Bridging Brexit-related societal divisions –

Learning from civil society initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract

My doctoral project compares civil society interventions aimed at bridging societal divisions in two different contexts: on the one hand, in post-war Bosnia & Herzegovina, and on the other hand, in post-Brexit referendum Dorset. It first explores the possibilities for such a comparison and proceeds to establish whether an ethnographically-informed understanding of the Bosnian case study can help generate a better understanding of the work of CSOs and their chances of success in the unprecedented climate of the post-Brexit referendum UK. Ethnographic fieldwork in Bosnia, conducted with CSOs promoting coexistence in Srebrenica in 2018, served as the baseline to inform subsequent ethnographic research with civil society organization working on hate crime and promoting community relations in Dorset.

Historical and contextual differences between the two case studies are recognised, including in the ways in which these are situated differently within wider geo-political structures of power, yet a comparison can be justified as follows: in either case, societal divisions are marked by human experiences of sudden (sometimes violent) exclusion and discrimination, based on a redefinition of the previous applicable citizen rights regime and a reshuffling of a collective sense of relevant group identities and group-based entitlements. In either case, the civil society organisations (CSOs) researched define their task in providing support and promoting coexistence among freshly differentiated local communities. The study argues that it is this similarity of local experience during processes of increasing alienation arising in either context, which justifies the comparison as basis of transferring insights and learning from one case to the other. In both cases, local experiences are marked by growing uncertainties and consolidating social distrust, which makes benevolent CSOs, in either case, both justify and carve out their role and the type of societal interventions which they pursued in similar/comparable ways. Based on immersive ethnography, this study is particularly interested in the conceptual frameworks according to which the involved CSOs, respectively, present 'the problem' of societal divisions and frame their actions on the ground.

Overall, guided by an anthropological approach to the study of CSO interventions, which aligns with the ‘local turn’ in peace studies, this thesis offers an epistemological exercise of applying the anthropological 'gaze of the other' to the UK context, thereby deconstructing what, in much of the wider Brexit debate, are unquestioned and taken-for-granted concepts guiding intervention practices. The overarching aim is to generate a better understanding of how questioning standard intervention paradigms that are applied in either context can illuminate differences and commonalities of experience found across apparently different contexts as well as potentially providing new epistemological tools of

evaluating the impact of CSOs aiming towards bridging societal divisions in any context. This study critically interrogates intervention paradigms such as, most prominently, 'reconciliation' and 'community cohesion' as culturally specific constructs with a particular history, yet also describes ethnographically how powerful these are in their impact and limitations on actually promoting the intended change when informing CSO intervention practices.

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PART 1

Introduction

This doctoral project developed within the framework of a call presented in 2017 by the Conflict Transformation Studies Group at the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences at Bournemouth University. The call, conceptualised by Associate Professor Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, was entitled "Bridging 'post-Brexit' Divides - a comparative approach (United Kingdom – former Yugoslavia)".

The project description denoted how British society emerged from the referendum on the membership of the European Union held on 23 June 2016 as politically deeply divided over the issues at stake: "critical observers have since noticed a consolidation of 'post-truth' politics contributing to the normalisation of an exclusionary discourse in the media, aimed at ethno-religious minorities, immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees" (Project call, 2017). As stated by a critical UN report, the referendum campaign "was marked by divisive, anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric" (CERD 2016, p.50) and hate crimes reportedly increased. Against these events, the project call proposed an original way to deal with the problems at stake: 'inverting the gaze' by reversing the usual West-East knowledge transfer traditionally based on a representation of the Balkans as 'Other' opposed to the 'civilised' West. The project aimed at investigating "the transferability of educationally innovative tools for both recognising and bridging societal divides and counteracting hate speech, as tested and tried in the former Yugoslavia (YU) after the 1990s wars. Focusing on civil society initiatives which created tools of conflict transformation that foster the recognition and appreciation of human experience across ethnic and social divides, it explores whether these can be made available in the 'post-Brexit' UK" (Project call, 2017).

