the conflict’⁹⁴⁶. ‘Politics mostly causes quarrels, it separates and divides but it is the people who fight wars and in the end, they bring the necessary peace’, argued another veteran who also added that ‘reconciliation’⁹⁴⁷ is in the natural spirit of every human being, meaning a normal person, especially those like Croats who consider themselves Christians’⁹⁴⁸. These statements put a strong emphasis on those who were indeed the most acutely affected by violence, meaning ‘ordinary people’ as opposed to top level and middle-

⁹⁴² ND047.

⁹⁴³ FO040.

⁹⁴⁴ ND047.

⁹⁴⁵ Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Question 26.

⁹⁴⁶ ES042.

⁹⁴⁷ It is important to add that this participant described reconciliation as co-existence and some relationship with a former enemy with the emphasis on ‘respecting others and their opinions’. He did not choose other options in the questionnaire such as ‘Forgiveness and building new relationships with former enemies’ or ‘Rebuilding previous relationships with former enemies’ which would indicate reconciliation as seen by some researchers in political science, as discussed in chapter 2.

⁹⁴⁸ FO043.

range actors. Since the Catholic Church ‘with its authority, prayer and advocacy for forgiveness and peace contributed to the end of the armed conflict’⁹⁴⁹, this explains why it was the only actor from the first two categories in Lederach’s pyramid that stood out with an average grade of 3.81 and was rated as the best contributor to reconciliation.

It can be concluded that, according to the participants, Greater-Serbia aggressive politics was defeated by Croats in 1995, but the same ideology still needs to be defeated by Serbs although ‘there is no indication that this could happen any time soon because the SPC captured their spirit’⁹⁵⁰. On the other hand, the Croatian spirit ‘was captured by the communist mind-set and remnants of old Yugoslav intelligence structures which obstructed our victory while throwing us back to the beginning and successfully working on an inversion of our history’⁹⁵¹. Thus, ‘a spiritual renewal’⁹⁵² of the Croatian people is essential. At the same time, ‘London should lose its power over Serbia while Serbia should lose its power over Croatian political elites’⁹⁵³. Therefore, the influence of external actors on domestic political elites should be diminished while top level and middle-range actors in Croatia should be pursuing ‘normal life’ the way it is expected and desired by its people. To achieve this, lustration is needed because otherwise Croatia remains ‘vulnerable and compromised’ with another war as an option⁹⁵⁴ and a constant threat to a peaceful ‘normal life’.

5.5. ‘BUILDERS IN PEACE’⁹⁵⁵: HOW ARMY VETERANS CAN HELP WITH CREATING A NEW ‘NORMAL’?

If establishing a stable peace 25 years after the war is another unachievable goal for such a large percentage of people who experienced violence the most acutely, and if there are so many ‘disturbers’, the question is how ‘ordinary people’ can support peace-building with the aim of transforming the world around them while moving towards a desired ‘normal’. As explored in the previous subchapter, the participants expressed their lack of faith in other actors which left many with doubts whether peace and ‘normalisation’ are even possible. One could argue that this is beyond the veterans’ control as they are ‘ordinary people’ whose influence on diplomacy, public opinion or any negotiations is limited. Thus, they may have weak opportunities to change the current reality and reshape ‘normal’ according to their

⁹⁴⁹ FO040.

⁹⁵⁰ ND020.

⁹⁵¹ ND020.

⁹⁵² ND020.

⁹⁵³ ND029.

⁹⁵⁴ ND029.

⁹⁵⁵ This phrase was used by one of the participants. ND057.

vision. However, as one of the basic ideas behind post-liberal peace-building and hybrid peace-building is focusing on ‘ordinary people’ to engage them actively in peace-building, I wanted to explore how this could be done in the Croatian context looking through the veterans’ lens. Hence, participants were asked: ‘Do you think that Croatian defenders can contribute to building a stable and lasting peace?’, as it was, for example, done in Northern Ireland. 248 participants answered this question and 82.66 per cent replied affirmatively. Thus, only a smaller percentage of participants do not believe that they as a group have power to influence peace-building, and consequently, safety and stability in Croatia with an aim of achieving a better ‘normal’ life.

Regarding this question, someone concluded that ‘an individual, or so-called ordinary person has no influence whether he is a veteran or not; thus, he can act on some personal level, but that’s insufficient and that activism focuses on accepting reality’⁹⁵⁶. Another added that many died or they are disabled and of poor health⁹⁵⁷ while struggling to survive in everyday life⁹⁵⁸. Some are ‘bought’ which means that ‘only a smaller number of honest patriots is left’⁹⁵⁹. Others simply do not believe in peace as discussed earlier; therefore, if peace cannot be achieved, ‘I don’t see any possibility for any organisation or an individual to act in a positive way’⁹⁶⁰. Furthermore, ‘Croatian defenders brought peace to Croatia and it is the job of politicians to keep that peace’⁹⁶¹ as ‘defenders’ wounds are still fresh’⁹⁶². Therefore, the veterans’ contribution to peace is ‘our silence as we don’t react to numerous provocations’.⁹⁶³ These statements reveal quite a passive approach to social engagement as people believe that their impact is almost non-existent; apart from the most inner layer of ‘normal’ which is limited to personal space. Serious problems they face in the personal sphere cause more obstacles to their attempts to get socially active; thus, better care and support for these people is essential as it would enable them to explore their options and become involved.

This previous statement about silence also emerged when participants were rating veterans’ contribution to forgiveness and reconciliation. As discussed earlier, the general population and veterans were chosen as the best contributors after the Catholic Church, with

⁹⁵⁶ ES046.

⁹⁵⁷ ND047.

⁹⁵⁸ WS013.

⁹⁵⁹ ND048.

⁹⁶⁰ ES046.

⁹⁶¹ ND025.

⁹⁶² WS004.

⁹⁶³ WS004.

an average grade of 2.94 and 3.21 respectively. What their contribution actually was can be divided into several categories such as:

- unlike the Communist Party in 1945, the victor of the Homeland War did not retaliate meaning that Croatian defenders did not take justice into their own hands regardless of personal suffering⁹⁶⁴,
- they did not interfere in political decisions made by top level and middle-range actors⁹⁶⁵; instead, they accepted them with silence⁹⁶⁶,
- the general population, including veterans, did not express hatred towards Serbs⁹⁶⁷; instead people were peaceful, merciful and tolerant, and ‘such behaviour of Croatian defenders certainly contributed to blunting the edge of hatred among the Serbs’⁹⁶⁸,
- ‘ordinary people’ communicate with the ‘other’ demonstrating that ‘civilised communication is possible although with caution’⁹⁶⁹, and
- Croatian defenders defeated the enemy in the battlefield and according to some participants, this is enough for reconciliation⁹⁷⁰.

These explanations revealed that the participants actually supported different elements of reconciliation the way it is understood in political science, such as Lederach’s work, focusing on justice which did not transform into revenge, was tolerant and merciful, and accepting a dialogue with the ‘other’ while continuously supporting top level actors and their decisions, thus, respecting a political system, hierarchy and democratic values. However, this does not mean that they are satisfied. ‘We are too tolerant’, argued some⁹⁷¹, ‘and we need to change that approach because this has been transforming us from victim to aggressor’⁹⁷². ‘We don’t know our history which leads to a conflict among ourselves’, they said asking what can be done if ‘we don’t understand ourselves’.⁹⁷³ Furthermore, ‘ordinary people’ are ‘dulled by daily propaganda and unaware that they have essentially forgiven the Serbs for everything and have even accepted their atrocities in a way that does not demand responsibility and

⁹⁶⁴ WS006. ES013.

⁹⁶⁵ WS026.

⁹⁶⁶ ES037. ES016.

⁹⁶⁷ OTH055. ND019.

⁹⁶⁸ OTH058.

⁹⁶⁹ ES046.

⁹⁷⁰ ND018. ND025.

⁹⁷¹ ND047. WS004.

⁹⁷² WS004.

⁹⁷³ WS004.

punishment'⁹⁷⁴. The question is how to be more assertive and articulate specific goals that would open space for creating a better and safer 'normal life' for all.

The veterans' ability to act as a group and influence peace-building process, meaning the post-conflict society in which they are trying to pursue their ideal of 'normal', emerged as an important topic equally among those who believe they can help build peace and those who disagree. One participant emphasised that 'Croatian defenders have been disabled by the methods of special warfare'⁹⁷⁵. Firstly, due to the current attitude of Croatian society and politicians towards veterans, 'their attempt to do something would be sabotaged and described as subversive or hate speech'⁹⁷⁶. Therefore, veterans' activism is possible 'only if it supports the politics of the leading party which is not beneficial for most defenders, while others who engage with politics are marginalised'⁹⁷⁷. Others argued that those who are marginalised are not only Croatian defenders but volunteers from 1991 'which is a huge difference'⁹⁷⁸. Even if this barrier is removed, they feel as if their voices would still be silenced as they cannot 'reach the public space' due to the media being flooded by NGO representatives. They keep 'lecturing' and expressing anti-Croat views⁹⁷⁹, even 'spitting on us and lying to the world while being funded by Croatia, groups such as Documenta'⁹⁸⁰, or those veterans' associations who support 'official politics'⁹⁸¹. Here, a strong sentiment was expressed regarding top level and middle-range actors who, according to participants, discourage or even prevent engagement by 'ordinary people; thus, limiting their ability to impact their 'local' and pursue their desired 'normal'.

Furthermore, their activity as a specific group of people has been challenged by a huge number of different veteran associations and internal divisions. Some participants highlighted that 'politics divided our associations because politicians were afraid of what the Croatian defenders could do if they were as united as they had been in the war'⁹⁸². This was done 'on

⁹⁷⁴ WS012.

⁹⁷⁵ ND020. WS004.

⁹⁷⁶ WS003.

⁹⁷⁷ WS003.

⁹⁷⁸ FO043.

⁹⁷⁹ ND024. Some Croatian media, such as Index.hr, mostly focus on Serbian minority (4.36 per cent of the total population) rights and very rarely publish articles about other minorities, such as Bosniaks, Muslims, Italians, Albanians, Roma, Hungarians, Slovene, Czechs, Montenegrins and Macedonians (3.14 per cent of the total population). Source: 'Population by ethnicity, 1971 – 2011 census', *Croatian Bureau of Statistics official website*, <https://www.dzs.hr/Eng/censuses/census2011/results/htm/usp_03_EN.htm> [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁹⁸⁰ ES050.

⁹⁸¹ FO040.

⁹⁸² ND025.

purpose'⁹⁸³ because 'strength is in numbers'⁹⁸⁴ and 'once we are unified, we would enter the pores of the political elites, including parliament'⁹⁸⁵. Another veteran described this as 'using veterans' associations to control the most dangerous members of society who are the only ones capable of overthrowing the government by decisive force', although 'I don't exclude riots since democracy is not what this totalitarian regime values; the police force would probably join us and this is something the government is afraid of'⁹⁸⁶. Another argued that even a military coup is needed although 'this should have been done in 2011 to prevent the return of the Communist Party to power'⁹⁸⁷. Some rejected this idea describing it as unpredictable and saying that it would result in Croatian victims, and possibly a civil war.⁹⁸⁸ Other participants added that they were 'manipulated by the HDZ'⁹⁸⁹, government⁹⁹⁰, politics⁹⁹¹ or 'rich and powerful'⁹⁹². Also, 'many saw some personal interests through the financing of veterans' associations, which led to disunity'⁹⁹³ or 'those associations that have been funded simply serve politics and cause confusion among the veterans'⁹⁹⁴. This further deepens internal conflicts among the veterans⁹⁹⁵; thus, the reason for this lack of unity is 'not always in some conspiracies but quite often in personal interests'⁹⁹⁶ and 'huge egos'⁹⁹⁷. These thoughts about the inability of those associations to articulate veterans' expectations due to the close relationship with politics is in line with Jansen's observations about contamination of the civil sector, as discussed in chapter 2⁹⁹⁸. As highlighted in chapter 4, social life is a part of 'normal life'; thus, limiting people's opportunities to get involved and means preventing them from fully exploring 'normal' even within the associations that are supposed to represent them and their interests.

How to solve this lack of unity remains unclear as some claim that 'all veteran associations should be deactivated as they only serve themselves'⁹⁹⁹ while others believe they

⁹⁸³ ND003. ND024. ND050. ND052. ND053. ND056. ND018. WS009. WS017. ES016.

⁹⁸⁴ ND048.

⁹⁸⁵ ND018.

⁹⁸⁶ ES034.

⁹⁸⁷ ES052.

⁹⁸⁸ WS012. Another participant said that 'an army is never a permanent solution'. ES040. Also, ES050.

⁹⁸⁹ WS002, WS017 and WS004.

⁹⁹⁰ ES007.

⁹⁹¹ ES050.

⁹⁹² OTH058.

⁹⁹³ WS003. OTH058.

⁹⁹⁴ FO040.

⁹⁹⁵ ND056.

⁹⁹⁶ ND057.

⁹⁹⁷ ES042.

⁹⁹⁸ See footnote 214.

⁹⁹⁹ ES003.

should be merged into one¹⁰⁰⁰. Some added that there should be fewer organisations on a national level – for police officers, volunteers and veterans, and those of each military unit on a local level¹⁰⁰¹ as ‘some problems are indeed local and that’s the reason why there are so many veteran associations’¹⁰⁰². Even if unity is achieved and veterans’ activism becomes successful, some argue that ‘a permanent peace will still depend on politicians instead of soldiers’¹⁰⁰³. However, this unity would help them as a group to define common goals such as developing and utilising Croatian sources instead of depending on foreign ones in order to address some ‘normal life’ issues such as reducing ‘unnecessary import’¹⁰⁰⁴, reducing ‘an impact of war consequences’¹⁰⁰⁵, and encouraging people to have faith in the future.¹⁰⁰⁶ Once this clear idea of what they are fighting for in peace is developed, ‘we would need a charismatic and reputable person who would initiate this and lead us’¹⁰⁰⁷. Some believe that this is the main Croatian problem, as there is ‘no one who is intellectually strong, courageous, willing to make sacrifices, lead the people and offer them hope’¹⁰⁰⁸.

As highlighted earlier, my data show that there is a general consensus that despite obstacles, veterans can help to build a stable peace or to preserve it once it is established. Therefore, in different circumstances they would have better opportunities to explore a full spectrum of ‘normal’ shades and pursue their desired ‘normal’. One participant emphasised that ‘the war experience we have gone through is reason enough for us to fight for peace because we saw the horrors of war with our own eyes’¹⁰⁰⁹. After all, ‘we were willing to give our lives for our country’, and, hence, ‘we would be willing to help with achieving peace’¹⁰¹⁰. This can be done in different ways such as ‘participating in politics and working’¹⁰¹¹ in ‘basically all spheres of society’¹⁰¹² as veterans are ‘a part of society and society needs them as much as they need society’¹⁰¹³. Some argue that they ‘did not fight for this kind of society’ and, therefore, they should be politically active in order to change it.¹⁰¹⁴ Others added that

¹⁰⁰⁰ ND022. ND018.

¹⁰⁰¹ ND024. ND028.

¹⁰⁰² ND058.

¹⁰⁰³ ND057.

¹⁰⁰⁴ ND029.

¹⁰⁰⁵ ND029.

¹⁰⁰⁶ ND029.

¹⁰⁰⁷ WS012.

¹⁰⁰⁸ WS009.

¹⁰⁰⁹ ES007.

¹⁰¹⁰ ND019.

¹⁰¹¹ ND053.

¹⁰¹² ND054. ES016.

¹⁰¹³ ND054.

¹⁰¹⁴ ND024.

‘more of them should be employed instead of being retired’¹⁰¹⁵ emphasising that mass retirements were done after the war with the goal of ‘putting veterans to sleep’¹⁰¹⁶. Some participants described this as ‘buying veterans’ to ‘silence’ them and ‘get their votes in elections’¹⁰¹⁷, and, therefore, socially euthanizing them, especially from 2000 when ‘3,600 defenders were excluded from the police force’¹⁰¹⁸. Although veterans tried ‘to awaken people by protesting’ in the past, this would no longer be an effective strategy as ‘you can no longer know if the protest is being organised by an enemy or a patriot’¹⁰¹⁹. When asked about the previous attempts of establishing veterans’ political parties, one emphasised that ‘this is a consequence of centuries of oppression and a well-organised and well-paid team on the other side which readily thwarts veterans’ plans’¹⁰²⁰. Another argued that ‘veterans simply don’t have patience for politics’¹⁰²¹. Apart from political activism, they could also support the development of society as doctors, engineers, painters and other professionals.¹⁰²² To do this, further education should be encouraged like it has been done in the USA¹⁰²³ or Israel¹⁰²⁴ because ‘we should never get tired of helping the homeland’¹⁰²⁵. As shown here, their ideas focus on a full range of social activism starting from working; thus, contributing to society and having opportunities to get engaged with different people in the workplace, to being politically active. All these options are seen as part of ‘normal life’. This way they would become active and valuable members of their community, and, consequently, have more opportunities to live to the fullest and explore all shades of ‘normal’ while influencing the world around them and promoting changes towards a desired ‘normal’.

Some participants argued that they have ‘huge war experience’¹⁰²⁶ and should be using their expertise ‘in the right places’¹⁰²⁷ such as government organisations and institutions¹⁰²⁸ as this would prevent the government from ‘selling national resources’¹⁰²⁹. This should be done with those veterans ‘who have Croatian interests at heart instead of

¹⁰¹⁵ ND056.

¹⁰¹⁶ FO040.

¹⁰¹⁷ WS011.

¹⁰¹⁸ WS017.

¹⁰¹⁹ WS012.

¹⁰²⁰ ND029.

¹⁰²¹ ND047.

¹⁰²² ND045.

¹⁰²³ OTH058.

¹⁰²⁴ WS015.

¹⁰²⁵ WS015.

¹⁰²⁶ ND028. ES042.

¹⁰²⁷ ND050.

¹⁰²⁸ ND051.

¹⁰²⁹ OTH055. WS017.

personal interests’ and ‘who have proven themselves by working for the common good’¹⁰³⁰. For others, ‘the right places’ also include training new soldiers¹⁰³¹ and diplomats¹⁰³², supporting the judiciary¹⁰³³ and creating¹⁰³⁴ or changing laws¹⁰³⁵. If this was achieved, ‘Croatia would be a fairer, more prosperous and determined society, while Serbia would be more moderate in its statements, the international community would look at us differently and a stable peace would be achieved’¹⁰³⁶. Others concluded that veterans ‘made a huge mistake as we should not have handed over governance; instead we should have done it, but this is no longer possible as we are not united’¹⁰³⁷. For example, someone emphasised that a Jewish army officer once told him: ‘you won the war, but you will lose it if real soldiers don’t take over the Department of Defence, the Department of Internal Affairs and intelligence agency’¹⁰³⁸. These statements support a view that veterans should keep contributing to building a safer society just like they defended their ‘mother’ in the early 1990s. With their support, safety as an important requirement for a peaceful ‘normal’ could be met and, therefore, it would open space to society to pursue other goals.

Finally, another veteran contribution is their knowledge of historical events. For example, they are ‘sufficiently engaged in various celebrations and anniversaries’ and they should keep reminding everyone of important war events.¹⁰³⁹ Also, they can teach new generations ‘how to love their country and defend the homeland’¹⁰⁴⁰ and give lectures¹⁰⁴¹ to familiarise children with ‘the bloody conflict’¹⁰⁴². Veterans should also be taught how to approach young people while the school curriculum should be improved with more war topics.¹⁰⁴³ In this way, veterans would contribute to ‘preventing history from repeating itself’¹⁰⁴⁴ while reminding people that ‘war is not human and heroism is not a fairy-tale; it is in fact terrible suffering’¹⁰⁴⁵. A part of these efforts should be ‘cherishing the memory of war

¹⁰³⁰ OTH055.

¹⁰³¹ ND054.

¹⁰³² ES042.

¹⁰³³ WS012.

¹⁰³⁴ WS017.

¹⁰³⁵ ES050.

¹⁰³⁶ ND019.

¹⁰³⁷ ES039.

¹⁰³⁸ ND048. A similar opinion was expressed by ES007 and ND058.

¹⁰³⁹ ND052.

¹⁰⁴⁰ ND052.

¹⁰⁴¹ ND054.

¹⁰⁴² ND018.

¹⁰⁴³ WS026.

¹⁰⁴⁴ ND003.

¹⁰⁴⁵ OTH058.

victims'¹⁰⁴⁶ and 'asking Serbia to submit information about missing persons'¹⁰⁴⁷. Another veteran highlighted that some meetings between veterans from both sides were held, allegedly with the aim of finding grave sites from the Homeland War. He added that 'the defenders should not give up because diplomacy is not doing anything; I cannot even imagine the HDZ from 1991 sitting together with Pupovac who knows the location of Dr. Šreter's grave'¹⁰⁴⁸. Here, veteran contributions to a peaceful 'normal' would be within the context of truth.

It can be concluded that 'veterans and all people of good will should help with building a stable peace'¹⁰⁴⁹ and this can be done in various ways such as 'through intellectual work and raising awareness'¹⁰⁵⁰ and using social media 'to promote their views in public'¹⁰⁵¹ while relying 'on their conscious because we are not for sale'¹⁰⁵². 'At the beginning of the Homeland War, we had a vision of what Croatia should be'¹⁰⁵³, they claim, and this is a multi-layered vision of 'home' as discussed earlier. However, that vision 'obviously doesn't suit some people on the top'¹⁰⁵⁴, and, therefore, the participants believe that they have not been allowed to contribute to peace¹⁰⁵⁵ which prevents them from pursuing a desired 'normal'. As shown in this subchapter, this left them with the feeling of being excluded as active participants in transformation of the society they are a part of and being transformed to passive observers of the world they did not fight for.

5.6. CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on answering the third research sub-question: What are the key elements of 'normal life' in the peace-building context? Although I partially tackled this sub-

¹⁰⁴⁶ ND047.

¹⁰⁴⁷ WS017. ES013.

Revealing details about remaining mass and individual graves of missing Croatian soldiers and civilians emerged as one of the key justice topics in everyday life as this would give their families an opportunity to properly bury their loved ones. Ryan also argued that recognising the victims is a part of the reconciliation process. Ryan, *The Transformation of Violent Intercommunal Conflict*, pp. 82-83.

Addressing this issue in the context of the Second World War and the lack of Croatian progress in locating and excavating hundreds of mass graves from that period, in my lectures, interviews and press releases in Croatia, I highlighted that in 2011 the case of Girard vs. France the European Court of Human Rights recognised a new right under Article 8 – the right to bury one's relatives. Maris Burbergs, 'The right to bury one's relatives', *Strasbourg Observers*, 6 October 2011, <<https://strasbourgobservers.com/2011/10/06/the-right-to-bury-one%E2%80%99s-relatives/>> [accessed 12 December 2019]. 'Otvoreno pismo Vijeću za suočavanje s prošlošću', *Croatia Rediviva*, 27 August 2017, <<http://croatiarediviva.com/2017/08/27/otvoreno-pismo-vijecu-suocavanje-s-prosloscu/>> [accessed 13 January 2020].

¹⁰⁴⁸ WS004.

¹⁰⁴⁹ OTH058.

¹⁰⁵⁰ OTH058.

¹⁰⁵¹ ES003.

¹⁰⁵² WS017.

¹⁰⁵³ WS017.

¹⁰⁵⁴ WS017.

¹⁰⁵⁵ WS017.

question in the previous chapter where I explored ‘normal life’ in length, here I highlighted some key issues in post-conflict Croatia which act as disturbers to ‘normal’ in the post-conflict setting; hence disabling a pursuit for a peaceful ‘normal’ in a way truly desired by the participants in this research. The chapter started with the exploration of the historical processes that act as ‘disturbers’ to participants’ attempts to pursue their desired ‘normal’. I identified several issues which were discussed in depth. These were primarily the lack of lustration and the continuity of the Greater-Serbia ideology which, according to participants, cannot be successfully defeated due to former communists acting as a barrier. The lack of lustration enabled former communists to keep positions of power; thus giving them an opportunity to negatively impact society on different levels, to create obstacles to learning about the past and, consequently, to prevent people from exploring a different ‘normal’ as opposed to its communist version. This cemented society in a situation where mentality hardly changes leaving people in an environment where many elements of ‘normal life’ beyond personal space are still difficult to improve. Furthermore, both ideologies – communism and the Greater-Serbia ideology, supported by external factors – keep threatening a sense of safety, as well as a pursuit of truth and justice; thus, leading to instabilities that can cause another conflict and significantly prolong people’s attempts to have the life they desire.

Although the threat of a new war was in the previous chapter identified as one of the least severe problems compared to other issues Croatia faces, data discussed in this chapter revealed that security concerns are far more serious. Thus, safety again becomes a priority emphasising people’s need to fight for life, ‘normal’ and ‘home’. As shown in this chapter, security evolves as a very different notion compared to how it is seen in political science. Although definitions of national security differ¹⁰⁵⁶, this concept tackles the absence of threats to vital national or state interests such as national survival, territorial integrity and political independence. But, here, security emerges as a far more complex and personal experience, like it happened earlier with the understanding of peace and ‘normal’. As highlighted in the introduction of this thesis, the participants closely linked it to the ideal of ‘home’ as a warm, comfortable and safe place where ‘normal’ can be explored. As shown in this chapter using my grandmother as a personal example, and the participants’ experiences, a basic level of safety in terms of survival is not enough. War, as the darkest shade of ‘normal’, occurred to secure ‘home’ and to give people the opportunity to pursue a desired ‘normal’. But, as some

¹⁰⁵⁶ Darko Lacković, ‘Poteškoće u definiranju pojma nacionalne sigurnosti’, *Polemos*, Vol. 3 (2000), No. 6, 197-206.

participants highlighted, achieving victory in war is not the end of the conflict because the battle continues on a different level. This was summarised by one participant who argued that victory ‘depends on how high your standards are’ and what the expectations in peace are, because ‘victory of the state doesn’t mean victory of its citizens as they all lost something anyway’¹⁰⁵⁷. As stated earlier, this statement significantly expands the meaning of a war victory as it does not include only physical safety and the end of armed conflict. ‘Citizens who lost something’ have certain expectations in peace and they differ, depending on their past experiences and their desired ‘normal’. Therefore, on this level security is linked to a ‘true’ victory which does not end with the conflict once the guns are silenced. Instead, this victory can be achieved only when people can truly pursue their ideal of ‘normal’ because, after all, this is what they fought for in the broader context of ‘home’. Thus, conflict is not only linked to survival and securing certain values such as freedom or independence although, as shown in the example of patriotic songs popular during the Homeland War, safety of ‘home’ is the first layer of security, particularly in times when ‘home’ and its’ people are in immediate danger. Instead, conflict implies transformation which happens during the armed conflict and continues afterwards. As a result, the concept of security stretches too, depending on the awareness of people and the most crucial problems at a specific point in time. This makes it a momentary experience. If one feels able to pursue a desired ‘normal’, then safety as a requirement is met. If this is not possible, that means something is lacking as conditions are uncertain. This can be linked to literally any aspect of ‘normal life’ starting from physical safety to opportunities to learn the truth about the past events.

Looking from Lederach’s perspective of ‘desired future’ and thinking in terms of generations, the question is how many generations are needed if one nation did not experience a real peace for several decades, and, as Santayana said, only the dead have seen the end of war¹⁰⁵⁸, while the living keep dreaming about a better ‘normal life’. If such a large percentage of participants in this research feel that there is no peace, this implies that Croatia is still involved in some kind of ‘conflict’. War has not ended, only the shooting ceased, as it was explained by Bosnian general Atif Dudaković.¹⁰⁵⁹ This perception leaves many in the situation which is not perceived as ‘safe’¹⁰⁶⁰. Data analysed in this chapter revealed that over

¹⁰⁵⁷ ES046.

¹⁰⁵⁸ George Santayana (1922): ‘Yet the poor fellows think they are safe! They think that the war is over! Only the dead have seen the end of the war’. Theodore Nadelson, *Trained to kill: Soldiers at war*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 168.

¹⁰⁵⁹ An. S., ‘Atif Dudaković: Rat nije završen, već je samo prestala pucnjava’.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Encouraged by events that took place in Croatia in August 2019 and statements made by Aleksandar Vučić and Milorad Pupovac, the Croatian Society of Historians ‘Dr. Rudolf Horvat’ started an online survey on their

half of participants believe that a new conflict with the same enemy is likely and much more needs to be done to minimise the threat. In the next chapter, I explore how participants in this research tried to find their place in that world where war is over because the shooting ceased, but the conflict continues and keeps impacting their journey towards a lighter shade of ‘normal’.

Facebook page on 25 August 2019. The question was: ‘These days we have witnessed new sabre-rattling by some Serbian politicians. Do you think that with the Croatian victories in 1995 the war was really over, or is it continuing by special means?’ In the first 24 hours, 120 people voted. 83% replied ‘yes’ to the statement ‘No. A new war is possible’, while only 17 per cent answered ‘Yes. The war is over’. It can be assumed that some were under the impression that a new conflict is possible due to tensions Croatia was facing during that week. However, the percentage is still too large to be ignored, and, despite a small sample, it seems that the general population shared the same concerns expressed by the participants in this research. <<https://www.facebook.com/CroatiaRediviva/>> [accessed 26 August 2019]

CHAPTER 6

TOWARDS A 'BETTER LIFE':

RESHAPING PERSONAL IDENTITY AND

TRANSFORMING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE 'OTHER'

War is an unnatural situation where terrible things happen. We are 'damaged' because we watched our friends die and we didn't know who was next. That causes an erosion of the psyche and soul, and war becomes the master of our lives.

A member of HV¹⁰⁶¹

In the previous chapter, I discussed security concerns which cause participants feeling stuck in an on-going conflict and without a possibility to explore 'normal life' in a truly peaceful society. The analysis of responses demonstrated how little faith participants have in a stable peace and how their lives continue with the expectation of another armed conflict; thus, safety as a basic requirement for peaceful 'normal life' has not been met. In this chapter, I focus on participants' attempts to adjust to a new but unsafe 'normal' where the root causes of the conflict remain unsolved while dealing with the transformation of their own identity and their relationship with the 'other'. This analysis will contribute to answering the fourth research sub-question which was: How does 'normal life' relate to transformation of post-conflict relationships?

As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, Duffield and Thornton linked conflict to everyday life suggesting why understanding 'normal' is so important. Some could argue that violence is 'normal' too because 'everybody needs to experience one war; my grandmother

¹⁰⁶¹ ND051.

witnessed four'¹⁰⁶². But some veterans also supported Astore's observation of war as 'the death of normalcy'¹⁰⁶³ arguing that they 'wanted to quickly defeat the enemy and return to my life' because 'as far as I am concerned, war is not life and war stories are not normal apart from some funny events we like to remember'¹⁰⁶⁴. These different observations about normalcy of conflict suggest that understanding violence is as subjective as understanding 'normal' and peace. For some, violence is simply just another element of life while for others violence is located at the end of the 'normal' spectrum at the very border with 'abnormal'. Therefore, throughout this thesis I speak of 'normal' as a palette of different shades as various themes kept emerging via different layers demonstrating that there is no unique approach to 'normal' due to the entire process being so deeply personal and dynamic.

As I show in this chapter, my data reveal that normalcy includes the acceptance of violence to a certain degree as war experiences become a second skin. As stated earlier, trauma changes people; thus, people's experience of the world and their expectations can differ when compared to those who have never experienced such extreme violence. Trauma does not shatter only our assumptions, upon which we base our sense of safety, but also those assumptions linked to our experience of freedom, as Bloom argued¹⁰⁶⁵; thus, potentially limiting one's potential to transform in the post-conflict reality and explore what people can truly accomplish. This was summarised by a veteran who did not participate in this research: 'Once you go to war, you don't come back home'¹⁰⁶⁶. The person who returns home is someone different. This shared experience of extreme violence brings people closer to those who survived the same as their identities are scarred by a similar trauma. They become 'brothers', as they were described in *Hrvatine*. To survive and defend 'home' they had to act as one or as a cast of 'falcons' as identified in *Himna HOS-a*. Once the war is over, they are expected to act as individuals again, often separated from the rest of their flock, and within society that changed while they were away. But, their shared experiences do not go away; instead, those traumas become another layer of their identity. As discussed in chapter 2, this transition from the 'falcons' at war to the individuals at peace has been seen as potentially one of the most valuable peace-building resources if done successfully and if ex-combatants are given an opportunity to act as potential agents of change. Also, their new social status needs

¹⁰⁶² WS006.

¹⁰⁶³ Astore, 'War is the new normal: Seven deadly reasons why America's wars persist'.

¹⁰⁶⁴ OTH058.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Bloom, *Creating Sanctuary*, p.76

¹⁰⁶⁶ I read this statement in the Facebook group for Croatian defenders titled 'Brothers in Arms' where I am a member and where I often engage in conversations on various Croatian historical and political topics. The Facebook group in the Croatian language 'Braća po oružju' / 'Brothers in Arms', 17 July 2020.

to be tackled. They need to feel empowered, free and safe to take a new role in contributing to their community and becoming its valuable members. As stated earlier, securing this new status can be challenging, especially in the first years after conflict. If their specific needs are not being met and if they are not fully supported on the long journey of ‘normalisation’, ex-combatants can feel isolated and excluded from society, as I demonstrate in this chapter. This leaves them with a feeling of being passive observers of the world around them despite their wish to act as an agent of change while at the same time being looked upon as a ‘target group’ or ‘spoilers’ within the peace-building community or as a ‘burden’ within their local community. At the same time, embracing a past touched by violence that left a mark on one’s soul is important too as it indicates coming to terms with influences that cannot be changed and moving towards a future that can be improved. This includes a transformation of lifestyle and approaches to everyday living as well as an understanding of personal identity and the relationship with the one who hurt you, shook your life and diverted it in an unwanted direction; hence, impacting your present and future. In Croatian society where everyday life is heavily influenced by past events and current instabilities discussed in chapter 5, this reset of the entire existence can be challenging. For the ‘outcasts’ it usually begins in a narrow private circle within a nest where each ‘falcon’ can return, rest, heal, recharge, reflect, make decisions and simply live.

Looking at this problem of ‘normalisation’ and moving on after the conflict from my own perspective, I kept thinking about my past which I share with the participants in this research and how conflict influenced my identity and the relationship with the ‘other’ while my inner ‘falcon’ was looking for its nest. In my early childhood, I barely had any knowledge of the Second World War and what I knew was based on the simple fact that Tito’s Partisans won the war against the Germans. In school, I was taught that this was because ‘good guys’ always win. As a result, the most common game children in the former Yugoslavia played was ‘Partisans versus Germans’. The outcome was always the same and known from the very beginning: the one who is a Partisan must win and, naturally, the one who is a German must die.¹⁰⁶⁷ There was no other option as this was the main rule of the game; there was no mercy

¹⁰⁶⁷ When playing this game, everybody wanted to be a good guy, of course, and once when I had to play a German soldier role, I complained when I had to fall on the ground and ‘die’. I did not want to die, but I was taught that the rules of engagement are simple and the ‘good’ always wins. Communists were good; everyone else was bad – that was the narrative. I saw other children accepting this ‘doctrine’ and I accepted it too as I did not know any better. Playing with toy guns instead of Barbie dolls was ‘normal’ and ‘dying’ during the play was ‘normal’ too. Remembering who your enemy is forever and ever was ‘normal’, killing the same enemy over and over again was ‘normal’ too as well as reliving a past which I did not even witness.

for the ‘other’, no reconciliation, the only truth was the ‘official’ one and death of the enemy was the only appropriate justice while peace was very ‘cold’. In this way, the conflict that ended decades before I was born became a natural part of my life. The ‘nest’ was infested by the memories of enemies and instead of being a safe place to grow, it was a place where conflict was the focal point of ‘normal’ and where one was getting ready for another conflict. Everybody was a soldier, but hardly any agent of change in the place where ‘doctrine’ was not questioned. This was the most visible layer of our identity marked by the Partisan blue hat with a red star and red scarf which each child received when they became ‘pioneers’ in the first grade of primary school. We were young soldiers whose purpose was to live and die for the communists’ ideas and to blindly follow the path of a man who was already dead. ‘Normal life’ with other layers of our identity existed, of course, but it was overshadowed by the past events that defined everybody in society and on some level the conflict in the 1940s continued.¹⁰⁶⁸ Throwing away my blue hat and a red scarf in 1989 was easy, but it was just a symbolic step towards my own reintegration to ‘normal life’. Learning how to live differently after experiencing the war for Croatian independence and how to be just a civilian whose mind is not primarily focused on fighting is a part of this still on-going journey. While listening to participants in this research, I wondered how easier it would be for ex-combatants if the entire society gave some thought about our shared past and realised that it is not just veterans who should reintegrate into ‘something’ new; it is actually all of us. This was even supported by a participant who stated that ‘reintegration of the entire Croatian nation into civilian life is still a work in progress’¹⁰⁶⁹.

In this chapter, I explore the presence of war experiences in everyday life and its link to identity. This is followed by analysis of how moving away from military life should look and why this process was stressful for the participants. Furthermore, an issue of inner peace raised by some participants will be discussed. In the final subchapters, I tackle who the ‘other’ is and whether relationships with them can be transformed.

¹⁰⁶⁸ This happened regardless of the thousands of Yugoslav nationals who started working in Germany in the 1960s and all those people who waited for Friday evenings to go to Trieste to purchase jeans or Kinder eggs. These countries – Italy and Germany – were still ‘the enemy’ to a point where my teacher who was teaching me German in the early 1990s told us a story about how some people resented him because he dared to study two ‘fascist’ languages – German and Italian – despite the fact that these languages were in demand due to a huge number of tourists from these countries who visited Yugoslavia during the summer months. Their money was fine as it supported the Yugoslav economy, but that did not change the perception rooted in the past that happened decades ago – that they were the ‘enemy’.

¹⁰⁶⁹ OTH076.

6.1. WHEN WAR BECOMES A NEW ‘MARTIAN’ SKIN: ONCE A SOLDIER ALWAYS A SOLDIER?

‘I don’t think there is enough time to repair some things. Some things just become part of a person, like their skin colour. It doesn’t have to define them, but it’s always with them’¹⁰⁷⁰ – this quote captures one of the main ideas behind my PhD topic. As argued earlier, if violence happened, that traumatic past cannot be changed and the only way forward is learning how to deal with it. This becomes a new version of ‘normal’ as the old one cannot be retrieved even if we believe that ‘normal life’ is the one before the war, as one participant stated¹⁰⁷¹. Occasionally, conflict stays a part of the new ‘normal’, and peace becomes unfamiliar and strange, as Brewer argued.¹⁰⁷² The country could be enjoying peaceful times; thus, conflict ceases on the ‘outside’. But for many who keep reliving war traumas, it resumes on a psychological and personal level. As stated earlier, intractability of conflict manifests on a symbolical level as well, creating what Lederach described as an ‘identity dilemma’.¹⁰⁷³ Thus, participants in this research were asked how they would identify themselves and how they would identify their enemies as my wish was to determine whether identity issues support an idea of a normalised conflicted life where a former enemy is still perceived as a threat to safety and ‘normal’. The purpose of the first question was to establish whether the veterans emphasise their loyalty to their ‘brothers in arms’ as their primary identity, and how this relates to difficulties surrounding reintegration into civilian life and pursuing a peaceful ‘normal life’. The aim of the second question was to determine how ex-combatants perceive their former enemies in peace whether this is an ‘apparent’ peace or a more stable version of peace. If veterans define themselves in military terms, I wondered if they apply the same approach to the ‘other’ and whether this identification burdens participants’ relationships with neighbours who were on the ‘other’ side; thus, potentially diminishing participants’ opportunities to pursue their ideal ‘normal’ within their ‘home’.

Choosing one primary identity was difficult for 20 per cent participants. The majority of them (or 13.33 per cent in total) chose more options, particularly ‘all of the above’ meaning ‘Croatian defender, Croat and Catholic’. There were also those who rejected all available options in the questionnaire. Three participants replied ‘a human’.¹⁰⁷⁴ One veteran answered

¹⁰⁷⁰ Jana DeLeon, *Malevolent (Shaye Archer Series Book 1)*, Kindle Edition (2015).

¹⁰⁷¹ ND025.

¹⁰⁷² Brewer, *Peace Processes*, p. 36.

¹⁰⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷⁴ ES046, FO041 and WS014.

similarly saying that he is ‘just an ordinary citizen for whom every human is a human’¹⁰⁷⁵. Another participant identified himself as ‘a cosmopolitan’¹⁰⁷⁶ while someone stated that he is ‘a person who often sees what others don’t want to see or cannot understand’¹⁰⁷⁷. Someone argued that ‘identity is plural, and it includes a man, a son, a brother, a father, a husband and more’¹⁰⁷⁸. One veteran highlighted that he is ‘a patriot in this context’¹⁰⁷⁹, referring to the topic of this research and implying that just like ‘normal life’, our identity is subject to change depending on circumstances. This was supported by another participant who explained his choice of being primarily a Croatian defender stating that ‘this is my identity based on the topics in this questionnaire’ because ‘I could not have chosen all the available options’¹⁰⁸⁰. ‘In one part of my sub-consciousness and consciousness I kept a military approach to problem solving, and I still look at things from a military-strategic and military-political perspective; thus, I don’t know how much I reintegrated into civilian life, probably not as much as I should have and could have’, he concluded.¹⁰⁸¹ Another veteran who also identified himself as a Croatian defender highlighted that ‘even today the real defender defends Croatia from anti-Croats because those who are in charge in Croatia are not Croats; therefore, I am still a defender’¹⁰⁸². In his case, the focus is on the issues explored in the previous chapter; thus his identity is rooted in the need to defend his ‘home’. This paragraph illustrates the diversity of roles a person can play during one’s lifetime, starting from just being a human being, someone’s sibling, a spouse or a parent, to having identity conditioned by particular circumstances such as war. This also suggests multiple identities that one can have; thus, emphasising that the way we see ourselves can be as subjective and dynamic as ‘normal life’ due to playing various roles in the current ‘normal’.

However, 80 per cent of all participants chose one option, as requested. Among them, 29.17 per cent identified themselves as a ‘Croatian defender’, including one who said that ‘the oath is for life’¹⁰⁸³. 51.25 per cent opted for a ‘Croat’, while only 10.42 per cent and 9.17 per

¹⁰⁷⁵ WS011.

¹⁰⁷⁶ WS019.

¹⁰⁷⁷ OTH042.

¹⁰⁷⁸ OTH057. Another participant expressed a similar thought saying, ‘I am a Croat, but also partially Italian and Hungarian, but this is not everything I am because I am also a design engineer and a musician, in the past I was also an immigrant, I was and still am many things, so I don’t like to see myself only in one way’. ES046.

¹⁰⁷⁹ WS012.

¹⁰⁸⁰ ES040.

¹⁰⁸¹ ES040. A similar thought was expressed by another veteran who stated that ‘I can only say for myself that I will always be half and half, half soldier and half civilian, but it doesn’t take much for that military side to take over; if necessary, I would defend my country again’. WS013.

¹⁰⁸² OTH055.

¹⁰⁸³ ND021.

cent chose a Christian and a Catholic, respectively. When compared to each other, differences between the categories of participants are noticeable.

Table 8: How would participants identify themselves? (in percentages)¹⁰⁸⁴

	Croatian defender	Croat	Christian	Catholic
Eastern Slavonia	26.53	57.14	10.20	6.12
Western Slavonia	20.83	66.67	8.33	4.17
Northern Dalmatia	32.26	37.10	16.13	14.51
Fought in Slavonia and Northern Dalmatia	34.29	42.86	5.71	17.14
Fought elsewhere	28.57	58.57	8.57	4.28
Total:	29.17	51.25	10.42	9.17

Data clearly show that there are similarities between former soldiers in Slavonia and those from other areas. The percentage of those who identified as a ‘Croatian defender’ was below 30 per cent, while the number of those who identified as a ‘Croat’ was well above 50 per cent. On the other hand, the percentage of participants in Northern Dalmatia and those who fought in Slavonia and/or Northern Dalmatia but never lived there was significantly different in both categories. Approximately one third chose a ‘Croatian defender’, while the percentage of those who chose a ‘Croat’ was closer to 40 per cent. Another discrepancy was percentage of participants who identified themselves as a ‘Catholic’ or a ‘Christian’. That number was much higher in Northern Dalmatia with over 30 per cent of participants choosing that option. This could partially be explained by an approximately 7.5 per cent of participants interviewed there being originally from Bosnia-Herzegovina where Croats cherished their religious beliefs for centuries as a way of preserving their identity in Muslim communities established after the Turkish invasion in the 15th century. However, according to data, only one third of them actually chose ‘Catholic’ as their answer which is insufficient to explain this discrepancy.

For the purpose of this research, the most significant detail is that most participants did not identify themselves in military terms, and despite relatively unsuccessful reintegration

¹⁰⁸⁴ Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Question 31. These are percentages only for those who chose only one identity.

into civilian life which will be discussed later, their primary identity remains determinate by their nationality. However, it cannot be neglected that almost one third identified themselves as Croatian defenders. Moreover, 12 per cent of all participants chose a 'Croatian defender' with a 'Croat', a 'Christian', and/or a 'Catholic', which dramatically increases the percentage of those who chose military as their primary or one of their identities to 36.66 per cent. Based on feedback received from some participants, this percentage could have been higher as some decided to choose only one answer as instructed and many focused on their nationality although they were having second thoughts.

This indicates that for some veterans war left a trace in how they see themselves and who they are in the post-conflict world where they are expected to 'reintegrate' and live as civilians while they still feel like Croatian defenders due to their need to keep defending their 'home' for the reasons discussed earlier. This begs the question whether they managed to transition to peaceful civilian life and how they envision this transformation. Some rejected the idea of reintegration as unnecessary or simply unwanted because it 'suggests an adjustment of behaviour and beliefs to social norms which are fake'¹⁰⁸⁵. For them, leaving their uniform is impossible because 'sometimes I still react like I am wearing it and although I am trying to live a normal civilian life there is that feeling which stays inside'¹⁰⁸⁶; thus, referring to military identity shaped during the war. Many supported this main thought that 'a soldier remains a soldier'¹⁰⁸⁷ due to various reasons. 'You remain somehow special' because 'those who are the same as you can accept you and a family accepts you because it must'¹⁰⁸⁸. This is because 'we accept death in a different way because deep inside we got over it; we saw it and we made peace with it and no one who has not experienced that can understand it'.¹⁰⁸⁹ For others, this shift in their identity happened due to the horrors they experienced and this transformation became their new 'normal'. 'I can say that war and war trauma keep following me although I do think that's normal', says one of them.¹⁰⁹⁰ Some described reintegration as 'a fictional term' because 'I will never be able to get rid of war; I still behave like a Croatian soldier and I always will be a Croatian soldier because I love my country'¹⁰⁹¹.