Before introducing how I decided to address this ambitious comparative project, it is worthwhile spending a few words on my background. I was drawn to this PhD proposal because of my previous work in the civil society sector dealing with human experiences of bridging societal divisions in very different contexts. Before enrolling in this doctoral program, between 2014 and 2017, I worked as a civil society practitioner for the Alexander Langer Foundation, based in South-Tyrol, a multilingual German and Italian autonomous region of Northern Italy. As part of my work at the Alexander Langer Foundation, I supported projects on dealing with the war past in the area of Srebrenica, in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Foundation bases its work on the experience of Alexander Langer (1943-1995). He dedicated great part of his political activism to the topic of inter-ethnic coexistence, in particular in South-Tyrol, marked by tensions between the German and Italian speaking population, and in former Yugoslavia during the war of the 1990s, when he was a member of the European Parliament. Langer's thoughts and actions were based on the awareness that identity-based divisions of different scale, and open war as the extreme consequence of specific contextual political and economic factors, were not typical of certain societies more than others but represented a possibility in different contexts. According to him, potentially all multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual societies, from Eastern to Western Europe, could deal with situations where the alternative between ethnic exclusivism and multi-ethnic living together became central (Langer 1994).

To face such circumstances and overcome divisions, alongside political and institutional solutions, Langer considered particularly important to strengthen the work of civil society and find practical ways to build relations between people. Building on his experience in South-Tyrol, in 1994, in the midst of the Bosnian war, he wrote the text 'Attempt of a decalogue for inter-ethnic coexistence', during the pressing need to push the European Union to find a solution to the war. In this text he referred to the importance of mixed ethnic groups as a form of political activism. According to him, such groups, no matter how small, could become a tool to reduce conflicts not only by helping interaction and physical proximity to the 'Other', but by favouring reciprocal knowledge and appreciation at a deeper level. There, people could: "experiment on their own skin, and in what could be called a courageous pioneering laboratory, the problems, difficulties and opportunities of inter-ethnic living together" (quote).

Inspired by Langer's work and ideas, in 2005 the Foundation promoted the birth of the civil society organization Adopt Srebrenica, an interethnic group of young people living in Srebrenica. In this Eastern Bosnian town took place one of the worst crimes committed during the war: the genocide against the Bosnian Muslim population committed by the Bosnian Serb Army. Still today, people there are faced with a dire economic situation and political divisions marked by nationalist and ethnically-based politics that divide the ever-shrinking local population. During my time living in South-Tyrol, I worked with Adopt Srebrenica on projects on the topics of promoting coexistence and dealing with the past, which also involved exchanges with the South-Tyrolean public. Compared to the time when Langer was politically active there, the situation changed considerably. Thanks to political and social reforms, and

subsequent economic growth, the level of conflict between the sides had decreased dramatically. However, elements of identity-based politics persist still today, such as ethnically-based political parties and separate schools. Therefore, some of the challenges the young members of Adopt Srebrenica faced in their day-to-day life resonated with people's experiences in the Northern Italian region.

Through my work between South Tyrol and Srebrenica I became passionate about the commonality of human experiences trying to improve coexistence by overcoming identity-based societal divisions. Moreover, these experiences gave me a deep insight into how civil society organizations can have a role in this process. It is with this previous knowledge and experience of practice that I approached this doctoral research project at Bournemouth University.

In September 2017, as soon as I moved to Bournemouth, in Dorset, a wealthy and touristic county on the British south coast, I started reflecting on the scope of my research. How could peaceful Dorset be compared to post-war Bosnia? Interestingly, in the wake of the Brexit referendum, Balkan scholars traced lines of comparison between such processes at play in the UK seceding from the European Union and the fall of Yugoslavia. Burić (2016) highlighted how the tone of the campaign and the polarisation of public attitudes during the Brexit crisis echoed similar ethnocentric and populist campaigns that characterised the referenda at the beginning of the 1990s in different Yugoslav states to determine citizens' willingness to remain part of Yugoslav Federation. Baker (2016) and Gordy (2016) saw parallels in how politicians and the media co-operated to spread fear and hatred addressing disenfranchised members of majority nations using language of crisis and threat, depicting them as victimised, under siege and competing with designated 'others' over resources (for example, the white English public for Nigel Farage and the Serbs for Slobodan Milošević, as Baker noted). Finally, Kostovicova (2016) paralleled the emergence of the "feelings that divide" after Brexit with the emotions stirred by the fall of Yugoslavia in the process of renegotiations of identities towards a new political order: resentment for those who voted differently, people torn between agony and acceptance, uncertainty for what was about to come and nostalgia for what some felt they had lost.