¹⁰⁸⁵ WS014.

¹⁰⁸⁶ ND024.

¹⁰⁸⁷ ES034. WS016. WS017. WS006. FO040. ES013. ND028. ND047. ND024. ND051. ND052. ES051. ND053.

¹⁰⁸⁸ WS002.

¹⁰⁸⁹ ES034.

¹⁰⁹⁰ ND052.

¹⁰⁹¹ ND051.

Whatever the reason, for some people their war experience changed them permanently and they believe that ‘defenders should be accepted for who they are with respect instead of forcibly taking away from us something we find valuable; there are not many generations who created history’¹⁰⁹². Someone argued that there is no successful reintegration ‘as long as society doesn’t accept us for who we are because we all have our baggage and we have to live with it’¹⁰⁹³. Participants acknowledge that they ‘partially remain stuck in the past but that military feeling shouldn’t be taken away from us’¹⁰⁹⁴. Some even emphasised that they are still in 1991 because they were ‘fine’ there as that experience created a strong ‘family’ bond with their brothers in arms or the ‘falcons’, ‘a bond created from pain and sadness which cannot be broken’¹⁰⁹⁵. ‘My life is my homeland and I would give my life for it’, they say.¹⁰⁹⁶ Not only do people change but their way of thinking also changes, and, therefore, ‘someone who fought a war will never be a civilian again’.¹⁰⁹⁷ As they became older they accepted themselves for who they are justifying their approach by saying that ‘adults cannot be changed’¹⁰⁹⁸. Moreover, reintegration should not be forced because ‘every soldier has his own psychological moment’¹⁰⁹⁹; thus, forcing them to fit into someone else’s box ‘could have a negative impact on their psyche’¹¹⁰⁰. Instead, everybody should have the freedom ‘to find his own space to be in and be satisfied’¹¹⁰¹ although this does not mean that ‘every attempt should not be made to include each individual into society to avoid making them feel rejected’¹¹⁰². Thus, there is no solution that fits all. Instead, there is a spectrum of shades within ‘home’ where each ‘falcon’ should find its nest and pursue his own ideal of ‘normal’.

Some participants were almost insulted by the whole idea of reintegration because ‘we didn’t go to war from Mars; they labelled us and created a perception that those who defended the homeland are not normal’¹¹⁰³. In the eyes of ‘falcons’, there is nothing more ‘normal’ but ‘sons’ who defend their ‘mother’, as the *Himna HOS-a* and *Domovino* highlighted. Another participant supported this saying that

¹⁰⁹² FO036.

¹⁰⁹³ WS017, ES014 and ES015.

¹⁰⁹⁴ FO036.

¹⁰⁹⁵ ES022.

¹⁰⁹⁶ ES022.

¹⁰⁹⁷ ES039.

¹⁰⁹⁸ ES001.

¹⁰⁹⁹ ND053.

¹¹⁰⁰ WS005.

¹¹⁰¹ ES001.

¹¹⁰² ES050.

¹¹⁰³ WS030.

being a soldier means that we did our task, we got our country, but we are not Martians and we are not different from others. We are all part of the same society and should socialise together as we all live in the same country. Defenders are not a separate part of our society and therefore, reintegration is unnecessary. We are all valuable people and our society as a whole went through war.¹¹⁰⁴

This approach emphasises that the majority of Croatian defenders were civilians unlike those who joined the Army in a traditional sense. Instead, ‘we were volunteers’ who ‘were never meant to have a military life’¹¹⁰⁵. Similarly to what McEvoy found in Northern Ireland as discussed in chapter 2, some Croatian defenders feel as if they have never been a separate part of society as their military role was a temporary duty in society which was at war as a whole. Therefore, ‘there is nothing to reintegrate into’¹¹⁰⁶. One participant even stated that ‘reintegration is fiction’ which is being used to ‘separate defenders from the rest of society’¹¹⁰⁷. On the other hand, another veteran said that ‘I was not a professional soldier, but actually a civilian who decided to defend my homeland; thus, reintegration into civilian life was normal’¹¹⁰⁸. This indicates that their primary civilian identity is what made their post-war transition, if not smooth, then at least ‘normal’. They acknowledge that this could be different for those who went to war very young because ‘war was their first adult experience’¹¹⁰⁹ and, therefore, ‘the strongest part of identity’¹¹¹⁰ as it shaped them in their early adulthood creating the first layer of their adult ‘normal’.

In the final group of participants who rejected reintegration were those who highlighted that it is not only the veterans who changed, but the entire society that went through a profound transformation. Thus, it would be futile to expect from anyone to fit into a specific way of life which existed before the war. This tackles another key idea in this thesis. People change; ‘normal’ does as well as it depends on people’s experiences as well as their current expectations and circumstances. For example, ‘those who were not at war also need that; therefore, a return to normal life is not only about those who were traumatised in war; understanding, acceptance and giving chances are the key to return to normal life’¹¹¹¹ and this applies to everybody. Thus, ‘normal’ comes in different variations of ‘old’, ‘new’ and

¹¹⁰⁴ OTH055.

¹¹⁰⁵ ND018.

¹¹⁰⁶ ES048.

¹¹⁰⁷ ND056.

¹¹⁰⁸ ES007.

¹¹⁰⁹ ND018.

¹¹¹⁰ ND018.

¹¹¹¹ ND029.

‘desired’. When asked how to reintegrate into a post-conflict ‘normal’ society, one veteran said that ‘our perception of normal is more normal than theirs’¹¹¹² because

we all change in life, our experiences better us; the world did not stop while we were at war, but society did not go to war and does not have the same experiences; upon our return, everybody was different and this is why there is no reintegration into something old because that’s past, therefore, I don’t see the point of reintegration of a soldier into civilian society¹¹¹³.

Hence, their war experience changed the veterans and shifted their lives in an unexpected direction. Therefore, ‘I wouldn’t change anything and I would choose to go through the same experiences again because there were those ugly things and traumatic experiences that upgraded me to a better person who is compassionate and focused on important things; I could say that I have been focusing on living and I am not going to waste it’¹¹¹⁴. In this context, it is accepted that war changes people permanently, sometimes even for the better, and with us, our perception of a peaceful ‘normal’ changes too which can have a positive impact on the transformation in society. Thus, ex-combatants become agents of change because of their experiences, not despite them, and as such they are potentially the key agent of change within their community as they can shift the focus on those things that really matter on their local level. However, their local may not see this potential. Hence, instead of reintegration into civilian life, another participant suggested discussing ‘co-existence between those of us who are different from the rest of society which cares about celebrities, weight loss and thousands of insignificant things because we do have to live next to each other’¹¹¹⁵. This way society would accept diversity of people with different life experiences that shape their vision of their identity and ‘normal’ with all the shades of ‘normal’ co-existence.

These answers reveal why for some participants choosing between possible identities was difficult. For others, their military identity indeed remains the primary one as it changed them forever while some chose their nationality as their military career was only temporary due to circumstances at that time and they never felt separated from the rest of society. These statements also encourage an open-minded approach to this issue as they speak of diversity of opinions and experiences that can contribute to society in various ways making it better and

¹¹¹² WS009.

¹¹¹³ WS009.

¹¹¹⁴ ES034.

¹¹¹⁵ ES034.

more progressive. Among 300 participants, there was only one who did not express any feeling of belonging to any specific group. He asked with whom or what he should reintegrate with concluding that ‘for me it was always difficult to fit in, so I couldn’t disintegrate and I have no reason to reintegrate’¹¹¹⁶. But, the majority of others spoke of belonging and acceptance that opens the space to socialising and leading a post-war ‘normal life’. Even if a soldier always remains a soldier, ‘he still needs to reintegrate if he wishes to live in peace’¹¹¹⁷. How to do this be will be discussed in the following subchapter.

6.2. WHEN SHOOTING CEASED: TRANSITIONING FROM WAR TO PEACEFUL ‘NORMAL’

As discussed in chapter 2, successful reintegration of ex-combatants is potentially one of the most valuable peace-building resources. Furthermore, establishing ‘normal life’, as analysed in chapter 4, was found to be a goal for many in the Croatian context. As stated earlier, ‘normal’ includes safety meaning absence of violence. This also suggests that lives of former soldiers, especially in societies such as Croatia, where those combatants were actually civilians who temporarily became soldiers to defend their homes, should switch back to a ‘peaceful mode’; thus implying some sort of ‘reintegration’ into civilian life despite the challenges. When asked how difficult it was for them to ‘reintegrate’ on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 signifies ‘not at all’ and 10 signifies ‘extremely stressful’, 295 participants, or 98.33 per cent, answered the question with an average grade of 5.96 meaning moderately stressful. The number of those who extremely struggled with reintegration was significantly higher in Slavonia (over 20 per cent), while the lowest number was recorded in Northern Dalmatia. Furthermore, it was also in Northern Dalmatia where the percentage of those whose reintegration was not stressful was the lowest. Compared to the participants who live or lived in the war-affected areas, difficulties experienced by those participants who fought the war but never lived in the affected regions were slightly easier to tackle. Approximately half of all participants graded their adjustments to civilian life with the grades between 5 and 7 while one third found reintegration quite stressful. Only 28.81 per cent (grades 1 – 4) managed to deal with this transition slightly easier.

¹¹¹⁶ ES046.

¹¹¹⁷ ES007.

Table 9: How difficult was it for you to ‘reintegrate’ into civilian life? (in percentages)¹¹¹⁸

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Eastern Slavonia	9.43	9.43	5.66	1.88	15.09	5.66	15.09	11.32	5.66	20.76
Western Slavonia	9.67	6.45	6.45	9.67	12.90	3.22	12.90	6.45	9.67	22.58
Northern Dalmatia	4.94	3.70	6.17	8.64	16.05	12.34	12.34	17.28	7.41	11.11
Fought in the case studies areas	8.89	4.44	2.22	2.22	24.44	2.22	22.22	11.11	6.67	15.56
Fought elsewhere	11.76	10.59	9.88	8.23	18.82	5.88	5.88	9.41	5.88	14.11
TOTAL:	8.81	7.12	6.44	6.44	17.63	6.78	12.54	11.86	6.78	15.60

Thus, for many reintegration was a difficult experience, and, as shown in chapter 4, many participants remain dissatisfied with their lives grading only their family life better and expressing their unhappiness with other segments of everyday living.

Given that many participants skipped the question in the questionnaire when asked about a definition of reintegration or they simply said it was ‘difficult’¹¹¹⁹ or ‘bad’¹¹²⁰, this was explored in-depth during the interviews. Some emphasised that it’s impossible to give a unique answer as this problem is ‘individual’¹¹²¹ or ‘personal’¹¹²²; thus highlighting the uniqueness of the experience. This necessity for an individual approach to reintegration was emphasised by other veterans¹¹²³ who argued that ‘it was more difficult for those who were wounded’¹¹²⁴ and, therefore, ‘war didn’t have the same impact on everybody’¹¹²⁵. Instead of reintegration as a unique approach to all, we should talk about ‘minimising the damage’ for each individual.¹¹²⁶ For some people, even that is not enough because ‘those who went

¹¹¹⁸ Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Question 2.

¹¹¹⁹ ES010, ES022, ES025, ES041, WS018, ND002

¹¹²⁰ ES004, ND038

¹¹²¹ ND057. ND057.

¹¹²² FO043.

¹¹²³ FO036.

¹¹²⁴ ES050.

¹¹²⁵ ND019.

¹¹²⁶ ND047.

through the worst in war need a special kind of help'¹¹²⁷. One's past has to be taken into account because 'we all feel the consequences of war and memories prevent us from reintegrating; thus, reintegration is needed, but not to the point where a defender is expected to renounce his past as that part will always live within us and we need to live with it, and society has to accept it'¹¹²⁸.

Any attempt for reintegration needs to address these individual differences and the government is expected to 'support its people, respect them and care for them'¹¹²⁹. If this advice is followed, a successful reintegration 'would be when a defender feels good in his country and feels like a part of society'¹¹³⁰. Unfortunately, it is exactly this part that the 'administration didn't understand'¹¹³¹. After the war, the government focused on rebuilding the country instead of rebuilding people's lives as 'they didn't think much of reintegration'¹¹³². The government did not prepare to help people to return to 'normal'¹¹³³ although 'we need to admit that our administration had no experience with dealing with that kind of situation'¹¹³⁴. Mistakes that were made are 'impossible to fix'¹¹³⁵. For example, participants feel like they have not been supported enough when trying to exercise their rights. This is largely due to bureaucracy, which is described as 'chaotic'¹¹³⁶ treating veterans as 'some expendable goods'¹¹³⁷. Bureaucracy is 'suffocating us'¹¹³⁸ and forcing some to give up.¹¹³⁹ Some are surprised 'that more veterans didn't give up on life and do something to themselves'¹¹⁴⁰ while others asked whether 'more than 3,000 defenders killed themselves if we had effective assistance'¹¹⁴¹. Some were unable to prove their status because 'paperwork about the military operations I participated in is missing'¹¹⁴²; thus, 'I realised that we have rights, but only until the moment when we actually ask for something'¹¹⁴³. Some reported bizarre situations when they had to get a confirmation letter to prove that 'we were not

¹¹²⁷ ND019.

¹¹²⁸ ND019.

¹¹²⁹ ND019.

¹¹³⁰ ND019.

¹¹³¹ ND019.

¹¹³² ND019.

¹¹³³ ND025.

¹¹³⁴ ES046.

¹¹³⁵ ND053.

¹¹³⁶ ES004.

¹¹³⁷ ES034.

¹¹³⁸ WS004.

¹¹³⁹ ES039. ND003.

¹¹⁴⁰ WS004.

¹¹⁴¹ ES022.

¹¹⁴² ES022.

¹¹⁴³ WS014.

members of the Serbian-Chetnik army'¹¹⁴⁴. One veteran struggled with this injustice and found satisfaction in helping others solve their status which helped him feel useful like 'I had a noble goal'¹¹⁴⁵.

This lack of support from the government left some participants with a feeling that having 'normal life' is indeed an unfulfilled dream and the only hope they have left is 'our work to be preserved, and that's Croatia'¹¹⁴⁶. As one participant emphasised, 'there was not a mechanism for return to civilian life, and for many there were no opportunities to stay in the army; the administration tried to solve this problem in different ways which resulted in frustration and dissatisfaction among the defenders'¹¹⁴⁷. In the following paragraphs, I explore what these mechanisms should be from the perspective of participants who spoke of the key elements of reintegration. It is important to highlight that the steps towards a new 'normal life' explained in this subchapter are by no means a linear process as these depend on personal circumstances; thus, making this process subjective and dynamic just like a pursuit of 'normal'.

The first element is acceptance which emerges as people's expectation within 'home'¹¹⁴⁸. This is not only about society accepting soldiers who returned from war as somehow different but also about veterans' acceptance of a new reality. It is about their 'understanding that the war ended and weapons need to be taken away because putting a gun down means accepting civilian life and once this happens, you also need to leave your uniform as it symbolises military life and belonging to a specific group of people'¹¹⁴⁹. Wearing a uniform in everyday life which is done by some people has been described as their inability to reintegrate because they prefer to keep their military identity and refuse to accept a new life in which that uniform 'doesn't have the same meaning'¹¹⁵⁰. Some believe that insisting on reintegration is a part of the problem because it is not about reintegrating into something but being 'clear in your head that the war is over and it's time to move on'¹¹⁵¹.

¹¹⁴⁴ WS004.

¹¹⁴⁵ ES034.

¹¹⁴⁶ ND053.

¹¹⁴⁷ ND025.

¹¹⁴⁸ ES040.

¹¹⁴⁹ ES040.

¹¹⁵⁰ ES040.

¹¹⁵¹ ES042.

The next layer is addressing any health problems, particularly mental health issues¹¹⁵², because ‘a warrior who went through hell can’t go there anymore, but he can cause hell to others’¹¹⁵³. Some participants reported that they often talk and think about the war which is related to their trauma and fears which can prevent them from reintegration into civilian society and having ‘normal life’. This is in line with Bloom who emphasised that trauma shatters ‘the assumptions upon which we all base our sense of safety and freedom in the world’¹¹⁵⁴, as stated earlier, and, hence, prevents people from living to the fullest as they partially stay cemented at the moment when the trauma was experienced. Thus, I wondered whether the traces of war reflected on veterans’ everyday lives and thoughts. All participants were asked to grade these statements with grades from 1 to 7 where 1 means ‘often’ and 7 means ‘rarely/never’: a) I speak about the experiences of war, b) When thoughts about the war come to me I dispel them, c) I think about my experiences in the war and d) I think about what could have happened to me. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 10: How often do you think about the events you experienced during the war? (in percentages)¹¹⁵⁵

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	20.33	11.66	16.66	15.66	15.00	12.33	6.00
B	10.33	10.00	13.66	18.66	12.33	8.33	21.66
C	22.00	12.66	18.00	18.00	11.33	10.33	6.66
D	20.00	12.66	13.66	16.00	10.66	9.00	15.00

Data revealed that 48.65 per cent of participants relatively often speak of their war experiences, 52.66 per cent think about them and 46.32 per cent think about what could have happened to them. Also, 42.32 per cent have difficulties with dispelling their thoughts (columns 5 – 7 in the B row). Furthermore, the data show that less than 20 per cent of all participants almost never think or speak about their war experiences (columns 6 and 7 in rows A and C). This illustrates that for many war memories are still very much alive and present in everyday life. Participants added that they talk about war ‘to get rid of negative thoughts’¹¹⁵⁶,

¹¹⁵² ES007. One participant started feeling depressed when he was already in the UK and five years after the war he was finally diagnosed with PTSD. ES037.

¹¹⁵³ WS026.

¹¹⁵⁴ Bloom, *Creating Sanctuary*, p.76.

¹¹⁵⁵ Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Question 1.

¹¹⁵⁶ ND052.

‘to get rid of stress’¹¹⁵⁷ or because ‘war is within us’¹¹⁵⁸ because ‘someone attacked us and we had to defend ourselves and what’s ours; this is why it remains permanently written in our lives’¹¹⁵⁹. Being a defender was not a profession; thus, there is no retirement. War disrupted ‘normal life’ which needed to be defended because ‘home’, the idea introduced in the introduction of this thesis, was attacked and this feeling of a personal space facing intrusion made a threat permanent in one’s life pushing an individual to anxiously live on the edge of ‘normal life’. This was highlighted by a participant who said that it was easier once he got rid of paranoia because ‘this was related to a fear of death which stays with you after you saw so many friends die’¹¹⁶⁰.

War conversations, meant to ease suffering and solitude, are often being led among the veterans because it shows them that they are not alone¹¹⁶¹; therefore, ‘falcons’ keep returning to their cast to find comfort and understanding. Some stated that their psychological problems were neglected during the war when they experienced difficult situations and needed help.¹¹⁶² One of participants with PTSD said, ‘when I tried to get help, a psychiatrist asked me how I could possibly remember something that happened 20 years ago and that “something” was my friend dying’¹¹⁶³ Some successfully turned to psychologists, including attending seminars such as ‘Trauma and self-help’¹¹⁶⁴, and the Catholic Church for support as they strongly encouraged talking about their problems instead of medicating them.¹¹⁶⁵

Instead of conversations, others found comfort in different activities. One participant said, ‘I was trying to deal with my PTSD and I struggled with a sense of guilt because of those who didn’t return, and for a long time I wanted everything to repeat so I could save someone or do more’¹¹⁶⁶. Moreover, he became aggressive and abusive as he was projecting his guilt. When he started working for NATO in Iraq ‘I was surprised with how relaxing I

¹¹⁵⁷ ND057.

¹¹⁵⁸ ND054. ND018.

¹¹⁵⁹ ND018.

¹¹⁶⁰ OTH058.

¹¹⁶¹ WS015. WS030.

¹¹⁶² ES037.

¹¹⁶³ ES037.

¹¹⁶⁴ WS026.

¹¹⁶⁵ ES022. ES048. One participant said that his reintegration ‘was enabled with participation in various programmes such as “Trauma and self-help” and engaging in normal life on an everyday basis. The “Trauma and self-help” programme is team work with a psychologist and psychiatrist. If a person engages completely in work and conversation, then you can understand the positive and negative sides of events. Listening is very important as well as understanding. Medicating people doesn’t mean helping them; helping is about gathering in smaller groups, work and conversation. Of course, not everybody managed to reintegrate. I think that depends on the person. Some focused more on treatment and became addicts, others are alcoholics and as such they are not accepted within their family, some divorced, some committed suicide.’ WS026.

¹¹⁶⁶ WS012.

found that war atmosphere; I slept great which I could not do for years; I socialised with everybody and I felt like I was at home. Perhaps I was hoping I would die. I used to think about suicide, but I didn't want to die as a coward. I wanted to leave this world, but as a man'¹¹⁶⁷. This statement demonstrates the profound impact of war on someone's life years after the conflict. For this participant, war indeed became 'normal' as this was where he was 'at home' although the supposed positive feeling he experienced in Iraq was overshadowed by a desire to die and escape the feelings that were difficult to handle. Furthermore, he found a way out in therapy and talking to Croatian veterans of Serbian origin, meaning his 'brothers in arms' who were able to understand him and who were at the same time people who were the 'other' in the context of their nationality. It seems that this served as the bridge that he needed to cross between war and hatred on one side and socialising and 'normal' on the other side. Some veterans reported doing potentially dangerous activities where they were able to keep some sort of military life between life and death disguised as a hobby.¹¹⁶⁸ Instead, sport activities would be beneficial because they 'would help the body to heal physically and psychologically and create a new circle of friends'¹¹⁶⁹ To improve one's fitness, vices should be avoided.¹¹⁷⁰ 'War is over, wounds stay, but it's not physical wounds that keep a person in the war, it's the horrors of war that wound a person, or a person destroys their own soul if they committed a crime and focused on vices', argued one participant.¹¹⁷¹ Distancing oneself from a 'war normal' was sometimes necessary to encourage healing. One participant emphasised that 'perhaps I would be able to integrate if I lived in another country'¹¹⁷² while another moved abroad because he had 'to run away from everything as I couldn't handle the pressure anymore'¹¹⁷³.

¹¹⁶⁷ This participant clarified that 'among other people, I was often aggressive and sometimes physically abusive because I was projecting my own sense of guilt. This happened even with people who were normal and who did nothing wrong to me, and I am sorry for what I did. At that time, I was still in the police force and I guess that gave me an opportunity to harass people without being punished. At the same time, I was also terrified that something could happen to my child and I kept seeing images of dead children in my mind. It's a terrible thing to kill someone, but to kill a child is unthinkable. I mostly dealt with this at group therapy as it is easier to open up to strangers and those who experienced the same, but also socialising with Serbs from my military units and those I grew up with. The first soldier in my unit who was killed was a 22-year old Serb. Faith in God helped me too as I realised how destructive hatred is.' WS012.

¹¹⁶⁸ WS009.

¹¹⁶⁹ ND047. ES018.

¹¹⁷⁰ ND047.

¹¹⁷¹ OTH058.

¹¹⁷² ES022.

¹¹⁷³ ES037.

Many participants perceived staying busy as a step towards healing and moving on towards a peaceful ‘normal’. One veteran said ‘I imaged myself as a ...¹¹⁷⁴ and a family person so I pursued those goals’¹¹⁷⁵. He believes that he is an example of successful reintegration ‘while an example of an unsuccessful one is a young retired person who spends his life in pubs talking about the war and who psychologically still lives in war and because of this he has PTSD’¹¹⁷⁶. Hence, the third step in rebuilding a new ‘normal’ life is about understanding how a new reality differs from war and thinking about future goals. ‘In war you are supposed to kill your enemy, but in peace you are supposed to protect and nurture your loved ones’, argued one veteran.¹¹⁷⁷ Also, ‘people get used to war conditions much faster because peaceful conditions are more relaxed and there is more freedom of choice’ which could be one of the reasons behind numerous suicides as ‘some defenders cannot accept that’¹¹⁷⁸. Thus, ‘returning to normal life can be scary because many lose control over themselves’¹¹⁷⁹. The key is to have a clear vision of a new life and to take responsibility for your choices to regain control over one’s life.

Not everybody was certain about their future; some needed time to learn how to live. However, ‘there was nobody to advise them’, argued one participant¹¹⁸⁰ as ‘the administration and others such as the Church, psychologists, and sociologists should have done this; it was particularly difficult for younger soldiers who went to war very emotionally and whose brains were more affected by war and many escaped from a new reality to drugs, alcohol, gambling etc.’¹¹⁸¹. Another veteran added that ‘some people need reintegration regardless of what it means because they are completely lost’¹¹⁸². This is not just about reintegration into civilian life; instead, it is about reintegration into any life which is not just bare survival on the frontline and what they need is guidance. When a clear vision of one’s future does not exist, ‘living day after day and pursuing short-term goals’ could be beneficial too.¹¹⁸³ The emphasis is on living in the present and moving forward ‘instead of allowing myself to get stuck in 1991’¹¹⁸⁴ because ‘the key is to keep yourself busy and do something useful for yourself or

¹¹⁷⁴ This participant mentioned a particular profession he was interested in pursuing, but this detail has been excluded to protect his identity.

¹¹⁷⁵ ES007.

¹¹⁷⁶ ES007.

¹¹⁷⁷ ES040.

¹¹⁷⁸ ES040.

¹¹⁷⁹ OTH058.

¹¹⁸⁰ ES040.

¹¹⁸¹ ES040.

¹¹⁸² ND029.

¹¹⁸³ ES046.

¹¹⁸⁴ ES042.

others, and to find some goal and purpose'¹¹⁸⁵. This feeling of having purpose is important because the success of reintegration lies in 'dedicating yourself to something so you can leave a trace in your life'¹¹⁸⁶ and 'improve society'¹¹⁸⁷.

To do that, 'certainty of what was waiting for us after the war'¹¹⁸⁸ was essential. What happened in reality was different because 'you had to manage on your own'¹¹⁸⁹. Hence, knowing what comes next after years of uncertainty was the first expectation which was not fulfilled. This is not just about finances although 'if you don't have that, you don't have enough for basic needs and you cannot have normal life'¹¹⁹⁰. This is also about having an opportunity 'to secure yourself'¹¹⁹¹, for example, by working. This is followed by 'a feeling of belonging to society and being useful'¹¹⁹². One veteran said that during the war other soldiers were his family and the 'war situation became something normal' while after the war 'many couldn't get a job and experienced financial problems'¹¹⁹³. Thus, they lost their 'cast of falcons' and the war 'normal', but this was not compensated in the post-conflict society by securing a new status. Due to unemployment, their feeling of belonging to the collective suffered and caused them everyday struggles with bare survival which they were supposed to leave behind when the war ended. Many veterans felt like they had no choice and retired in their 20s, 30s and 40s. This was described by some as 'the biggest mistake'¹¹⁹⁴ because it distanced them even more from society with mostly small pensions that meant struggling for survival for the rest of their lives. This created a new problem as 'people were frustrated'¹¹⁹⁵ and for some 'a retirement was a terrible experience'¹¹⁹⁶. Instead, 'they should have worked according to their health and qualifications'¹¹⁹⁷. 'We are more than just soldiers', argued one participant, 'because we have some experiences and skills that you cannot gain anywhere else'¹¹⁹⁸ and which 'are there for life'¹¹⁹⁹. Some veterans highlighted the importance of further education and gaining new qualifications in order to improve their existing skills and expand

¹¹⁸⁵ ES042.

¹¹⁸⁶ WS026.

¹¹⁸⁷ ND018.

¹¹⁸⁸ ND003. ES039.

¹¹⁸⁹ ND003.

¹¹⁹⁰ ES022.

¹¹⁹¹ ES039.

¹¹⁹² ES050.

¹¹⁹³ ES003.

¹¹⁹⁴ ND003.

¹¹⁹⁵ ND058.

¹¹⁹⁶ WS017.

¹¹⁹⁷ ND003.

¹¹⁹⁸ ES037. ES040.

¹¹⁹⁹ ES040.

their opportunities in the labour market.¹²⁰⁰ In an ideal situation, the workplace should be supportive and encouraging with possibilities of promotion.¹²⁰¹

Overall, participants demonstrated a broader range of thoughts and emotions when answering the question about their identity and reintegration. Based on their replies, which revealed a link between how they see themselves and how they perceive their return to a peaceful 'normal', it can be concluded that there is neither a unified identification nor a unique approach to reintegration into civilian life. Reintegration should be a process of transformation from warrior to civilian which in the Croatian context does not necessarily mean reintegrating into civilian society because many participants saw themselves as an integral part of that same society which has been going through its own transformation. As someone said, 'I never wanted to be a soldier and I consider myself a warrior who defended Croatia'¹²⁰². Another veteran argued that 'reintegration is a phenomenon which is individual; to define it we should define life itself'¹²⁰³. According to some, 'a full reintegration should include working because without work you are in a ghetto; moreover, reintegration is a natural process and it means doing everything that a person would do in peace; thus, not working and having income means not being reintegrated'¹²⁰⁴. Apart from employment, there are other requirements for successful reintegration such as rebuilding homes, putting those who destroyed Croatia on trial because 'how can defenders be satisfied if former enemy soldiers are working in government institutions'¹²⁰⁵ and an 'acknowledgement of all defenders, life with dignity, preserving national pride and punishing criminals and removing them from public life'¹²⁰⁶.

However, the statements explored in this thesis also revealed a huge disappointment some participants had been experiencing while pin-pointing different challenges post-conflict Croatian society faces. Instead of becoming a transformed society, for some it became a 'broken' society due to various internal and external factors. This was summarised by the veteran who said that

the key for successful reintegration should be responsible behaviour of society (administration) – institutions and individuals. (...) The opposite happened in Croatia.

¹²⁰⁰ ND047.

¹²⁰¹ ES040.

¹²⁰² OTH058.

¹²⁰³ ND054.

¹²⁰⁴ OTH058.

¹²⁰⁵ ES003.

¹²⁰⁶ WS012.

Many who wanted to live honestly and normally lost their income. Mass retirements happened twice – in 1995 and 2005. Those who were honest and responsible to the end turned out to be the biggest victims and those who were deceived. It's not about early retirements; this is about a huge number of fake defenders, and the real ones who were forcibly retired or fired which enabled the UDBA and KOS to take over the system. Many people don't know that this was one of the requirements for our membership in NATO.¹²⁰⁷

This led to 'desperation and hopelessness'¹²⁰⁸ and suggests that not only veterans' expectations had not been met, but some of them feel that their 'home' gained at war was eventually lost in peace due to internal and external factors explored in the previous chapter. This transformed 'home' into something that people did not want; thus, neglecting their wishes, expectations and experiences. Once the 'nest' is taken away and the 'falcons' feel helpless to heal the 'broken' society, the only sanctuary they have left was their cast, uniform and memories of what 'home' was supposed to be. This explains why their military identity remained important for such a large number of participants. Some also emphasised the role of their families, particularly wives and children who have been their support. 'Knowing that they are here, and I am with them was enough for a new start', said one veteran.¹²⁰⁹ 'To be a part of a local community in the full meaning of that word, to participate in creating and the delivery of content that enhances quality of life and to feel that I am fully present, meaning I am giving and sharing', added another participant.¹²¹⁰ Therefore, living in a narrow circle with a family as a safety net and contributing on a local level helped some participants to experience some sort of 'normal'.

A comparison of definitions given by the participants demonstrated an interesting link to the previous definitions of 'normal' life¹²¹¹ as the main themes appear to be identical, for example: job, health, family, social life, hobbies and a local community with safety at the most basic level being achieved. This was recognised by some participants, for example, 'I couldn't wait for the war to end so I could continue with my normal life'¹²¹². Another added that he simply 'continued living normal life, solving life's problems, and focusing on

¹²⁰⁷ FO043. This was supported by another participant who stated that 'defenders were fired while pardoned enemy soldiers were protected', added another veteran, concluding that 'there is also that servant mentality as we have a country which has been controlled from Bruxelles'. ES003.

¹²⁰⁸ ES003.

¹²⁰⁹ ES016.

¹²¹⁰ ES002.

¹²¹¹ Note: The basic definitions of 'normal life' with the keywords can be found on pages 120-122.

¹²¹² WS025.

achieving life goals'¹²¹³. Keeping in mind that most participants chose 'normal life' and/or its' specific 'themes' as their main objectives after the war, the significance of reintegration into civilian life dramatically increases although what it actually means in the Croatian context is reintegration into a new 'normal life' with the rest of society. If reintegration into peaceful life is the key to establishing 'normal life', which implies safety, this explains why participants who have been struggling with 'fitting in' still dream about achieving 'normal life', but find it difficult to define. If a soldier truly remains a soldier and does not integrate into civilian life, 'normal life' indeed becomes an unachievable aim and a faded memory of the pre-war life. This explains why some participants defined 'normal life' as 'the one before the war'¹²¹⁴ as that was the only 'normal' they experienced. Since the entire Croatian society was at war, this is a story of people whose old 'normal' was lost forever, and after the conflict, they have been trying to build a new 'normal'. In this process, those who experienced violence the most acutely, such as ex-combatants, are in a different position than other members of society. Every one of them is a different person and, as one participant argued, each veteran has his own psychological moment¹²¹⁵. Thus, the approach to return to 'normal' has to be individual as there is no unique way that would suit everyone. Another participant stated that 'forcing reintegration is not good as forcing will result in negative outcomes, for example a soldier will see it as an attack on his integrity and personality'¹²¹⁶. Instead, 'society needs to let former soldiers live'¹²¹⁷. Some believe that they will never be able to return to 'normal life' completely as their war experiences will always separate them from the rest of society. 'We will always have tears in our eyes on 18 November¹²¹⁸ or when we hear patriotic song and this will always distinguish us from others', one of them argued.¹²¹⁹ After all, they are the ones who defended 'home', and with it, everybody else, while the rest of society kept living some sort of 'apparent normal'.

6.3. INNER PEACE AS A TOOL TO UNLOCKING THE COMFORT ZONE

In the previous subchapter, I discussed how participants approached reintegration into civilian life and which key themes emerged as necessary to live a post-war 'normal life'. I showed how they mainly focused on being accepted, having equal opportunities and health

¹²¹³ WS031.

¹²¹⁴ WS013.

¹²¹⁵ ND053.

¹²¹⁶ ES040. ES003.

¹²¹⁷ ES003.

¹²¹⁸ On 18 November 1991, Vukovar was occupied and that day has a special place in the memory of the Croatian people.

¹²¹⁹ WS012.

care, being able to provide for their families and being supported in pursuing their goals. During one of the first interviews, another topic emerged which was identified as one of the steps in reintegration. Due to its uniqueness, it deserves a separate subchapter although it was discussed in the introduction of this thesis as a part of ‘home’, but separated from the ‘other’. The interviewee in question tackled the issue of forgiveness saying, ‘this is how you find your inner peace’¹²²⁰. That person lost several family members in Vukovar and ended up in a POW camp in Serbia. The struggles of this person continued after the war since a child who survived with this parent was severely traumatised and still suffers from PTSD. These life challenges did not seem to change this person for the worse as they came across as kind and caring.¹²²¹ I found this case intriguing and I wondered how many others feel the same and perceive forgiveness as a part of reintegration leading to a new ‘normal life’. It is important to emphasise that this is by no means about reconciliation, but forgiveness which serves inner peace being brought to a personal space which can potentially expand beyond someone’s ‘home’ and perhaps reach the ‘other’.

All interviewees were asked to think about the possible link between forgiveness and ‘normal life’ enriched by inner peace to establish whether inner peace actually depends on their relationships with the ‘other’ and whether that relationship is relevant to ‘normal’, particularly if the enemy was a neighbour. Most interviewees responded mainly negatively to this question. ‘I cannot imagine my inner peace depending on forgiveness or reconciliation’¹²²² because ‘Chetniks were not the enemies in a poker game’, some argued¹²²³. Others felt the same saying that ‘as long as he lives in his front yard and I live in mine, we have nothing to do with each other unless there is a war; therefore, why would I think about him?’¹²²⁴. Another interviewee ‘would build a Great Wall of China on the border with Serbia and they could come to Croatia only with visas, but to get one, security checks about their whereabouts during the war would be needed’.¹²²⁵ ‘Reintegration has nothing to do with forgiveness because if members of your family were hurt by the same enemy in three wars, even the most optimistic people cannot see a purpose of forgiveness’, argued one participant.¹²²⁶

¹²²⁰ ES004.

¹²²¹ ES004.

¹²²² ES052.

¹²²³ WS002.

¹²²⁴ WS006.

¹²²⁵ WS030. A similar opinion was expressed by another participant (WS011).

¹²²⁶ ES016. OTH055.

Participants acknowledge that ‘inner peace is one of the most important things for successful reintegration’¹²²⁷. But relying on the relationships with the enemy in the context of inner peace does not work because veterans try to shield their personal peace and ‘normal life’ from negative influences, including the enemy as a source of trauma. Participants felt the enemy is ‘actually the least important’¹²²⁸. Many see their inner peace as ‘my own thing’¹²²⁹ unrelated to any ‘external factors’¹²³⁰ because ‘a real inner peace is peace of mind, concentration and focus’¹²³¹. When it comes to the enemy, what matters is ‘my clear conscious knowing I defended myself, and I didn’t attack or take what’s not mine’¹²³² which brings back the idea of ‘home’ and self-defence. One veteran was particularly critical of making any links between something so personal with something so external arguing that

this version of inner peace (in your question) is about being satisfied with your own existence in your comfort zone which is under social influences, but that’s not peace. Peace in the context of reintegration is actually an attempt to pacify the minds and actions of the veteran population. For my peace, I don’t need anyone’s forgiveness.¹²³³

As shown in this example, some prefer making their ‘own inner peace’¹²³⁴ which ‘has nothing to do with the enemy’¹²³⁵. This is about ‘living in a predictable way and successfully ignoring what I don’t like’¹²³⁶ or living in a safe family circle and ‘taking care of my wife and kids’¹²³⁷. Someone emphasised that he had experienced some sort of peace when he started working, meeting new people and building new relationships.¹²³⁸ ‘I simply stepped away from everyone and started choosing people who could enter my small world; when I met my future wife, a new world opened up, I buried the old deep inside and accepted the new’, he said.¹²³⁹ Although others emphasised that they have their inner peace, what worries them is the future

¹²²⁷ ND019.

¹²²⁸ WS004.

¹²²⁹ OTH055.

¹²³⁰ WS014.

¹²³¹ WS014.

¹²³² ES042.

¹²³³ WS014. Participant explained this further stating that ‘I killed people. I am not happy about that, but I don’t feel any guilt. There is no reason for that. If there was another way, I would have done it. But, there wasn’t. I don’t need the forgiveness of mothers whose adult children I killed. They need mine. Why did they throw flowers on the JNA tanks carrying their sons? They were happy to go to war.’

¹²³⁴ WS016.

¹²³⁵ FO036.

¹²³⁶ ES046.

¹²³⁷ ES039.

¹²³⁸ ES034.

¹²³⁹ ES034.

for their children who have ‘no perspective’¹²⁴⁰. When it comes to the enemy, ‘it’s difficult to step away, but it is better that way’¹²⁴¹ because veterans prefer to stick to the rule ‘I don’t bother you, you don’t bother me’¹²⁴². Instead of looking at the enemy, ‘inner peace can be achieved only by those who are valuable to their community as it is a hard-working person who balances between spirit and body and who can get rid of negative energy through work’¹²⁴³ and who can indeed exist in their ‘own reality’¹²⁴⁴, or ‘home’.

While inner peace is very important to these people, the enemy emerges as a potential spoiler in terms of safety, as shown in the previous chapter. Thus, some oppose the approach discussed in the previous paragraph arguing that ‘nobody is an island’¹²⁴⁵. They believe that ‘a man can create an apparent reality, ignore what bothers him, create a micro society for himself and exist for some time but the true reality will catch up with him at some point because nobody can exist in isolation without being influenced by external factors’¹²⁴⁶. Someone argued that ‘there cannot be inner peace without peace in the country’¹²⁴⁷. Hence, some relationship with the ‘other’ must exist even if it is not necessarily linked to the most personal layer of inner peace and it does not include forgiveness. ‘What is forgiveness?’, asked someone arguing that ‘I could eat, drink and work with the enemies, but I would never trust them; is that forgiveness? If so, then I support it’¹²⁴⁸. ‘It’s far more important how organised the country you fought for is’, says another, because, as discussed in chapter 5, ‘I believe that our enemy was the idea which hasn’t been defeated yet, regardless of whether this is the communist or Greater-Serbia idea’¹²⁴⁹. Thus, safety concerns are perceived as a threat to inner peace even if inner peace and satisfaction exist in a family circle. For some participants, understanding that danger still exists is what matters; thus, they remain Croatian defenders and ‘For Home Ready’. Although inner peace has nothing to do directly with the enemy,

we need to be aware and ready for that enemy as they don’t want to acknowledge the truth; you cannot forgive your enemy if for that person you are still their enemy; that enemy has to become your friend, the enemy has to sincerely apologise and admit they

¹²⁴⁰ WS011.

¹²⁴¹ ND047.

¹²⁴² ES051.

¹²⁴³ OTH058.

¹²⁴⁴ ND048.

¹²⁴⁵ ND029.

¹²⁴⁶ ND019.

¹²⁴⁷ WS005.

¹²⁴⁸ ND029.

¹²⁴⁹ ND025.

are guilty, the enemy has to ask for forgiveness; I have my inner peace because I know who they are and I am sure they'll do the same thing again; once you realise that some stuff is impossible, then you have your inner peace.¹²⁵⁰

Here, inner peace is actually rooted in one's readiness to accept reality and living 'normal life' knowing that there are things beyond one's control. Hence, one can dream about a desired 'normal' within 'home', but needs to be prepared to defend it if necessary instead of being self-deceived by peace found in the narrow personal circle.

These threats, as discussed earlier, are numerous and not exclusively linked to one particular group of people or political programme. 'I don't judge the enemy by their nationality; I judge them exclusively by their work against Croatia and Croats because many people of different nationalities proved that they love Croatia and Croats more than some Croatian people', one participant argued.¹²⁵¹ To secure inner peace, 'I would never allow the enemies to hold positions of power where they can make decisions about Croatia'¹²⁵² because 'as long as they exist there will be no normal life'¹²⁵³. These statements link threats to security explored earlier with threats to 'normal' life emphasising once again how important that feeling of safety is. Another participant argued that 'unconditional forgiveness and reconciliation won't bring peace which is obvious from the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia and pardoning the Chetniks because that caused even more discord and suffering'¹²⁵⁴. Therefore, 'I will be at peace the moment when the aggressor is tried, when they acknowledge their aggression and apologise, when they pay war damages and renounce the Greater-Serbia ideology, when our politicians start working for the wellbeing of our country and when state interests are above their own'¹²⁵⁵. In this context, inner peace is also linked to justice or a lack of it.

Lastly, for some people, forgiving the enemy is potentially something that should be considered as one of the routes to inner peace. However, it is important to repeat that this is not done in the context of reconciliation but for personal reasons linked to inner peace, such as faith and trust in God. As one participant said, 'inner peace is most important, and in order to achieve it, faith in God and that kind of lifestyle is necessary; that's the key and those who

¹²⁵⁰ ES037.

¹²⁵¹ ND029.

¹²⁵² ND029.

¹²⁵³ ND019.

¹²⁵⁴ ND019.

¹²⁵⁵ ND019.

succeed in that have a chance to reintegrate into society'¹²⁵⁶. Others also highlighted that 'faith played a huge role in my after-war life, and as a Catholic I believe inner peace is related to forgiveness'¹²⁵⁷ although 'we should not forget'¹²⁵⁸. This approach is rooted in spiritual experiences filled with comfort and strength to move on after experiencing war horrors. Therefore, they chose forgiving as a way to cleanse their lives from negative influences instead of holding on to them. 'The realistic person understands that hatred is tiring and takes away energy, they also understand that people make mistakes and if someone sincerely regrets, and if you are really a human you cannot choose not to forgive', argued someone¹²⁵⁹ and concluded that 'once you accept reality, a person can have inner peace regardless of enemies and circumstances'¹²⁶⁰. Therefore, inner peace is rooted in coming to terms with the past and traumatic experiences, and taking steps perceived as important for one's spiritual growth, thus, bringing this experience closer to the experience of 'home' as a 'spiritual house'.

As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, inner peace emerged as a necessary element to 'normal life'. Here it also appears as an important step in the long process of reintegration. The approaches to achieving it are different. Some reject a possibility of linking something so personal to the 'other', whether that would be the enemy or other external factor. They prefer keeping their inner peace in their narrow circle where it can be shielded from the outside world. Others acknowledge exposure to external influences and this includes the enemy. For them, the major question was a relevance of forgiveness in achieving inner peace. Some completely rejected the idea; some questioned what forgiveness even is while others saw it as a step towards their inner peace. In such cases, nobody spoke of forgiving the enemy in terms of reconciliation as it is explained in the context of liberal peace-building. They spoke of a possibility of forgiveness for personal reasons, such as avoiding living in hatred or simply because they are devout Christians. It is obvious that approaches to inner peace are equally unique and deeply personal just like 'normal life'. Thus, being open-minded and allowing people to explore different shades of 'normal' would be beneficial. As some participants said, when it comes to the enemy, 'forcing forgiveness and reconciliation can be

¹²⁵⁶ ND045. This idea about a specific lifestyle and approach to life was supported by another participant who said: 'Do not do to others something you would not like to be done to you; we are all God's children; thus, I can take everything and socialise with everybody without hatred because God gives me strength to love and care'. ES004.

¹²⁵⁷ FO040.

¹²⁵⁸ ES050.

¹²⁵⁹ OTH058.

¹²⁶⁰ OTH058.

counter-productive'¹²⁶¹ and what is necessary is 'to work on tolerance'¹²⁶². Tolerance would open space to diverse opinions; thus allowing people to explore their own reality within society. In this reality, where no man is an isolated island, the enemy does exist and cannot be completely ignored. As shown before, many participants struggled with their transformation from soldiers to civilians. Approximately one third identified themselves in military terms indicating that they have not left their uniform behind. Before exploring their relationship with the enemy, I discuss whether this enemy is also identified in military terms and why.

6.4. OUR NEIGHBOURS, OUR ENEMIES

In the previous subchapters, I explored veterans' identity and their adjustments to civilian 'normal life'. I highlighted that most participants chose 'a Croat', 'a Croatian defender' or both as their identity with a smaller percentage of those who opted for 'Christians' or 'Catholics'. Among 300 participants there was only one who described himself as a human and his enemies as people.¹²⁶³ 'And what other answer could I possibly give you?' he asked me not knowing that there were 299 answers different from his. 'We are all people with our predictable behaviour patterns, with our flaws and virtues', he said, and concluded that 'it is wrong to think about any problem outside the complexity of its context'¹²⁶⁴; thus emphasising the relevance of past experiences and current circumstances. Another participant who also identified himself as a human described the enemy differently. For him, the enemy is simply the enemy because 'being an enemy is in certain circumstances and time frame, and in relation to me, his main characteristic; I don't know more about him, I don't know if in a different place and different time he is a car mechanic, a professor, a Serb or something else; therefore, I don't know how the enemy sees himself'¹²⁶⁵. Although he did not identify the enemy as human, both statements reveal that the understanding of the enemy is conditioned by particular circumstances in the current 'normal'; therefore, this leaves some hope that under different circumstances and in a different 'normal' a perception of the enemy can change.

¹²⁶¹ ND003.

¹²⁶² ND003.

¹²⁶³ WS014.

¹²⁶⁴ WS014. He explained this by saying that 'Serbian-Croatian animosity doesn't exit just like that, it didn't come from Mars, it has its history and causes, and therefore, to reduce it to a nation, religion or any other distinction reveals only a partial picture because not a single conflict in modern history didn't begin without careful media preparation and manipulation with what we call public opinion; we are all just people and they are easy to manipulate'.

¹²⁶⁵ ES046.

Other participants offered very different answers, although they were faced again with the difficulty of choosing only one option. Almost an identical number (241) managed to make a choice, including 164 who identified their enemies as Chetniks. Although the Yugoslav Army and the communists were offered as one of the options, only 28 participants chose them. Given that numerous war video footage showed joint military operations conducted by the Yugoslav Army and Chetniks¹²⁶⁶, it was not surprising that a certain number of participants struggled with choosing only one. Consequently, 28 participants chose both options, while several others expanded the answer saying that the enemies were ‘Yugo-Serbian aggressors’, ‘Greater-Serbia ideology’¹²⁶⁷, ‘Serbo-Chetnik Armada’, and ‘Serbian imperialism’. Overall, for 220 participants one of the military units which invaded Croatia was their primary option or one of their choices meaning they largely identified the enemy in military terms. Only 46 participants identified their enemies as ‘Serbs’, with three participants describing their enemies as ‘Orthodox’. Furthermore, 16 participants who chose ‘Yugoslav Army’ or ‘Chetniks’ (or both), also added Serbs or Orthodox. Thus, 65 participants linked military units to nationality or, more rarely, religion of their soldiers. If we add those who found their enemies in ‘Serbian imperialism’, ‘Greater-Serbia ideology’, ‘Yugo-Serbian’ or ‘Serbo-Chetnik Armada’, that number increases to 75. This represents 25 per cent of all participants which is still low compared to 68.66 per cent (206) participants who defined their enemies exclusively in military terms (Yugoslav Army, Chetniks, and similar variations) without linking them to any particular nationality or religion. A veteran who spoke of the enemies as ‘people’ argued that ‘the war was not caused by belonging to different nationalities although this was used in a process of negative identification of the “other”’.¹²⁶⁸ Based on these data, this apparently did not have a significant impact on the participants as they mainly did not link nationality to the enemy. Therefore, who the enemy is in their peaceful ‘normal life’ is irrelevant; what matters is that once the conflict started the enemy was the one with weapons who endangered ‘home’ and a peaceful ‘normal’.

¹²⁶⁶ This includes the occupation of Vukovar when soldiers with a red star on their helmets were marching together with paramilitary units with Chetnik insignia singing ‘There will be meat; we will slaughter Croats’. The footage is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sVj_QRo17I [accessed 12 February 2020].

¹²⁶⁷ A veteran who described his enemies as Greater-Serbs believes that ‘Serbs are people like everybody else, peaceful, friendly, willing to help while Greater-Serbs are those who are ready to lie for deception, encouraging the war, conquering what isn’t theirs, waking up the beast within their nation, blaming those who defended themselves and promoting oblivion so they could prepare for another aggression’. ND029.

¹²⁶⁸ WS014.

Table 11: Identifying the enemy (in percentages)¹²⁶⁹

	Chetniks	Serbs	Yugoslav Army / Communists	Orthodox
Eastern Slavonia	67.40	19.56	10.87	2.17
Western Slavonia	69.23	23.07	7.69	0.00
Northern Dalmatia	73.43	12.50	10.94	3.12
Fought in the case study areas	70.59	20.59	8.82	0.00
Fought elsewhere	61.97	22.53	15.49	0.00
TOTAL:	68.05	19.08	11.62	1.24

Participants who identified their enemies as Serbs argued that

in the Serbian forces there were people of other nationalities such as Croats, Muslims, Macedonians, although not that many, and Montenegrins in a larger number, but it was the Serbs in Croatia who started the log revolution, it was the Serbs in the Yugoslav Army who delivered weapons to those in Croatia, it was the Serbs in Croatia who forcibly wanted to separate a part of Croatian territory; therefore, it can be concluded that the enemies were the Serbs¹²⁷⁰.

Thus, not ‘all Serbs are Chetniks and enemies; there were also Croats who were shooting at us’¹²⁷¹. This was supported by someone who emphasised that, ‘the Serbs were the main aggressors while others were included as individuals and Yugo-nostalgic types who thought

¹²⁶⁹ Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Question 32. Note: These are percentages only for those who chose only one identity.

¹²⁷⁰ WS003.

¹²⁷¹ ES001. On the other side, there were also Croats who joined the Chetnik paramilitary units and who participated in war crimes. One of them, Renato Petrov from Benkovac, was arrested in 2011 in Germany. He allegedly participated in mass executions of the Croatian population in Škabrnja near Zadar in November 1991, but was acquitted due to lack of evidence. According to witnesses, he demonstrated more cruelty than Serbs in his unit, and he greeted Serbian war criminals who motivated war atrocities. This example, which is well-known among the veterans, shows that not every Croat is ‘friendly’ and not every Serb is ‘the enemy’. Frane Šarić, ‘Hrvat u odori SAO Krajine ponašao se gore nego neki Srbi’, *Večernji list*, 6 April 2011, <<https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/hrvat-u-odori-sao-krajine-ponasao-se-gore-nego-neki-srbi-273761>> [accessed 11 January 2020].

that the old Yugoslavia had to exist'¹²⁷². Another veteran agreed with this arguing 'of course it was the Serbs as they were supported by Serbia, they attacked us, and Chetniks were not a regular army anyway; they called us Ustasha, we called them Chetniks, but we are Croats and they are Serbs'¹²⁷³. One participant explained that 'the politics was Serbian, and therefore, I didn't think of the JNA and the communists as enemies although they did follow the Serbian concept which was Greater-Serbia politics; thus, the JNA and those communists who supported the Greater-Serbia programme or Yugoslavia can be included'¹²⁷⁴. Another veteran emphasised that this identification does not refer to everybody¹²⁷⁵ because 'the entire nation is not guilty for the crimes committed in their name'¹²⁷⁶.

These statements demonstrate that even when the enemy was identified in terms of their nationality, this was done due to specific circumstances; thus, it is not about Serbs being an enemy in every 'normal' context, but about Serbs who became an enemy due to their participation in the war meaning in a different version of 'normal'. As mentioned earlier, the participants rarely identified the enemy based on religion, and their further explanations revealed the same. One participant said, 'there were Orthodox in the Croatian Army but they identified themselves as Croats of Orthodox denomination; I was referring to Serbian Orthodox because the SPC is a Chetnik nest as it encouraged war, hatred and killings'¹²⁷⁷. Therefore, when participants spoke of the Orthodox, they thought of those who were associated with the paramilitary units during the Homeland War, just like they did when they spoke of the enemies' nationality. To tackle this problem, a group of participants from Vukovar identified the enemy as Chetniks on purpose explaining this choice by stating that 'not all Serbs participated in the war'¹²⁷⁸, 'because the enemies were Chetniks'¹²⁷⁹ and 'they identified themselves that way'¹²⁸⁰. This indicates that identification of the enemy is related to how that enemy identified themselves during the war, regardless of their identity during the peaceful 'normal'.

Nevertheless, some participants felt that the entire nation should be called out. One asked 'how many people in Croatia who identify themselves as Serbs raised their voices

¹²⁷² WS004.

¹²⁷³ WS006.

¹²⁷⁴ ES040.

¹²⁷⁵ ES007.

¹²⁷⁶ ES015.

¹²⁷⁷ ND018.

¹²⁷⁸ ES015.

¹²⁷⁹ ES013.

¹²⁸⁰ ES014.

against Serbian aggression’ and concluded that they were all silent¹²⁸¹ as ‘they are all part of their nation’¹²⁸². Another veteran opposed this opinion stating that he cannot identify the enemy as Serbs because ‘there were those who were against Milošević’s aggressive politics’ and, therefore, he identified the enemy as the Yugo-Serbian aggressors meaning ‘all those structures in the former Yugoslavia who had comfortable lives and who didn’t want independent republics’¹²⁸³. However, someone argued that not ‘all communists were against Croats because not all of them, at least not the Croatian ones, attacked us during the war’¹²⁸⁴. These statements show how complex understanding of the enemy is as these definitions can include anyone who supported particular political programmes and ideologies based on anti-Croatian views. Hence, understanding of identity in conflict is as subjective and dynamic as ‘normal life’ because both depend on specific experiences and circumstances that can change over time.

Furthermore, some participants highlighted that ‘there were Serbs in my military unit who defended Croatia’¹²⁸⁵ with one who added Ukrainians, Jews, Hungarians and others ‘but I don’t care who was what’¹²⁸⁶. Those defenders of Serbian origin ‘were in a very difficult position and only they know how they felt when they joined the Croatian Army and fought against their people’¹²⁸⁷. Furthermore, ‘Croatian Serbs were not mobilised; those who joined the Croatian Army were volunteers; thus, politically speaking they are Croats’¹²⁸⁸ or ‘Orthodox Croats’¹²⁸⁹. When captured, they were treated ‘much worse than Croats’¹²⁹⁰. These

¹²⁸¹ WS009.

¹²⁸² ND018.

¹²⁸³ ES034. He explained this by stating that it was they who ‘carried out a project of controlled chaos with the transformation of society into independent states, with the transformation of state-owned into private property as this was a task which couldn’t have been done in peace because they would’ve lost their power forever’.

¹²⁸⁴ ES040.

¹²⁸⁵ ES001. Another veteran said that he has ‘four brothers Serbs, all of them wounded as Croatian defenders, and I love them because they are my brothers in arms’. ND048.

Thousands of Croatian citizens of Serbian nationality indeed fought in the Homeland War as members of the Croatian Army. In 2014, the Croatian Ministry of Defence stated that official records do not exist because during recruitment in the early 1990s nobody was asked about their ethnic origin. However, Dr. Ante Nazor, director of the Croatian Memorial-Documentation Centre of the Homeland War, stated that at least 9,000 Serbs defended Croatia, while unofficially that number could be up to 20,000. Marko Marković, ‘Poruka za Pupovca: U obrani Hrvatske sudjelovalo je najmanje 18.000 Srba’, *Maxportal.hr*, 29 September 2017, <<https://www.maxportal.hr/vijesti/poruka-za-pupovca-u-obrani-hrvatske-sudjelovalo-je-najmanje-18-000-srba/>> [15 January 2020].

¹²⁸⁶ WS014.

¹²⁸⁷ WS003. Another veteran supported this opinion stating that ‘I could not imagine myself in their shoes as I don’t think I could fight against my own people’. ES007.

¹²⁸⁸ WS009. WS013.

¹²⁸⁹ WS012. ES022. Another participant wondered if people in the USA can all be Americans regardless of their ethnic origin or religion, why can the same not be applied in the Croatian context particularly due to ‘our expectation for a Serbian minority to be loyal to Croatia after they were given “general forgiveness” and pardoned’. (WS015) Thus, in Croatia ‘only Croats of Catholic and other denominations’ can live. WS013.

statements suggest that nationality is indeed irrelevant when it comes to identifying the enemy as there were those Serbs that were ‘Croatian falcons’ who defended ‘home’. Who they are was influenced by what they did when ‘normal’ was pushed to the end of the spectrum becoming its darkest shade. After the war, ‘they didn’t want any contact with Serbs who were on the other side’, argued one veteran adding that ‘they celebrate their religious feasts, but they don’t want to go to their churches because they don’t want to be exposed to that propaganda’¹²⁹¹. Some even changed their names and surnames ‘because they feel like Croats because they were beaten for being Croats, not for being Serbs’¹²⁹². Thus, it is their right to transform their identity into a new ‘normal’ and become whatever they wanted to be. Some participants emphasised that the sacrifice of Croatian defenders of Serbian origin, who are ‘peaceful’¹²⁹³ and ‘love their Croatian homeland’¹²⁹⁴, should be acknowledged. They should be fully included in ‘active life’ because ‘they were great people and great warriors, but today they share the destiny of all Croatian defenders because politicians don’t want to include them in society due to their impure conscience’¹²⁹⁵. Thus, ‘it seems that Serbs who were Croatian defenders are not desirable in politics unlike those who were on the other side’¹²⁹⁶. These statements support the previous ones as enemies and friends are both conditioned and depend on the shade of ‘normal’ which is currently experienced. People of other nationalities¹²⁹⁷, who were ‘For Home Ready’, are perceived as ‘brothers in arms’ regardless of other layers of their identity.

Hence, participants do not find their enemy in any particular community, whether ethnic or religious, although one quarter links the enemy to Serbia. Being an enemy is ‘conditioned by the situation’¹²⁹⁸ meaning ‘everyone who attacked the Croatian territory and

¹²⁹⁰ ES040. Another participant spoke of a Serbian woman who was cooking for Croatian soldiers and tortured in the Serbian POW camp where she was imprisoned. ES022.

¹²⁹¹ ES050.

¹²⁹² ES040. However, not all defenders support this dramatic change of one’s identity saying that ‘if you fought with me as Savo, don’t become Zvonimir now; stay who you are because for me that is where your greatness is’. (ES050) ‘I strongly discouraged some from changing their names because you cannot choose your parents, but you can choose a side and that is what they did’, argued another. ES001.

¹²⁹³ ES001.

¹²⁹⁴ ES050.

¹²⁹⁵ ES016. This opinion is supported by another participant who says that there were Croatian defenders of Serbian origin in his military unit who ‘defended their homeland, but it is some of our politicians who do a lot of damage when it comes to this topic’. ND003. Some participants suggested that they would like those people to be the voices of their minorities in Croatia as they are the ones who fought with everybody else to create a desired ‘normal’ and ‘home’.

¹²⁹⁶ WS016.

¹²⁹⁷ Such as British, Swedish, French, Australians, Germans and others.

¹²⁹⁸ WS019.

the Croatian people'¹²⁹⁹. The enemy is also 'the one who thinks of himself instead of the wellbeing of Croatia and Croatian society; (...) it is about what was done to me'¹³⁰⁰. The enemy can be anyone who does not have Croatian interests in their heart whether these are former communists, the Greater-Serbia sympathisers or someone else. Another veteran added that 'the enemies are all those who endanger life and health, peace and freedom of any person; but this is less painful if they are not yesterday's friends, godfathers, family members and friends'¹³⁰¹. The complexity of this situation was reflected in answers given by a smaller number of participants who opposed identification offered by the researcher. They identified their enemies as simply 'enemies'¹³⁰², 'non-humans and beasts'¹³⁰³, 'rebels'¹³⁰⁴, 'barbarians and thieves'¹³⁰⁵, 'robbers'¹³⁰⁶, 'criminals'¹³⁰⁷, 'worthy of pity'¹³⁰⁸, and 'fools'¹³⁰⁹. Therefore, drawing the line between the so-called 'warring parties' is not that simple because my data suggest that the Homeland War was not a war between Catholic and Orthodox, nor Croats and Serbs; instead, it was about readiness to defend the 'home' and pursue a desired shade of 'normal' while leaving behind the communist past. Whether a new relationship with the 'other' can be formed will be explored in the next subchapter.

6.5. CROSSING THE BRIDGES TO 'NORMAL': THE ENEMY IS HERE TO STAY

In the previous subchapter, I tackled how the enemy's identity is shaped. In this subchapter, I focus on the possibility of transforming relationships between the participants and their enemies. As discussed in chapter 4, 'normal life', includes relationships with other people, particularly neighbours. Therefore, I look into whether the 'other' remains the 'other' within a 'normalised conflicted life' or if this can be changed.

Addressing the issue of who the enemy is leads to another question: how to face the enemy in everyday 'normal life' if that person is not a foreigner, but someone who used to be one of 'us' and who lives among 'us', causing a once unified community to split in two; thus, disrupting the previous version of 'normal'. Reintegrating into civilian society within the

¹²⁹⁹ OTH057.

¹³⁰⁰ OTH055.

¹³⁰¹ ES004.

¹³⁰² ES018. ES046.

¹³⁰³ WS024.

¹³⁰⁴ ND016.

¹³⁰⁵ ND018.

¹³⁰⁶ ND021.

¹³⁰⁷ FO043.

¹³⁰⁸ OTH021.

¹³⁰⁹ OTH030.

society which was torn apart by war is another element contributing to challenges of reintegration. This is not only about adjusting to non-military life or dealing with traumatic experiences. It is about doing that in the same environment where the violence occurred. In these circumstances, avoiding as one of the coping mechanisms fails us, just like Newman's 'humanizing connections'¹³¹⁰ that could be permanently broken. This can greatly affect re-establishing 'normal life' because a former neighbour is the 'other' and the psychological barrier between 'us' and 'them' becomes higher than any physical one. As one participant said, 'the hardest part is meeting people who were on the other side and who were pointing their weapons at me'¹³¹¹.

Facing the enemy in the neighbourhood is not the only challenge. In communities with a smaller population where 'everybody knows everybody', missing friends or family members are another constant reminder of the violence. 25 years after the war, Croatia is still searching for almost 2,000 missing persons and trying to locate war criminals. These efforts have been supported by SOA.¹³¹² In a 2017 report, they highlighted an operation which

¹³¹⁰ 'And killing will begin, again the modern kind, distant and televised; how strange it is to think of movies instead of slaughter', wrote poet and playwright Harry Newman at a time when military tensions seemed to be rising between the USA and Iran, and the battle against ISIS in Syria and Iraq was raging on. Newman's 2016 collection *Led From a Distance*, where the poem *Soon* was first published, tackled the issue of the distance of modern-day warfare. In his poem, Newman spoke of falling missiles over suburbs 'so much like our own' and streets that could be 'ours', emphasising that 'those are really humanizing connections'. Elizabeth Flock, 'How we fail to humanize war', *PBS News Hour*, 10 July 2017, <<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/poetry/fail-humanize-war>> [accessed 11 December 2019].

¹³¹¹ ES032.

¹³¹² These efforts have been supported by SOA. In its 2015 report, the agency stated that 'independently and in cooperation with other competent state bodies, SOA works on the establishment of locations of individual and mass graves of missing persons from the Homeland War, collects information on war criminals, as well as on the place of residence of persons on the run from criminal prosecution for war crimes they have committed. In 2014, SOA focused on identifying and locating individual and mass graves of missing persons from the Homeland War. This particularly applied to the location of mass graves in the Podunavlje area. In the process, the cooperation of SOA with citizens who have information on missing persons and possible burial sites plays a key role'. 'SOA Public Report 2015', p. 15.

This part of the report was extended in 2017: 'In cooperation with other competent authorities in the Republic of Croatia (the State Attorney's Office, Ministry of the Interior, Military Security-Intelligence Agency) SOA collects information and documentation in order to identify the perpetrators, victims and circumstances of war crimes committed during the Homeland War. Particular efforts are undertaken to identify individuals suspected to have committed war crimes, either as direct perpetrators or as instigators. The number of persons still reported missing in the Homeland war is 1952. SOA carries out activities to determine the fate of missing persons, locate individual and mass graves or burial sites of the victims of war crimes. In cooperation with other competent authorities in the Republic of Croatia (the State Attorney's Office, Ministry of the Interior, Military Security-Intelligence Agency) SOA collects information about locations and circumstances leading to the burial of remains of persons who had gone missing during the Homeland War. SOA has focused on establishing the exact place of residence of persons who are on the run from criminal prosecution and are subject to arrest warrants, in order to bring them before judicial authorities. In 2016, the Agency focused on identifying and locating individual and mass graves of missing persons from the Homeland War. Particular efforts were made to establish the location of mass graves in the Podunavlje region'. SOA emphasised again that 'close cooperation with citizens who can disclose information on missing persons and possible burial sites plays a crucial role' and 'SOA is obligated to guarantee anonymity and discretion in such cases'. 'SOA Public Report 2017', p. 20.

gained extensive media coverage with the aim of obstructing the ‘investigation and prosecution of war crimes committed during the occupation of Croatian territory in the Homeland War’ and which included with the ‘intimidation of other potential witnesses’¹³¹³. In many situations where houses were battlefields, potential witnesses are someone’s neighbours who may know the fate and burial location of missing friends. In a country where many are still uncounted for, and where civilians and veterans who inhabit previously occupied regions share their everyday life – meaning every single ‘humanizing connection’ – with the ‘other’, switching from the military mode to peaceful ‘normal’ is an even greater challenge. Social life, neighbourly ties, security and family – all these topics emerged as central themes to ‘normal life’, and they have been greatly affected by secrecy related to disappearances and killings that occurred during the war.

But how many of those neighbourly ties actually survived and how relevant are they in a new ‘normal life’? Mostly those veterans who used to live or still live next door to the former enemy spoke of this and many were not happy to discuss it leaving the researcher with the feeling that this is too painful and it is better to be left buried in the pre-war ‘normal life’. Occasionally, it turned out that individuals never had any contacts with the neighbours who were on the other side because ‘I knew well who we are dealing with’¹³¹⁴. Some participants had pre-war relationships with the ‘other’ and described them as ‘seemingly good’¹³¹⁵. This happened because ‘we were forced into one artificial creation called Yugoslavia which was actually Srboslavia in which Croats were oppressed, our history was erased, our culture ruined, our identity almost destroyed, but they couldn’t take our soul’¹³¹⁶. One veteran said that the previous relationship was ‘perhaps friendly’¹³¹⁷, but this was because of ‘how I was raised’.¹³¹⁸ Thus, old relationships with the ‘other’ existed because of circumstances instead of being a matter of choice which left participants feeling like their reality was created for them instead of them having an opportunity to pursue their desired ‘normal’.

Some veterans described their pre-war relationship with the ‘other’ as ‘fine’, but ‘now it’s like I don’t see them’¹³¹⁹. Others stated that these relationships no longer exist and when asked if an apology would change anything, someone said, ‘I am not interested in their

¹³¹³ ‘SOA Public Report 2017’, p. 12.

¹³¹⁴ WS002.

¹³¹⁵ WS013.

¹³¹⁶ WS013.

¹³¹⁷ ND048.

¹³¹⁸ ND048.

¹³¹⁹ ND050.

intentions because they burned down my house, and they would do it again if they had the chance'¹³²⁰. On the other hand, some do not want any contact with the 'other', but an 'apology would help a lot if it's sincere'¹³²¹. Others added that there is no reason to have contact with those who left as 'none of them tried to contact me, but if that happens I would react positively if that person was decent, but if they promote the Greater-Serbia ideology then that's against me and my family, not only against Croatia'¹³²². Some veterans rejected any possibility of contact. 'I don't believe in reconciliation, not in the way you mean', said one of them.¹³²³ A veteran whose previous relationship with the 'other' was 'more or less normal' remembered past times saying that 'there were verbal incidents as we supported Hajduk¹³²⁴ and they supported Crvena Zvezda¹³²⁵ and Partizan¹³²⁶, but they also followed Slobodan Milošević's politics'' and concluded, 'honestly, I wouldn't accept any contact gladly'¹³²⁷. Another participant whose pre-war relationship with former enemies was 'neighbourly, sometimes even friendly' says that he is not interested in them and he does not miss them.¹³²⁸ It appears that reviving contact with the 'other' is not desired or needed. If it happens, this can be a random encounter or in the context of work¹³²⁹, but some requirements need to be met such as renouncing the Greater-Serbia ideology.

In the third group are those whose current relationship with the 'other' exists, but not necessarily as a friendly one. Someone described it as 'fair, but cold'¹³³⁰. Another veteran added it is 'very bad' although a sincere apology would change this but 'they, especially those who are the most dangerous ones, will never do it so I don't carry any illusions'¹³³¹. One participant described his previous relationship as 'neighbourly but after the war, it is cold and involves very little communication'¹³³². 'I remember that just before the war their sincerity was suddenly gone, they started avoiding us, and greetings were cold; I forgave them but there cannot be reconciliation without communication', he said and concluded that it would

¹³²⁰ ND052.

¹³²¹ ND051.

¹³²² ES037. The same participant emphasised that while working abroad, he socialised with Serbs and developed good relationships with them, but this was only done in the context of work.

¹³²³ ND056.

¹³²⁴ A football club from my hometown Split.

¹³²⁵ A football club from Belgrade, Serbia.

¹³²⁶ Another football club from Belgrade, Serbia.

¹³²⁷ ND003.

¹³²⁸ ND047.

¹³²⁹ For example, one participant from Northern Dalmatia stated that although his relationships with the 'other' is 'correct', it is 'burdened by yugo-communism and it's mostly due to work and random encounters'. ND020.

¹³³⁰ ND054.

¹³³¹ ND045.

¹³³² ES007.

be easier to reconcile with total strangers than with Serbs.¹³³³ Two participants said their contact with neighbours is cold or non-existent and only happens if it cannot be avoided in a professional setting.¹³³⁴ One interviewee explained his ‘insincere’ relationship with the ‘other’ stating ‘they try to present themselves as friends, but we know that they were killing us when they had a chance; if they were really friendly, then they would return everything they stole and they wouldn’t teach their young that Croats are actually Serbs’¹³³⁵. Although he rejects making friends with them, he is willing to be their neighbour, co-worker or even marry one ‘because they are not a problem as individuals as long as they don’t cross a line and insult Croatia and me as a Croat’¹³³⁶. These statements reveal that what participants are describing is co-existence within a ‘cold peace’ where superficial contact with the ‘other’ exists, and even if it gets deeper, it is conditional and happens on an individual basis.

Only a smaller number of participants are developing a relationship with former enemies because ‘there are some who are honest; and that’s individual’¹³³⁷. One veteran stated that his relationship is not as it used to be, but it is improving. ‘I had plenty of encounters with them; they are all people which, I believe, didn’t participate in killing and war crimes although they lived in the occupied territories; they don’t like to talk about it and in a way I understand them; sometimes I notice that they feel ashamed’, he said.¹³³⁸ Another participant remembered his first after-war encounter with former Serbian friends who stayed on the other side describing it as ‘a very emotional encounter as they cried tears of joy’¹³³⁹. He also added that some people apologised and he communicates with the people whose apologies were sincere, but he did not accept insincere ones.¹³⁴⁰ Another interviewee stated that he also accepted apologies from some former neighbours but ‘this came from those who didn’t take an active role in the war, while those who did always claim the same – that they did what they had to; those who really were Chetniks are proud of that and they only regret they didn’t kill more people’¹³⁴¹. These participants are taking some active steps to deepen their relationship with the ‘other’ although this mainly depends on how sincere the ‘other’ is and how willing they are to apologise. This suggests that truth, meaning admitting wrong-doings, apologising

¹³³³ ES007.

¹³³⁴ ES042. ES052.

¹³³⁵ WS012.

¹³³⁶ WS012.

¹³³⁷ ND058.

¹³³⁸ ND057.

¹³³⁹ ES050.

¹³⁴⁰ ES050.

¹³⁴¹ ES001. A participant from Dalmatia had a similar experience with neighbours whose ‘dogma is - we are just people and it is politicians who are guilty – which is a huge lie and a mistake’. ND020.

and asking for forgiveness opens the door to a dialogue and more ‘normal’ living for all within such communities.

This short analysis of participants’ answers reveals that in most cases the relationship with former enemies does not exist or it mainly happens in the context of work or random encounters. Participants were asked a set of questions aimed at identifying the maximum relationships they would be willing to develop with the ‘other’. Their answers are presented in the table below.

Table 12: The maximum relationship that participants are willing to develop with the former enemy (in percentages)¹³⁴²

	Eastern Slavonia	Western Slavonia	Northern Dalmatia	Fought in those areas	Others	Average
Enter into wedlock (or your children)	3.7	9.6	1.1	2.2	5.8	4.48
Be friends	3.7	9.6	7.0	4.4	9.4	6.82
Be neighbours	2.9	2.2	2.9	2.4	2.9	2.66
Colleague at work	29.6	22.5	29.4	24.4	29.4	27.06
Citizen in the same state	29.6	25.8	14.1	20.0	25.8	23.06
Avoid any contact	70.3	41.9	49.4	55.5	55.2	54.46

The data confirmed that the maximum relationship that participants are willing to develop with former enemies is mostly a neighbour, a co-worker and co-existence in the same country, with approximately one third who would rather avoid any contact. Less than 5 per cent would be willing to enter into wedlock with a former enemy or allow their children to do so, while

¹³⁴² Participants were allowed to choose more options which explains why the total percentage goes beyond 100. Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Question 17.

approximately 7 per cent are willing to be friends. This leaves almost 90 per cent of participants unwilling to develop any deeper relationships with former enemies and begs the question whether reconciliation as it is defined by liberal peace-building is even possible, or, as Jansen put it, desired.

Also, 65 per cent of participants opposed the return of Serbs who left Croatia in 1995 when the Chetniks and Yugoslav Army were defeated.¹³⁴³ This was because ‘a rebellion could occur again in the future’ (46.34%), ‘co-existence is impossible’ (22.56%), ‘they are war criminals’ (14.63%), ‘it could cause Croats to get expelled again’ (9.14%) and ‘something else’ (7.31%).¹³⁴⁴ One participant clarified that this applies to those Serbs who took an active role in the conflict, not everybody.¹³⁴⁵ However, another veteran opposed this saying that ‘those who left participated in the aggression towards Croatia or did some illegal acts’.¹³⁴⁶ Some wondered why ‘someone who was killing and raping would even want to return to Croatia’¹³⁴⁷. Others concluded that ‘those who returned haven’t changed a bit’¹³⁴⁸ or ‘they are even worse’¹³⁴⁹. Thus, their return should be conditional on accepting Croatia as a homeland¹³⁵⁰ because ‘I don’t care who is a Serb; I care about who is loyal’¹³⁵¹. This confirms the previous statements about the ‘other’ who does not belong to a specific group; instead, the ‘other’ is anyone who is not willing to recognise Croatia as an independent country and the values its constitution promotes. The question is who on the ‘other’ side is indeed guilty of various illegal actions – all of them or some of them. Some participants argued that the ‘other’ should ‘relinquish the General Amnesty Act, meaning accepting an investigation about personal liability’¹³⁵². This would indicate that the ‘other’ is willing to come to terms with the past and accept personal responsibility if found guilty; thus, opening space to honest communication, healing and ‘normalisation’. These data show that, although most participants opposed to the return of Serbs, this was mainly due to their fears of a new conflict

¹³⁴³ Only 10 per cent of participants supported the return of the ‘other’, explaining this by ‘the international public and Croatian dependency on international assistance’ (30.64%) and ‘because I support everyone’s right to return to their home’ (69.36%).

¹³⁴⁴ These percentages include only those participants who chose to answer this question which was in total 164 (or 54.66 per cent).

¹³⁴⁵ WS003. ES051. ES003. ND045. ND003. ND056. ND054. ND050.

¹³⁴⁶ WS013.

¹³⁴⁷ WS026.

¹³⁴⁸ FO040.

¹³⁴⁹ ES015.

¹³⁵⁰ WS030.

¹³⁵¹ ES037.

¹³⁵² WS012.

and violence, meaning another major disruption to 'normal life'. This emphasises safety concerns discussed in the previous chapter and anxiety regarding a possible new threat.

6.6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I explored the impact of war experiences on everyday life and I tackled participants' personal identity. This was linked to the discussion on what 'normalisation' towards civilian life should look like and what the obstacles the participants face. Inner peace emerged as one of the key themes in this process and it was discussed from different angles, particularly in regards to the 'other'. Furthermore, the identity of the 'other' and the relationship with them in the post-war 'normal life' from the perspective of participants was explored as this emerged as another challenging piece of the puzzle on the long journey towards 'normalisation'. This analysis was relevant to answering the final research sub-question: How does 'normal life' relate to transformation of post-conflict relationships? In the context of my research, this is not only about the relationship with the former enemy, but also with everybody in the society and even a relationship between our pre-war and post-war self.

A personal identity proved to be another difficult question for some participants. Although the majority identified their nationality as their primary identity, some reported they struggled with choosing only one option as instructed. Data revealed that Lederach's 'identity dilemma' is occasionally present when combining nationality with military identity. Although those who chose military identity as their primary identity or one of the identities were not in the majority; their number was high enough to demonstrate that some people still feel like 'falcons' in their cast. This was due to the comfort and safety they find among those who share similar experiences, and, sometimes, due to fear and anxiety around the lack of safety in the country which emphasises their need to keep defending 'home'. Many believe that they changed due to the trauma they suffered and due to new skills they gained as soldiers which distinguish them from the rest of society. As some argued, those skills can be used to benefit their 'local' and encourage the acceptance veterans are searching for. What they need is a sense of belonging if not as 'falcons' in their cast, then as valuable members of their community which would give them an opportunity to lead a truly 'normal life'. This is particularly important for those who were retired early as that excluded them from the workforce and took away their chance to feel fully reintegrated and useful. Apart from employment, there are other requirements for successful reintegration such as development of the country, justice, opportunities to create and respect for all defenders. However, due to

various processes on a micro and macro level, participants highlighted profound feelings of disappointment and unhappiness with the country that does not meet their expectations and in which they sometimes feel like unwanted outsiders. This experience of injustice is deeply personal as it tackles the core of one's being on different levels. Consequently, the feeling of helplessness to heal within a 'broken' society pushed many to their personal space where veterans can find comfort and safety; thus, leading to their further isolation instead of moving towards 'normal life' of better quality. This showed to be detrimental to their inner peace which emerged as an important step in the long process of reintegration and towards 'normal' life.

For some people the relationship with the 'other' appeared as relevant to their experience of 'normal'. They believe that a man cannot exist only in his narrow circle where his peace can be protected from the outside world; thus, external influences, including the 'other', are expected. In this context, forgiveness emerges as a subtheme. Some rejected it while others saw it as a step towards their own peace. As stated earlier, none spoke of forgiving the enemy in terms of taking a step towards reconciliation as it is explained in the context of liberal peace-building. Instead, forgiveness is rooted in deeply personal reasons such as being devoted to God or seeing God's children in the 'other'. The question was who the 'other' even is. Unlike personal identification where nationality was highlighted, the enemy was primarily identified in military terms. Even when the link with nationality or religion was established, this was not done because the 'other' is somehow different. The enemy is anyone who put a desired 'normal' and 'home' in danger regardless of their other identities, and being the 'other' is conditioned by specific circumstances that represent the darkest shade of 'normal' as it is overshadowed by extreme violence. During the war, the 'other' became someone who was a neighbour once. Fear that their return could provoke another conflict remained; thus, many participants opposed to their return in an attempt to preserve stability and safety for their communities which brought safety issues, discussed in chapter 5, back to the agenda. To regain trust, the 'other' needs to take responsibility for their actions, apologise, regret, ask for forgiveness, admit the real causes of war, and change the mind-set and beliefs which led to war. Without it there is no real desire to rebuild relationships with the 'other' and participants are satisfied with living their 'normal lives' in a 'cold peace'.

Finally, this chapter confirmed that each person's experiences of war, peace, the 'other' and 'normal' are different and based on their experiences, character and beliefs.

Consequently, war and peace are isolated experiences as everyone's reality is unique. Hence, processes such as reconciliation, tolerance and forgiving happen on a personal level and begin from within, making peace-building challenging and full of potential at the same time. As it turned out in the Croatian case, this begs another question: reconcile with whom? As discussed in this chapter, this is almost about everyone, including top level actors, the 'other' and 'ordinary people' whose perception of Croatian defenders partially changed due to politics and the media. After being warriors and victors they were stigmatised as a 'burden'. This happened in the place that did not meet their expectations. As one participant said, 'during the war children used to ask me why we were at war and I kept saying - to establish the Croatian state and have a better life; ten years ago kids asked me if this is the country I fought for'¹³⁵³. This suggests that the journey towards 'normal' within 'home' continues making this thesis an unfinished story with an end that will be written by the 'falcons' once they reach their goals.

¹³⁵³ WS016.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION:

CONFLICT SERVED FOR BREAKFAST AS A PART OF NORMALISED LIFE

Stanley Allen McChrystal, a retired US Army general, once said: ‘My very identity as a soldier came to an abrupt end. I’d been soldiering as long as I’d been shaving. Suddenly I’d been told I could no longer soldier, and it felt as though no one really cared if I ever shaved again’¹³⁵⁴. ‘An abrupt end’ to life circumstance that over time we accept as ‘normal’ includes a requirement to suddenly adjust to a new ‘normal’ indicating that ‘normal’ is not static and definitive. In this thesis, known life circumstances came to end for many civilians in the early 1990s when they suddenly became soldiers forced to defend the place they called ‘home’. The previous version of ‘normal’, highly impacted by political dogmas and propaganda, was interrupted by an armed conflict and once that conflict was over, a new version of ‘normal’ coming to light called upon all to adjust to it, including ex-combatants who had to switch back to a civilian mode of living, very often without any or with very little support. As a result, the life cycle of people who experienced this came to ‘an abrupt end’ several times within only a few years challenging them to adjust and prioritise very quickly in sometimes ‘abnormal’ circumstances emerging at the very border of a ‘normal’ spectrum. Their stories reveal a parallel existence of different versions of ‘normal’, depending on internal and external influences and goals; thus making ‘normal’ a subjective, dynamic and ever-changing concept that has no a unique understanding that would fit all and results in numerous shades of ‘normal’. This spectrum becomes a post-conflict reality, and, as Bargués Pedreny argued, this is where peace-building is opening up acknowledging ‘the myriad of objects’ instead of focusing on closure.¹³⁵⁵ This puts ‘normal’ as it is currently experienced in post-conflict reality into the centre of peace-building research emphasising the need to establish how people pursue this ideal, transform it as a response to external influences and adjust to new circumstances while burdened by a violent past, pain and suffering experienced during the conflict.

¹³⁵⁴ ‘Stanley A. McChrystal Quotes’, *BrainyQuote*. Available at <https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/stanley-a-mcchrystal-quotes> [accessed 15 December 2019].

¹³⁵⁵ Bargués Pedreny, *From the Liberal Peace to Pragmatic Peacebuilding to the Reality of Post-conflict Zones*.

This adjustment proved to be difficult, even if a new situation is seemingly improved as it excludes extreme violence as a part of everyday life. Based on Jansen's findings about 'normal life' being an object of hope in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia and encouraged by the lack of in-depth research of 'normal', I focused on looking into this further with the aim of establishing what truly matters to 'ordinary people', particularly those who experienced violence the most acutely, such as Croatian Army veterans. As the first research sub-question, I asked if 'normal life' was indeed one of the key parts of their post-conflict recovery. This was explored in the first subchapter in the chapter 4 where the positive answer to that question was highlighted. Furthermore, based on Duffield's observation that if we wish to examine conflict we must begin by analysing what is 'normal'¹³⁵⁶, my second research sub-question was formed and, therefore, I looked into how 'normal life' can be defined and which elements it includes. My research data confirmed Jansen's results bringing 'normal life' to the spotlight of the peace-building and post-conflict recovery in Croatia after the Homeland War. However, the major difference between Jansen's work and my research was in the nature of 'normal' that kept unpacking through the data analysis. In his work 'normal life' emerged as an 'object of hope' indicating a static and passive concept that people are waiting to be accomplished. In my thesis, 'normal life' emerges as an ideal enriched by a dynamic and flexible nature which changes according to the external circumstances and inner experiences; thus, it is being actively pursued. It is not an object; it is a quest that, just like Bargués Pedreny's perception of peace-building, may not even have a definitive closure as there is always an aspiration for something better. This means that 'normal' does not necessarily transform in relation to past, but also as a response to the vision of the future that one day could be. Hence, 'normal' emerges as the construction of something new which people believe would be more 'normal'.

Additionally, although in Jansen's research 'normal life' emerged as a desirable priority in some societies where reconciliation shows up only on a horizon, a definition of 'normal life' was lacking. As a part of answering my second and third research sub-question, I address this important theoretical gap in deconstructing and challenging the assumptions about 'normal life' as an aim for post-war individuals and societies. Although my research findings showed that there is no a unique definition of what 'normal life' is, an analysis of participants' answers revealed that there are certain criteria that 'normal life' needs to meet to

¹³⁵⁶ Quoted in: Thornton, 'Introduction, Identity Matters', p. 10. Originally published: Mark Duffield, 'Post-modern Conflict: Warlords, Post-adjustment States and Private Protection', *Civil Wars*, Vol. 1 (1998), No. 1, 65-102.

start feeling like ‘normal’. In this context, a very small number of people spoke of peace-building initiatives, how they are understood in liberal peace-building, and reconciliation as one of the broadly discussed peace-building topics rarely appeared among their desires. Post-war contacts with the ‘other’ simply emerge as a tolerable co-existence which includes some necessary relationships with the ‘other’, such as those in a professional setting or random encounters. Instead, for many participants the focus was on ‘normal’ which, as discussed in chapter 4, includes everything from feeling safe, having enough to live, being able to enjoy hobbies, and growing personally, professionally, and even spiritually.

Furthermore, this means that, looking back at Maslow’s pyramid of basic human needs, ‘normal’ can be stretched across the layers of everyday life covering all aspects from the most basic needs to opportunities for self-actualisation. Also, many participants in this research explored overlapping layers of ‘normal’ meaning their focus was not exclusively on the most urgent needs such as food, shelter and health. For example, once our discussion during the interviews progressed, different shades of ‘normal’ emerged developing into new ideas about truth, justice and feelings of accomplishment and acceptance as an equal, valuable and integral part of ‘normal’. This demonstrated a desire of the participants to truly live as human beings in every sense of the word because the bare survival they had experienced during the war was no longer sufficient to have ‘normal life’. In simple words, life is more than just a struggle to live another day, and in the post-conflict setting this leads to certain expectations in the improvement of quality of life, as Atashi and Smyth argued. We may describe life as ‘normal’, but that does not mean it should be average. Just the opposite as in the post-conflict setting in the country which transitioned from autocracy and totalitarianism to a new democracy this new version of ‘normal’ should provide space for Nussbaum’s ‘a good quality life’. This was clearly demonstrated when participants spoke of truth and justice as preconditions of ‘normalisation’¹³⁵⁷ and ‘a better future’¹³⁵⁸. This indicated the key elements of ‘normal life’ in the peace-building context; thus, providing the answers to the third research sub-question. The values the participants spoke of are not only a part of ‘normal life’ journey but also something that would have been accomplished if ‘normal’ was actually achieved. Without them, there is no ‘complete normal’; there is only an aspiration for what ‘normal’ should be. Hence, the quest continues as long as certain moral values and ideals are beyond reach. This happens with the understanding that perhaps they may never be achieved

¹³⁵⁷ ES042.

¹³⁵⁸ OTH055.

leaving participants with a feeling that the only hope for a desired ‘normal’ is a spiritual realm as a final layer of ‘home’ which is ‘a spiritual house’¹³⁵⁹ where one becomes complete.

Also, this exploration of ‘normal’ revealed an extreme fluidity of ‘normal’; thus, making it impossible to conceptualise it as a model or a pyramid. This significantly distinguishes ‘normal’ from Nussbaum’s and Maslow’s frameworks I partially relied on in my approach to ‘normal’ as a starting point when thinking about ‘normal life’. On a practical level, I demonstrate this fluidity in the empirical chapters using, for example, employment prospects as a job can both guarantee survival and a feeling of accomplishment, usefulness, and personal growth. Consequently, the participants in this research placed employment on a different levels of Maslow’s pyramid revealing the fluidity of ‘normal’ and going beyond Maslow’s and Nussbaum’s models into a wider spectrum of ‘normal’ and its complexities. As a result, my research was built upon philosophical, psychological and anthropological insights into ‘normal’. Furthermore, it also resulted in a wealth of data whose analyses exposed a far more complex nature of ‘normal’ that resists linear coherence; thus, excluding that concept from specific boundaries and categories where limitations are expected and portraying ‘normal’ as a sphere with thousands of intersecting circles whose dynamics depend on external influences and our perception of the current reality. Data also revealed that to fully understand the depth and complexity of ‘normal’ using metaphors that portray those intersecting circles is a necessary and beneficial part of its conceptualisation and exploration of the entire ‘normal’ spectrum.

Furthermore, the idea of inner peace, which was introduced in chapter 1 and which emerged in the empirical chapters, opened to a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be human since living ‘normally’ is not about the list of external or physical conditions that need to be met, but a very delicate and dynamic mind-set. The key to unlocking the full human potential for having ‘normal life’ with inner peace as its crucial component was found in the safe environment where an individual has an opportunity to explore a personal vision of a desired life. As stated earlier, definitions of ‘normal life’ revealed that the understanding of what it really means is diverse; thus, it is subject to change and is deeply personal. Moreover, ‘normal’ is also culturally conditioned and understood differently on a local level; hence, there is not a final conclusion on an approach that needs to be taken to achieve it or even pursue it. This obviously represents a potential obstacle in a pragmatic sense because ‘normal’

¹³⁵⁹ ES033.

does not come with the list of requirements that need to be met; thus, there are no boxes to tick or to measure its' current progress. However, as my findings support Jansen's insights and significantly expand the relevance of 'normal' in post-conflict society, its role in peace-building should not be neglected as supporting people to establish their version of 'normal' can help post-conflict recovery and, consequently, peace itself. As stated earlier, building peace on an illusion could end up just like Tito's Yugoslavia that outlived him for only ten years because it was built, as Ephraim Kishon argued, on 'a little bit of freedom and a little illusion of a better life'. Thus, understanding a local 'normal' reality and its complexities is essential while keeping in mind different themes that emerge in this context if we wish to use it as a possible tool in peace-building. However, it is this kind of exploration that is largely missing in the current literature which is focused on dualities such as local/international, safety/danger, war/peace and us/them; thus further emphasising the need for this research while demonstrating the level of flexibility required within this topic. In this conclusion, I summarise some key findings significant in the context of specific peace-building topics linked to 'normal life' which clearly demonstrate how complex post-conflict 'normal' can be and which obstacles peace-building is facing on the ground when it opens to these realities.

According to explored definitions, what 'normal life' does not include is a lack of safety which was tackled in-depth in chapter 5 while exploring the current experience of security as part of answering the third research sub-question; hence, a safe environment where 'normal' can be nurtured has to exist. Some participants acknowledged that even violence is a part of 'normal life' as it cannot be completely avoided, but to experience all those aspects of 'normal life' they described, safety is needed. In the Croatian context, this problem emerged when participants raised the issue of 'home' as the goal they fought for. An analysis of what 'home' means to them revealed that there are multiple connecting dots where 'normal life' and 'home' meet to the point where they become the same as 'home' is not only a place for living, but also a place of growing and achieving one's desires. This means that while defending 'home' the participants defended their various ideas of 'normal' because 'normal life' can hardly exist outside this space where people can nurture their traditions and past, question their present, and perhaps shape a different future as opposed to current future prospects.

Furthermore, within this discussion about 'home' another micro topic emerged as a symbol of their struggle to move away from the communist past and build a different 'normal life' in which their Croatian identity would be acknowledged. A salute that started developing

330 years ago and was used in the Homeland War and the Second World War linked this constant fight for a different ‘normal life’ to the search for truth, the impact of former communists on a ‘new’ society due to a lack of lustration, identity issues, a burden of ‘collective guilt’ rooted in events that occurred during the Second World War and, finally, a quest for justice. All these themes were explored in the empirical chapters.

Firstly, the meaning of the salute was linked to independence¹³⁶⁰. One interviewee summaries this belief saying that ‘some¹³⁶¹ are not happy with the spirit of the people expressed in that salute and as long as the salute exists all those deniers of Croatian statehood will not be able to carry out their politics peacefully’¹³⁶². Another described this stating that ‘the enemies of everything which is Croatian particularly detest the greeting “For Home – Ready” because it invites to resistance and it’s a symbol of an unrepentant spirit and love for our home’¹³⁶³. As stated earlier, this indicates the need to create a freer and safer environment for a new ‘normal’. Safety was identified by Maslow as one of the basic human needs and as a first step to reconciliation by Bar-Tal. As discussed in chapter 5, from the perspective of many this requirement has not been met yet due to ‘the enemies’ being diverse starting from the Greater-Serbia ideology and communism to the great powers that possibly have impact on external or internal enemies. Those internal enemies were identified as the communist elites that have not been lustrated, but also as all those who in one way or another oppose Croatian independence, such as pardoned local Serbs who rebelled in the early 1990s. This means that the enemy is not a nation or people of different religion but those whose political beliefs exclude existence of an independent Croatian state and, therefore, they represent a threat to ‘home’ and ‘normal’. This lack of safety undermines faith in a stable peace leaving the participants convinced that conflict has not ended and another armed conflict is possible. To move away from this situation, certain requirements have to be met, such as a final defeat of ideologies that led to the war, and this can be done only by a transformation of societies on both sides and changes in the mind-set that would lead to renouncing any extremists’ beliefs. Without safety, a ‘normal’ relaxed life focused on personal and professional growth falls into the shadows of fear and anxiety. This creates a security dilemma where past events contribute

¹³⁶⁰ In 1941, the first Croatian state was established for the first time since the end of the 11th century when the last Croatian king died and afterwards, Croats were ruled by Hungarian and Austrian monarchs. The political programme for the independent Croatian state was shaped by Ante Starčević, ‘Father of Homeland’, in the mid-19th century although Croats were fighting for preservation of their own language and culture much earlier and their desire for freedom lived in the salute discussed in the introduction of this thesis.

¹³⁶¹ The enemy.

¹³⁶² ND047.

¹³⁶³ OTH058. ND029.

to socio-psychological dynamics that fuel later developments of our reality, including conflict.

Secondly, the fight for statehood during the Second World War ended with the bloodshed as thousands of Croatian soldiers and civilians were executed by the communists and ended up in thousands of mass graves all over the former Yugoslavia. That part of Croatian history officially remained hidden until 1990 when the first data about those events started emerging in the former Yugoslavia.¹³⁶⁴ Knowing truth and speaking freely about past events appeared as one of many layers of ‘normal life’. However, to know what truth is, an ‘objective’ research free of political dogmas and pressure is needed, but, as some participants highlighted, this is still not coming to fruition due to communist elites still holding positions of power in Croatian society and whose activities partially pose a significant obstacle to learning more about the past and exposing the crimes of the communist regime. In this context, we could argue that nothing is ever completely free from political influences although their impact manifests as a spectrum. What the attitude of participants in this research implies is an active resistance of political elites to allow new evidence to come to light and enable people to gain new knowledge which would have impact on their understanding of the past and present; thus, changing their experiences of both and influencing dynamic and the goals of a desired ‘normal’. Also, if cemented in the past which cannot be questioned, people remain unable to change their mind-set about themselves and the ‘other’. This undermines opportunities for social changes that would normally be encouraged by a new repertoire of premises, assumptions and aspirations, as Bar-Tal argued¹³⁶⁵, but it also neglects people’s desire to pursue a new ‘normal’ based on a different set of values in which people would be allowed to think critically, question and, consequently, explore their full potential, or self-actualise; thus having one of their human needs met.

This inability of society to come to terms with the past and encourage healing means that the conflict in one way or another continues, if not on the outside, then as an internal one.

¹³⁶⁴ This also means that fighting for truth represents the fight for a different version of ‘normal’ unburdened by a secretive past which influenced the lives of so many, and consequently, left thousands of families unable to know the fate of their loved ones whose only trace was often a photo that family kept hidden afraid of the communist regime which could see their family member in the ‘wrong’ uniform. In my case it was the photo which was put in a box and buried deep in the ground by my great-grandmother who wanted to preserve the only memory of her son who ‘disappeared’ near Dravograd (Slovenia) in May 1945 where he was captured by the communists. Decades later, when it was safe, the box was dug up and the photo was handed over to my grandmother, and then to me. That photo and the search for his remains is my only inheritance. Many participants in this research had similar photos to show or they shared them on social media.

¹³⁶⁵ Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*, p. 323.

This manifests as a rift between a desired ‘normal’ which is being hidden within the sanctity of ‘home’ or an inner circle and the current normal that is being experienced; thus leading to dissatisfaction and unhappiness and revealing some fundamental connections between macro-political structures and the intimacy of a private world. This results in multiple inner realities which occasionally meet as they reveal mutual concerns, as shown in the empirical chapters. Once peace-building opens to this richness of realities of inner worlds, it truly becomes a maze that is challenging to navigate but necessary if we wish to examine conflict hidden on the outside. As this conflict continues on a different level, peace becomes, as Brewer said, strange, leading to a different understanding what peace even is starting from a very basic definition such as ‘we won; there is no war and, therefore, that’s peace’¹³⁶⁶. But this peace is a cold peace in which co-existence with the ‘other’ shows up as something which is being tolerable because it cannot be avoided.

Moreover, as some tensions continue, not only in regards to the Second World War, but also in regards to the Homeland War, the conflict or various themes around it become a central preoccupation for many leading to, what Bar-Tal identified as ‘centrality’, and consequently, society members live a normalised conflicted life. In this life, the conflict emerges through various topics in everyday life, the media and politics. The conflict is everywhere, starting from the early morning, as I like to say, because that is the time when I read Croatian news while having my first cup of coffee. I have conflict served for breakfast and if I spend any time online during the day, I have conflict for lunch or any other meal. Like many participants in this research who spoke about the presence of their war memories or historical topics in their everyday lives, I live my ‘normal life’ in the shadow of the conflict that started hundreds of years ago.

Finally, in this situation where people still feel the need to defend ‘home’ and ‘normal’, some former soldiers stay soldiers, at least in their minds. ‘Once a soldier, always a soldier’, concluded a participant from Eastern Slavonia.¹³⁶⁷ Looking at this answer one might ask if reintegration is even possible because soldiering has become an integral part of one’s identity. A lack of safety could decrease veterans’ opportunities for a full reintegration into civilian life as their military identity becomes the primary identity, which happened in some cases discussed in chapter 6 where I analysed the data about the relationships in the post-conflict setting, relevant to the fourth research sub-question. This leads to what Lederach

¹³⁶⁶ WS006. ND050.

¹³⁶⁷ ES036.

described as ‘identity dilemma’ which creates an even larger gap between former soldiers and the rest of society. Furthermore, ‘the gunman can also experience emasculation during decommissioning’, as Brewer argued. A soldier without his weapon can no longer defend, which is a problem if there is no safety in the society where he lives and if, as some participants highlighted, he still feels the need to defend. But, in the new post-conflict setting the status he previously enjoyed is lost and this can cause him to feel like something ‘less’ than he used to be. As a result, as Spear argued, reintegration of these former combatants into society should ‘provide them with a role equivalent status to the one they had during the conflict, or at least positively recognise the role they played in the conflict’.¹³⁶⁸ Recognising status held in the past could be easier than securing a new one in the environment which has changed and this leaves former combatants with a crucial question: ‘reintegrate into what..?’¹³⁶⁹. If they find themselves depending on assistance programmes and unable to rebuild their lives, for example to get a job and support their families, they could feel like something even ‘lesser’ instead of finding a new place in the society. In Croatia, many were denied opportunities for getting any job and were retired. Health issues played a major role in this process. Instead of being tackled in a professional manner, many veterans felt forced to deal with their pain in secret as revealing the truth meant forced retirement.

This emerged as one of the biggest mistakes of Croatian government. Retirement took away an opportunity from participants to earn their income, to create, to spend less time thinking about war, to contribute to their community and to feel like a valuable member of society. Instead of transforming into civilians and experiencing all stages of a life cycle, many were excluded from the labour market which narrowed down their opportunities to socialise and fully reintegrate. From being soldiers, many young people were transformed into pensioners, and some believe this was done deliberately to minimise their impact on society and remove them as possible ‘spoilers’ to the anti-Croatian political elites. Many argued that this situation left them feeling worthless, and caused them problems with survival as, in some cases, their pensions were insufficient to live. Also, work would have helped them deal with PTSD and possibly preventing some from committing suicide. They would have been proud ‘if they had earned everything on their own instead of constantly hearing that they got something and they are privileged’¹³⁷⁰. Consequently, their personal sacrifice became less

¹³⁶⁸ Spear, ‘Disarmament and Demobilization’, p. 145.

¹³⁶⁹ Dudouet, Giessmann, Planta, ‘Deficits and blind spots in existing approaches to post-war security promotion’, p. 34.

¹³⁷⁰ ES004.

meaningful and justified as it turned them into a ‘burden’ and took away their dignity. Once some in society defined them as a ‘burden’ with privileges, as it happened in the Croatian context, this created a further rift between former soldiers and the rest of society. Once they feel excluded – or, ‘it feels like I landed with a parachute in an unknown land where you understand their language, but still you have nothing to talk about’, as someone explained¹³⁷¹— their military identity, the only one which is left as their only refuge point, could become dominant. Shunned from the rest of society which does not understand them, the only refuge they can find is the circle of their army buddies where war stories keep living on an everyday basis. The question which was raised was how to actually reconcile with the society which started rejecting you as a ‘burden’ and this brings the desire for a more tolerant society which would respect diversity of people, beliefs and opinions to light.

Instead of a fairer society, some aspects of society transformed into something worse while others, such as the mentality which remained a residue of communism, did not change at all. This is why some participants refused to ‘reintegrate’ into the old as this was just the opposite of what they fought for and negation of the goals they had in their hearts. Injustice they identified as a significant obstacle to their reintegration infecting all aspects of life kept emerging in all empirical chapters when various issues were addressed. When speaking about how society started perceiving defending ‘home’ as ‘abnormal’, participants even questioned how meaningful the war really was and why they actually put their lives in danger while also revealing a profound feeling of unhappiness and dissatisfaction due to their expectations not being met. This included the transformation of society into a post-communist society; instead, they found themselves in a society where another battle for truth is needed, but this time truth about their own contribution in war. Furthermore, the ‘other’ have not gone through a personal catharsis which would begin with renouncing the ideology that led to war, progress with confessions of wrong-doings, apologies, showing remorse and asking for forgiveness, and ending with concrete deeds such as paying war reparations. Instead, former enemies have not been punished and some even made it into parliament, taking control over the same people they fought against. As one participant argued, ‘this doesn’t allow us to leave our army boots’¹³⁷² as described circumstances undermine a sense of justice.

All of this happened in the place called ‘home’ that is supposed to provide a safe environment for a new ‘normal’. However, the experiences of participants highlighted in this

¹³⁷¹ ES034.

¹³⁷² ES016.

chapter explain why that place still feels unsafe; thus, conflict continues due to the need to defend ‘home’ and protect a desired ‘normal’. Consequently, ‘falcons’ remain ‘For home ready’ with their boots on. None of them spoke of violence and causing harm to another. Moreover, one participant emphasised that ‘it’s my belief that there is nothing disputable in the salute, nothing violent, and nothing that invites hatred or any other negative feeling, and therefore, it’s not compromised’¹³⁷³. What the salute represents are goals and expectations that have not yet been met; therefore such strong feelings of injustice and disappointment expressed throughout this thesis lead towards tension in a society that remains stuck between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ ‘normal’, unable to move on from the conflict. Topics discussed in previous paragraphs, largely focusing on experiences of safety, truth, justice and identity, were broadly explored in the empirical chapters as they emerged as the most critical layer of ‘normal’ in the post-conflict setting, linking it directly to some key peace-building topics. This example emphasises the need to look into post-conflict realities and examine ‘normal’, as Duffield and Bargués Pedreny argued, as new findings can contribute to new approaches to peace-building.

To conclude, my research data revealed several broader key points relevant to the exploration of localised peace-building. Firstly, understanding of peace can mainly happen in the context of a cold peace in which a new ‘normal’ exists with a very little desire to pursue reconciliation in a way it is understood in liberal peace. Instead, the emphasis is on safety which opens the necessary space to pursue a desired ‘normal’. However, as shown in the empirical chapters, security also evolves as a very different notion to how it is seen in political science as it emerges as a far more complex experience. Hence, conflict that no longer manifests on the outside can persist on a deeply personal level. As a result, the understanding of safety becomes equally fluid and subjective as the understanding of peace(building) and ‘normal’ while also being very specific to the local due to different circumstances and experiences. This was emphasised by one participant whose comment demonstrated flexibility and fluidity of ideas and categories discussed in this thesis. During the interview he stated, ‘now I have to correct myself in some answers given in the questionnaire because the political situation is changing on an everyday basis which means that my answers could be different’¹³⁷⁴. As a result, ‘normal’ with all its aspects, including safety, indeed comes in different shades depending on personal experiences, external

¹³⁷³ ND045.

¹³⁷⁴ WS004.

influences, own understanding of the world and other factors. Thus, its complexity and dynamic made it challenging as I was trying to address an important theoretical gap in deconstructing the assumptions about ‘normal life’ as an aim for post-war individuals and societies. While unpacking ‘normal’, the links between its layers and common peace-building themes emerged indicating that understanding of people’s desires and their perception of ‘normal’ is significant because supporting them in establishing their version of ‘normal’ can support post-conflict recovery and, consequently, help build peace in a more stable way. Therefore, this needs to be considered.

Secondly, using this summary of the main participants’ ideas relevant to their experiences of the current ‘normal’, particularly in the context of truth, justice, safety and the inability to leave the conflict behind due to specific circumstances within society, I briefly portrayed their reality where conflict continues and liberal peace-building, dominant in the 1990s when this conflict was in progress, failed as local experiences were neglected and the inner world of ‘ordinary people’ was ignored. This strongly emphasised the need for research focused on the role of agency and giving an opportunity to ‘ordinary people’ to articulate their desires. This does not include only ex-combatants who were the main topic in my research, but all ‘ordinary people’ affected by violence. This is due to significant transformations their society goes through during the conflict which impacts all layers of life and leaves people to deal with its’ consequences. Thus, it is not only ex-combatants who need to reintegrate into ‘civilian’ life; it is the entire society that needs to reintegrate into a different version of post-conflict ‘normal life’. This indicates that some sort of assistance programmes or support should be in place for all as this would support people to heal and pursue their desired ‘normal’ while acknowledging specific needs of different groups within society. In this context, not only can unfulfilled expectations of improvements in the quality of life lead to more violence, as Atashi and Smyth argued¹³⁷⁵, but they indeed prolong the conflict within personal realities. This happens because victory which implies the final end of conflict does not happen with the end of armed conflict even if it is won. Instead, conflict truly ends when expectations of people are addressed meaning basic requirements for pursuing their desired ‘normal’ are met. This includes truth and justice that were earlier described as preconditions of ‘normalisation’¹³⁷⁶. Hence, what victory actually means as the end of conflict ‘depends on

¹³⁷⁵ Atashi, ‘Challenges to conflict transformation from the streets’, p. 49.

¹³⁷⁶ ES042.

how high your standards are'¹³⁷⁷ and what expectations in peace are. This further strengthens the argument for further research on 'normal' in post-conflict societies.

Furthermore, unlike hybrid peace-building that focuses on everyday life, exploration of 'normal' goes beyond that as it is not only about what happens in people's everyday lives. It is about unpacking numerous shades of 'normal' within everyday experiences where each individual faces their personal reality. Looking from a theoretical perspective, this significantly shifts the focus not only to the bottom of Lederach's pyramid, but also to every person who becomes a possible 'agent of change'. Moreover, each person has their own unique voice and once this voice is given to them, the richness of the previously hidden post-conflict realities full of suggestions and ideas for future peace-building initiatives open; thus, emphasising the need for a safe and confidential place where all those thoughts can be expressed in-depth. In practice, this means focusing on qualitative research methods since due to the nature of 'normal' quantitative data can only provide a broader statistical context.

Finally, this approach does not exclude other actors. As Mac Ginty argued, external agents may be unaware of how subjective and culturally loaded their own interventions may be. What needs to be added here is that if people in conflict-affected zones have different experiences of 'normal', the same applies to external actors whose experiences of 'normal' can be rooted in their personal past or influenced by their work in the professional setting. As one participant from the beginning of this thesis stated, 'what is normal to me may be abnormal to another'. Hence, other actors could have a completely different understanding of 'normal' and expectations for a better life. This means that all players in this arena – local and external – bring their own expectations and approaches which may differ, and perhaps even oppose each other. This does not mean that local should be disconnected from the rest of society because, as some participants argued, nobody is an island. As demonstrated in previous chapters, many issues that participants brought up were identified as those beyond local. They do influence 'ordinary people' in their everyday lives, but the solutions to those cannot be found in the local community and communication with top level and middle-range actors is needed. This was clearly expressed by participants when they spoke of lustration, truth, safety and other issues. They also tackled an impact of foreign factors connecting their local issues to global which is in line with Richmond's observations about a localised perspective of peace-building.¹³⁷⁸ Hence, for successful peace-building where a safe space, or

¹³⁷⁷ ES046.

¹³⁷⁸ Richmond, *A postliberal peace*, p.3.

a peace-building 'home', would exist to open a dialogue between all actors, it is necessary to acknowledge multiple 'normalities' of all players. In terms of future research, this means that focus could be on a comparative analysis of internal and external 'normal' with an aim of finding out more about intersecting circles as those points where the two meet could imply a starting point for future peace-building initiatives. Thus, based on my findings, this localised peace-building could consist of two layers which can be described as 'localised normal' and 'individualised peace-building'. This is due to the necessity to understand local experiences of 'normal' enabling us to examine the conflict itself and the need to open peace-building not only to the reality of conflict-affected zones, but also to inner realities of conflict-affected individuals and all professionals involved in peace-building initiatives.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

A PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET

Study Title: **From Combatants to Civilians: The Role of Croatian Defenders in Post-Conflict Croatia (1995-2017)**

Investigator(s): **Blanka Matkovic**

You are invited to take part in this research study, which is conducted as part of a PhD degree at the University of Warwick. This is a self-funded project although a tuition fee was partially funded by the Frankopan Fund.

The research aims to help us better understand post-conflict reconstruction and post-conflict recovery in Croatia and beyond. The focus will be on ex-combatants due to a tendency within the academic literature to look upon them “as ‘target groups’ of assistance programmes who have to become ‘educated’ and ‘socialised’, or as ‘spoilors’ who should disband and disappear once peace has prevailed.

Before you decide whether or not to participate it is important to understand what your participation would involve and mean. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish.

- 1) Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any point, for example, if your participation causes any discomfort or stress.
- 2) All participants will be asked to fill in a questionnaire which will take approximately 30 minutes to complete, and which you can submit in person or via email, Skype etc. In addition, a number of participants will be asked to participate in more in-depth interviews, which will be scheduled at a convenient time.
- 3) The information that you share will be treated as confidential, and your identity will be anonymised. Please note that the study has been reviewed and given favourable opinion by the Department of Politics and International Studies (University of Warwick) Research Ethics Committee: 29 March 2017
- 4) There are no direct benefits for participating in this research, and no payments will be made.
- 5) If you choose to participate, we will ask you to sign a consent form to confirm that you have agreed to take part.
- 6) If you have any questions or problems please speak with Blanka Matkovic (email:

B.Matkovic@warwick.ac.uk)

7) If you would like to receive a copy of the research findings please provide your contact details:.....

N.B: If you have a complaint about the way you have been dealt with during the study or any possible harm you might have suffered will be addressed. Please address your complaint to the person below, who is a senior University of Warwick official independent of this study:

Director of Delivery Assurance

Registrar's Office, University House, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 8UW

Complaints@Warwick.ac.uk; 024 7657 4774

In case you feel that participating in this research caused you discomfort or stress you are welcome to speak to the researcher about different support systems in place. You may also seek help provided by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Croatia or visit the website <https://zdravlje.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/1966> where you can find the list of all coordinators for the Croatian defenders at the Croatian hospitals.

APPENDIX 2

A CONSENT FORM

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE ETHICS COMMITTEE CONSENT FORM

Study Number:

Title of Project: From Combatants to Civilians: The Role of Croatian Defenders in Post-Conflict Croatia (1995-2017)

Name of Researcher(s): Blanka Matkovic, supervisors: Dr. Gabrielle Lynch and Dr. Erzsebet Strausz

Please initial all boxes

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 24 February 2017 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. I understand that I am also free not to answer any particular question that I may find uncomfortable or distressing.

4. I understand that all information about me will be treated in strict confidence and that I will not be named in any written work arising from this study.

5. I understand that any audiotape material of me will be used solely for research purposes and will be destroyed on completion of your research.

6. I agree to take part in the above study and have been given a copy of this form for my own information.



Name of Participant Date Signature

Name of Person Date Signature
taking consent

APPENDIX 3
QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What is your gender?	2. How old were you when:	
a) male <input type="checkbox"/> b) female <input type="checkbox"/> c) I prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/>	a) you joined the Army: Please also state which Army you joined (you may choose more than one answer): b) you left the Army:	_____ a) HV <input type="checkbox"/> b) HVO <input type="checkbox"/> c) HOS <input type="checkbox"/> d) MUP <input type="checkbox"/>

3. Geographic data:		
a) Please write current location/place of residence (region)		
b) Where are you originally from?		
Please mark if you are from one of the following regions:		
	Northern Dalmatia	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Western Slavonia	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Eastern Slavonia	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Have you always lived in the region where you were born?		
Please mark if you have lived in one of the following regions:		
	Northern Dalmatia	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Western Slavonia	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Eastern Slavonia		<input type="checkbox"/>
Please read the following statements and mark those that apply to you. You may choose more than one answer in some cases. If the statement doesn't apply to you, please move to the next one.			
	NORTHERN DALMATIA	WESTERN SLAVONIA	EASTERN SLAVONIA
My hometown was occupied	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I lived in the region before the war and we lived there during the war	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I lived in the region before the war, my family was displaced and returned after the war	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I lived in the region before the war, my family was displaced but never returned	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I participated in military operations in the region (only for those who lived there before or after the war)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I participated in military operations in the region, <u>but I never lived there</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I participated in military operations in the region and I moved there after the war	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I never participated in military operations in the region, but I moved there after the war	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. What was your education level in 1995?		5. What was your employment status in 1995?	
Primary school	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never been employed before joining the Army	<input type="checkbox"/>
Secondary school	<input type="checkbox"/>	I had a job before the war, but lost it while I was at war	<input type="checkbox"/>
At the university	<input type="checkbox"/>	I had a job before the war and I went back to my previous workplace	<input type="checkbox"/>
Graduate	<input type="checkbox"/>	I was retired	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can't remember	<input type="checkbox"/>	I was unemployed and I was looking for a job	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. What was your marital status in 1995?		7. Did you have any children in 1995?	
Never married	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Divorced	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, please write how many	—

Married	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer not to specify	<input type="checkbox"/>
Widower/Widow	<input type="checkbox"/>		
In a relationship	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Prefer not to specify	<input type="checkbox"/>		
8. Were you involved in any peace-building initiatives?		9. Are you a member of any veteran organisation or veteran NGO?	
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
No, but I wanted to	<input type="checkbox"/>		
10. Was your health affected during or after the war?		11. Did you lose someone very close to you during the war?	
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was wounded and I recovered	<input type="checkbox"/>	A friend (civilian)	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was wounded and I am disabled	<input type="checkbox"/>	A family member	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was not wounded, but my health was affected in other ways	<input type="checkbox"/>	A comrade in the army	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was detained in war camp	<input type="checkbox"/>		

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS:

1. How often do you think about the events you experienced during the war?

I speak about the experiences of the war	often	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Never
When thoughts about the war come to me I dispel them	easily	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	With difficulty
I think about my experiences in the war	Often	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Rarely
I think about what could have happened to me	Often	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Never

2. How difficult was for you to ‘reintegrate’ into a civilian life on the scale from 1 to 10 where 1 signifies ‘not at all’ and 10 signifies ‘extremely stressful’?

Not stressful at all									Extremely stressful
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

3. What was your primary concern(s) at the time when you left the Army? Please choose between 1 and 3 options.

My personal relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>	My health	<input type="checkbox"/>
My children	<input type="checkbox"/>	Getting on with a ‘normal’ life	<input type="checkbox"/>
My social life and friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	Getting a job	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seeking justice	<input type="checkbox"/>	Getting involved in civil society	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wanting to know the truth about past events	<input type="checkbox"/>	Getting involved in peace-building efforts	<input type="checkbox"/>
Something else:			

4. Please explain in your own words how you have and are coping with the concerns listed above, and which approaches you have taken to address them. Who has provided you with support (authorities, family, friends, former combatants, etc.)?

5. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your life today?

	unsatisfied				satisfied
With my job	1	2	3	4	5
Financial situation	1	2	3	4	5
My family	1	2	3	4	5
My health	1	2	3	4	5
My life in general	1	2	3	4	5

6. How would you describe 'reintegration' into a civilian life?

7. How would you explain a 'normal' life?

8. What in your opinion are the most serious problems currently facing Croatia? Please order them in order of most serious to the simplest numbering them from 1 to 10.

	order
Unemployment	
Low standard of ex-combatants and material deficiencies	
Lack of moral and traditional values	
Care for war victims and Croatian defenders	
Instability and threats of war in the region	
Political turnabouts in the country	
Lack of hope and faith in the better future	
Crime and corruption	
General insecurity and lawlessness	
Unsolved issues from the recent past	

9. Do you think that the military victory in 1995 resulted with stable and lasting peace in Croatia and another similar conflict with the same enemy could never happen again?

yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
no	<input type="checkbox"/>
If no, please explain why you feel this way	

10. If you replied yes to the previous question, please skip this question and proceed to the question 13. If you replied no, please explain, according to you, what else needs to be done in Croatia in order to achieve stable peace.

11. According to you, how likely is another conflict with the same enemy?

Highly unlikely									Extremely likely
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

12. Do you think that the Croatian defenders can contribute to building stable and lasting peace?

yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, please explain how this can be accomplished	
no	<input type="checkbox"/>
If no, please explain why you feel this way	

13. In your opinion, have the Croatian defenders been included in peace-building efforts in Croatia, and if yes, please provide some details.

14. Do you think that reconciliation between Croats and Serbs should be included as one of the elements of building stable peace in Croatia?

yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
no	<input type="checkbox"/>
If no, please explain why you feel this way	

15. Do you consider reconciliation between Serbs and Croats possible? Do you agree or disagree with the following claims? Please choose one option for each statement.

	Don't agree at all	Mostly don't agree	Nor do I not agree nor do I agree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
What was done in the past war cannot be forgiven	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A great deal of time is yet to pass before true conditions for reconciliation are achieved	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Forgiveness has already begun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The economic situation and international pressure encouraged the process of forgiveness and reconciliation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
True reconciliation will never be	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

achieved					
The majority is willing to forgive if the opposite side were to apologise and admit its faults	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can forgive the nation but not the individuals that committed crimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
For reconciliation to take place, it is necessary for all those who committed crimes to be brought to justice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deep down inside, I cannot forgive, but I am willing to accept co-existence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. How would you describe reconciliation? Please choose only one answer.

Forgiveness and building new relationships with former enemies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rebuilding previous relationships with former enemies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Living next door to the former enemy and developing some kind of a relationship	<input type="checkbox"/>
Living next door to the former enemy without any contacts	<input type="checkbox"/>
Co-existence, but without any contacts, including living in the same neighbourhood	<input type="checkbox"/>
How would you define 'reconciliation' in your own words?	

17. Would you please signify which of the following categories represents the maximum relationship that you are prepared to achieve with the former enemy. You may choose more than one answer.

Enter into wedlock, or your children	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be friends	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be neighbours	<input type="checkbox"/>
Colleague at work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Citizen in the same state	<input type="checkbox"/>
Avoid any contact	<input type="checkbox"/>

18. If your pre-war neighbours were ‘on the other side’ during the war, how would you describe your relationship with them before the war and today?

19. What was your opinion about the return of Serbs to Croatia?

- a) I completely opposed to the return of Serbs
- b) I opposed the return of Serbs
- c) I supported the return of Serbs
- d) I completely supported the return of Serbs
- e) I am not sure

20. If you opposed their return, why?

- a) because it could cause Croats to once again be expelled
 - b) because co-existence is impossible
 - c) because they are war criminals
 - d) because a rebellion could occur again in the future
 - e) for some other reason, which
-

21. If you supported their return, why?

- a) I opposed their return
 - b) because of the international public and Croatia's dependency on international assistance
 - c) because I support everyone's right to return to their home
 - d) for some other reason, which
-

22. In your opinion, should the victim forget what he/she experienced during the war?

- a) should remember
 - b) forgive but not forget
 - c) forgive and forget
 - d) forget
 - e) other
-

23. What in your opinion should the victim do to the perpetrator? You may choose more than one answer.

- a) take revenge
 - b) seek compensation for damages
 - c) seek an apology
 - d) forgive
 - e) other
-

24. To what measure do you agree with the following claims?

	Don't agree at all	Mostly don't agree	Nor do I not agree, nor do I agree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
Murder in war circumstances should not be measured according to peacetime standards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Even at war it is necessary to offer the hand of reconciliation to the opposite side	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The inefficiency of the law in war is the best opportunity to become rich	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The war has ended and it is necessary for all sides to forgive their enemies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

25. What pre-conditions do warring sides – Serbs & Croats – need to be fulfilled to bring about forgiveness and mutual reconciliation? You may choose more than one answer.

	Croats should	Serbs should
Compensate material damages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Apologise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enable the return of refugees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Locating remains of missing people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Those who committed the crimes should stand a trial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

26. Who do you think has been contributing to the process of forgiveness and reconciliation, if any?

	Didn't contribute at all				Contributed exceptionally
Catholic Church	1	2	3	4	5
Orthodox Church	1	2	3	4	5
The Hague Tribunal	1	2	3	4	5
Croatian Politicians	1	2	3	4	5
Serbian politicians	1	2	3	4	5
Serbian representatives in Croatia	1	2	3	4	5
Media	1	2	3	4	5
NGOs	1	2	3	4	5
Croatian defenders	1	2	3	4	5
General population	1	2	3	4	5

27. Which participants should be brought to justice? You may choose more than one answer.

- a) responsible politicians
- b) responsible military personnel
- c) actual war criminals
- d) others who motivated crimes
- e) all enemy soldiers because they participated in insurgency against the legal authorities

28. How do you feel about the amnesty proclaimed after the war? Please choose only one answer.

I am against the amnesty - former enemy soldiers should stand a trial	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am not against the amnesty, but I would not allow them to work for the authorities (policemen, etc.) or to be political representatives in the parliament and on the local level	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't mind them participating completely in all areas of Croatian public life	<input type="checkbox"/>

29. Are you willing to reconcile with the enemy?

	yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	no	<input type="checkbox"/>
If not, please explain why you feel this way		

30. Are you willing to forgive the enemy?

	yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	no	<input type="checkbox"/>
If not, please explain why you feel this way		

31. How would you identify yourself? Please choose only one answer.

Croatian defender	<input type="checkbox"/>
Croat	<input type="checkbox"/>
Christian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Catholic	<input type="checkbox"/>
Something else _____	

32. How would you identify your former enemies? Please choose only one answer.

Chetniks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Serbs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yugoslav Army/Communists	<input type="checkbox"/>
Orthodox	<input type="checkbox"/>
Something else _____	

33. How would you rate the influence of the past events and memories on the Croatian people in 1995 and today? Please rate each from 1 to 5 where 1 signifies ‘not important at all’ and 5 signifies ‘very important’.

	1995	2017
Greater Serbia ideology and politics		
Second World War		
Bleiburg and the massacres committed against Croats after the Second World War		
Repression of the communist regime in the former Yugoslav		
The Homeland War and atrocities committed during that time		
There was no lustration and the former communists still have power		
Chetniks were allowed to return to Croatia, get jobs and participate in political life		

APPENDIX 4

1991 POPULATION CENSUS (CROATIA)

Table: Population census – Nationality¹³⁷⁹

	1991		2001		2011	
Croats	3,736,356	78.10 %	3,977,171	89.63 %	3,874,321	90.42 %
Serbs	581,663	12.16 %	201,631	4.54 %	186,633	4.36 %
Yugoslavs	106,041	2.21 %	176	-	331	-
Muslims	43,469	0.91 %	-	-	-	-
Slovene	22,376	0.47 %	13,173	0.30 %	10,517	0.25 %
Hungarians	22,355	0.47 %	16,595	0.37 %	14,048	0.33 %
Italians	21,303	0.45 %	19,636	0.44 %	17,807	0.42 %
Czechs	13,086	0.27 %	10,510	0.24 %	9,641	0.22 %
Albanians	12,032	0.25 %	15,082	0.34 %	17,513	0.41 %
Montenegrins	9,724	0.20 %	4,926	0.11 %	4,517	0.11 %
Romani	6,695	0.14 %	9,463	0.21 %	16,975	0.40 %
Macedonians	6,280	0.13 %	4,270	0.10 %	4,138	0.10 %
Slovaks	5,606	0.12 %	4,712	0.11 %	4,753	0.11 %
Bosniacs ¹³⁸⁰	-	-	20,755	0.47 %	31,479	0.73 %
Others	197,279	4.12 %	139,536	3.14 %	-	-
TOTAL	4,784,265	100 %	4,437,460	100 %	4,284,889	100 %

Table: Population census – Religion¹³⁸¹

	1991		2001		2011	
Catholics	3,666,784	76.64 %	3,897,332	87.82 %	3,697,143	86.28 %
Orthodox	532,141	11.12 %	195,969	4.42 %	190,143	4.44 %
Muslims	54,814	1.14 %	56,777	1.28 %	62,977	1.47 %
Others	530,526	11.10 %	442,918	9.99 %	-	-
TOTAL	4,784,265	100 %	4,437,460	100 %	4,284,889	100 %

¹³⁷⁹ 'Population', *Croatian Bureau of Statistics official website*,
<http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/ljetopis/2009/PDF/05-bind.pdf> [accessed 14 April 2020].

¹³⁸⁰ In previous censuses they were not presented as national minorities.

¹³⁸¹ 'Population', *Croatian Bureau of Statistics official website*,
<http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/ljetopis/2009/PDF/05-bind.pdf> [accessed 14 April 2020].

APPENDIX 5

NORTHERN DALMATIA – GEOGRAPHY AND POPULATION

Table: Population in Northern Dalmatia¹³⁸²						
	CROATS		SERBS		YUGOSLAVS	
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
Drniš	18,732 (77.50 %)	7,835 (91.15 %)	4,974 (20.58 %)	656 (7.63 %)	76 (0.31 %)	-
Knin	3,886 (9.05 %)	11,613 (76.45 %)	37,888 (88.20 %)	3,164 (20.82 %)	502 (1.16 %)	-
Benkovac	13,553 (40.60 %)	8,845 (90.38 %)	18,986 (56.88 %)	730 (7.45 %)	154 (0.46 %)	-
Obrovac	3,761 (32.54 %)	2,844 (83.96 %)	7,572 (65.52 %)	435 (12.84 %)	53 (0.45 %)	-

¹³⁸² *Croatian Bureau of Statistics official website*, <www.dzs.hr> [accessed 14 April 2020]. These are the numbers of inhabitants in municipalities in 1991 and those in towns in 2001 which explains the difference in total number. Municipalities/towns with a Croatian majority are marked with blue and those with a Serbian majority with a red colour.

APPENDIX 6

WESTERN SLAVONIA – GEOGRAPHY AND POPULATION

Table: Population in Western Slavonia¹³⁸³						
	CROATS		SERBS		YUGOSLAVS	
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
Novska	16,556 (67.04 %)	12,813 (89.52 %)	5,402 (21.87%)	818 (5.72 %)	675 (2.73 %)	-
Nova Gradiška	43,692 (71.92%)	14,347 (90.61 %)	12,572 (20.69%)	914 (5.77 %)	1,810 (2.97 %)	-
Grubišno Polje	6,015 (42.34%)	4,692 (62.37 %)	4,540 (31.96%)	872 (11.59 %)	636 (4.47 %)	-
Daruvar ¹³⁸⁴	10,459 (34.76%)	7,729 (58.36 %)	10,074 (33.48%)	1,863 (14.06 %)	1,653 (5.49 %)	-
Pakrac	9,896 (35.87%)	6,048 (68.30 %)	12,813 (46.44%)	1,514 (17.09 %)	1,346 (4.87 %)	-

¹³⁸³ Croatian Bureau of Statistics official website, <www.dzs.hr> [accessed 14 April 2020]. These are the numbers of inhabitants in municipalities in 1991 and those in towns in 2001 which explains the difference in total number.

¹³⁸⁴ In 1991, the ratio of the Croatian and Serbian population was almost identical.

APPENDIX 7

EASTERN SLAVONIA – GEOGRAPHY AND POPULATION

Table: Population in Eastern Slavonia ¹³⁸⁵						
	CROATS		SERBS		YUGOSLAVS	
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
Beli Manastir	22,740 (41.90%)	6,085 (55.39 %)	13,851 (25.52%)	2,920 (26.58 %)	4,265 (7.84%)	-
Vinkovci	78,313 (79.55%)	31,958 (88.99 %)	13,170 (13.38%)	2,513 (7.00 %)	1,882 (1.91%)	-
Vukovar	36,910 (43.84%)	18,199 (57.46 %)	31,445 (37.35%)	10,412 (32.88 %)	6,124 (7.27%)	-
Osijek	110,934 (67.13%)	99,234 (86.58 %)	33,146 (20.06%)	8,767 (7.65 %)	8,351 (5.05%)	-

¹³⁸⁵ *Croatian Bureau of Statistics official website, <www.dzs.hr> [accessed 14 April 2020]. These are the numbers of inhabitants in municipalities in 1991 and those in towns in 2001 which explains the difference in total number.*

Research training

1. Annual Masterclass in Critical Security Studies (with Professor Edward Newman, University of Leeds), 2/03/2016
2. Transitional Justice, the Legacy of Guilt and the Question of Punishment, Warwick Law School, 4/03/2016
3. How to Engage with Parliament, University of Warwick, 12/06/2017
4. What's Next After Your PhD?, University of Warwick, 20/06/2017
5. Insight into Leadership Skills, University of Warwick, 2/11/2017
6. Publication strategies in IR/IS, 10/11/2017
7. The ethical researcher: Interviews and other qualitative and quantitative methods in theory and practice, 6/12/2017
8. Completing your PhD, 16/01/2018
9. Making sense of (Big) Data: surveys, focus groups, and other data research techniques, 24/01/2018
10. Getting published, 30/01/2018
11. How to get Postdoctoral Research Funding, 13/02/2018
12. Impact & Outreach, 27/02/2018
13. Evaluating your Public Engagement Activity, 23/05/2018
14. Academic Career Workshop - Arts and Social Sciences, 5/06/2018
15. Researching job options, identifying skills, making applications - for PhDs considering non-academic careers, 7/06/2018
16. Digital Public Engagement Techniques, 8/06/2018
17. PG and ECR Masterclass with Professor Cynthia Enloe on 'Exploring the Cultural Politics of Militarized Patriarchy', 12/06/2018
18. Interdisciplinarity Mapping, 21/06/2018, Warwick IPC organised by Warwick SU

While doing my previous research degree at the University of Warwick between 2012 and 2015, I also attended these workshops:

1. Organising references Using EndNote Web, 17/10/2012
2. Effective Applications – Producing Application Forms, CVs and Cover Letter, 17/10/2012

3. Effective Literature Searching 1, 24/10/2012
4. Academic Writing – Understanding Academic Writing, 31/10/2012
5. Comprehensive Literature Searching, 7/11/2012
6. Academic Writing – Elements of structure and organisation, 7/11/2012
7. Working Effectively with your Supervisor, 13/11/2012
8. What is impact and how can I demonstrate it?, 13/11/2012
9. Academic Writing – Paragraph Construction, elements and transition, 14/11/2012
10. How to be an Effective Researcher for the Arts, 20/11/2012
11. Disseminating Your Research A: Choosing which journal to publish in, 21/11/2012
12. Academic Writing – The academic writing style and language, 21/11/2012
13. ePortfolio seminar, 26/11/2012
14. Public Engagement – Reaching out to new audiences for your research, 27/11/2012
15. Attracting funding: Identifying sources of funding & writing proposals, 27/11/2012
16. Academic writing – Developing Critical Analysis, the Cognitive Domain, 28/11/2012
17. Disseminating Your Research B: Publications beyond journals, 30/11/2012
18. Understanding the Upgrade Process, 4/12/2012
19. Academic Writing – Ordering a Critical Argument, PEA Matrix, 5/12/2012
20. Effective communication 1: Having productive conversations, 6/12/2012
21. Managing Procrastination, 10/01/2013
22. Café Enterprise: Public Engagement, 23/01/2013
23. What to say after Hello! workshop, 24/01/2013
24. Effective communication 2: Behaving Assertively, 31/01/2013
25. Speed Reading, 6/02/2013
26. Building Confidence and Self-esteem workshop, 7/02/2013
27. Making the Most of your Strengths, 18/02/2013
28. Coping With Bereavement workshop, 21/02/2013
29. Poster Design and Creation, 06/03/2013
30. Café Scientifique, 06/03/2013
31. Attribution and co-authorship, 13/03/2013
32. Academic Writing - Contextualising Own Writing, 13/03/2013
33. Generating Ideas, 18/03/2013
34. Academic Writing - Thesis Structure, 20/03/2013
35. Practical Project Management, 23/04/2013
36. Academic Presentations 1, 24/04/2013

37. Academic Writing - Defending Your Argument, 1/05/2013
38. Careers beyond Academia, 8/05/2013
39. Practical Project Management 2, 9/05/2013
40. Academic Presentations 2, 15/05/2013
41. Café Scientifique, 15/05/2013
42. Promoting yourself and your research, 16/05/2013
43. Essential Leadership Skills, 22/05/2013
44. Academic writing - The Peer Review Process, 29/05/2013
45. Academic Presentation Skills Masterclass, 31/05/2013
46. Social media for researchers: managing your online identity, 4/06/2013
47. Effective Interview Skills, 4/06/2013
48. Developing your enterprising potential, 5/06/2013
49. Ideas to kick start a Career for International students, 5/06/2013
50. Media workshop, 11/06/2013
51. Successful Interviews, 12/06/2013
52. Academic Writing: Overcoming Writer's Block, 12/06/2013
53. Developing your brand, 13/06/2013
54. The shift from print to digital publishing: what it means for researchers and publishers, 18/06/2013
55. How to present yourself confidently, 19/06/2013
56. Discover Yourself Through Drawing, 19/06/2013
57. Employability Skills: What are they and how can you gain them?, 20/06/2013
58. Time Management and Motivation, 20/06/2013
59. Make your Cover Letter sing, 26/06/2013
60. Academic Writing How NOT to write, common problems & errors in Academic writing, 26/06/2013
61. Research to Reality (includes workshops: Setting up as a consultant, Intellectual property and commercialisation of research, Sustaining your consultancy income, Social enterprise, Writing a business plan), Summer Programme (July - September 2013)
62. Stress Management, 17/10/2013
63. Just Write It! - A weekend of workshops and 1-to-1 tutorials with Greta Solomon, Visiting Scholar, 19/10/2013
64. Get your CV noticed!, 21/10/2013

65. Kick Start: Exploring Careers Information & Resources, 24/10/2013
66. Researching Employers, 24/10/2013
67. Engaging different audiences with your research, 30/10/2013
68. How to use LinkedIn for careers success, 30/10/2013
69. Live life to the full!, 31/10/2013
70. Use Work Experience to promote yourself in Applications, 31/10/2013
71. Making progress in the 2nd year of your PhD, 04/11/2013
72. Understanding your personality type-MBTI, 05/11/2013
73. Organising Conferences, small events and seminars, 06/11/2013
74. Working Effectively with your Supervisor, 18/11/2013
75. The Confident Networker, 18/11/2013
76. Make your Application form count, 20/11/2013
77. Managing Depression, 28/11/2013
78. Managing Perfectionism, 05/12/2013
79. Digital Tools for Researchers course, January - May 2014
80. Academic Writing- Reporting using critical resources: paraphrase, summary and synthesis, 15/01/2014
81. Academic Writing - Writing an Abstract, 22/01/2014
82. Mindfulness, 23/01/2014
83. Academic Writing - Writing a Literature Review, 29/01/2014
84. Academic Writing - Grammatical Accuracy, Morphology and Syntax, 05/02/2014
85. Speculative Job Applications, 11/02/2014
86. Academic Writing - Grammatical Accuracy, Syntax, 26/02/2014
87. Careers in Academia - Arts, 03/03/2014
88. Academic Writing - Revision, proofreading, editing for clarity, 05/03/2014
89. Emotional Resilience, 13/03/2014
90. Dealing With Imposter Syndrome, 27/03/2014
91. Defeating Self-Sabotage, 22/05/2014
92. Academic Writing - Referencing and Plagiarism, 14/05/2014
93. Sleep Well, 12/06/2014
94. Preparing for and Surviving your Viva, 9/11/2015

In the academic year 2013/2014, I also attend a few workshops at UCL and the University of Cambridge:

CEELBAS / University of Cambridge

1. Ukrainian for Postgraduate Research Purposes, Robinson College, 15-16 March 2013
2. Challenges of Teaching Slavonic Languages in Higher Education, Madingley Hall, 22-23 March 2013

CEELBAS / UCL

1. CEELBAS Language Workshop, SSEES, UCL, 10/06/2013
2. British Library Slavonic & East European Collections - Research Training Workshop, 20-21 March 2014

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