Clearly, the two contexts retain considerable differences. Above all, Britain, neither at the time of the referendum nor in the years that followed, was even close to experiencing the levels of violence that were witnessed in former Yugoslavia. In Bosnia, the state that was most

affected, the war caused over 100,000 dead and more than 2 million were displaced (Research and Documentation Center 2013). Violence was intentional and planned and led to incomparable sufferings involving crimes of the highest order, including crimes against humanity and, as legally determined for Srebrenica, genocide[1].

However, what above-mentioned Balkan scholars' analysis tried to convey was that, despite the differences, the causes of the conflict in Yugoslavia were not unique or 'typical' to the Balkan region, nor were many of the experiences people went through. This aligns with the anthropology of conflict and violence, which emphasises a continuum between war and peace, violence and social bridge-building as a universal human fact (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Richards 2005). Overcoming the war/no-war dichotomy, all societies find themselves somewhere along a path toward peace that, rather than being linear, can "sidestep into stalemates, backtrack into flare-ups and take take twists and turns along the way" (Bromley-Davenport et al. 2018, p.42).

In other words, violence and war is always a potential outcome of social 'othering' processes and the above-mentioned Balkan scholars' de-exotisation of the Balkans as unique is in line with such considerations. Their findings suggest, in the same vein, that we can learn from Yugoslav developments where othering processes can lead to, if not recognised early enough and counteracted. The immediate increase of hostility towards foreigners after the Brexit referendum, and the growing uncertainty over what Brexit was going to mean in practice, especially for the status of EU citizens, constituted comparable experiences of processes of 'othering', redefinition of previously taken for granted identities and reshaping of sense of belonging and reconfiguration of rights. Therefore, I wondered if we can establish that the two crises have elements in common regarding the nature of the divisions at play, then what about the processes to bridge them?

As soon as I started exploring Dorset, I found resonances with initiatives in the Bosnian context as, in both contexts, civil society organizations seemed to have the same role of trying to improve coexistence by promoting mutual understanding between people differentiated according to the specificity of each context. Like I heard in Bosnia, civil society organizations

[1] The crimes committed during the Srebrenica massacre in July 1995 were ruled to constitute a genocide in the case of the Prosecutor v Krstić by the ICTY in 2001, which was confirmed by the appeals chamber in 2004, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2007 (Schabas 2007).

(CSO) staff described their role through a recurrent formula: 'bringing people together'. I started wondering, what does 'bringing people together' mean in the post-Brexit referendum environment? Who, in this context, were those who need to be brought together and how does this was happening in practice?

After the war Bosnia became an 'experimental ground' to test on a large scale a variety of imported civil society intervention practices (Bieber 2002) to reduce the divide between people usually differentiated along ethnic lines. CSOs working to improve relations between people took place within the framework of the concept of 'reconciliation' as a guiding paradigm for intervention. However, in Bosnia, as the literature shows (see 2.4.3), the 'benevolent character' of reconciliatory initiatives is not taken for granted or assumed as both participants and CSO staff are aware of the limitations of the 'reconciliatory model', criticised for its normativity and perceived as externally imported.

Learning from the Bosnian experience on the relation between civil society organizations' stated intervention aims (as encapsulated in guiding paradigms) and people's experiences of divisions can have an impact in bringing about social change on the ground. I wondered if a similar critical gaze could be applied to the UK. Do civil society organizations in the UK act, similar to Bosnia, guided by specific intervention paradigms?

Taking a different route from the original call, my project did not test the transferability of practices from Bosnia to the UK, but 'inverted the gaze' by becoming an epistemological exercise of exploring and comparing how similar problems are framed in one context and in another, questioning the 'taken for granted' internalisation and normalisation of them in the ways in which they are conceptually framed. I started from the main assumption that the role of civil society organizations to bridge societal divisions in the UK is not put into question as openly as in Bosnia, nor are the intervention paradigms that underpin them. This is because in the UK these initiatives are home-grown and not, like in Bosnia, 'imported' from the outside. Therefore, starting from the Bosnian experience, I wondered if similarities could be traced in terms of how intervention paradigms affect the success of CSO interventions in the UK to better understand the chances of success of civil society organizations' practices in the post-Brexit referendum context. In order to question symbolic hierarchies of power, in this study I adopted an analysis of discourses from two perspectives: at the macro-level, to understand what discourses underpin interventions to bridge societal divisions, and how they are formulated; at

the micro-level, to understand how such discourses work in practice when meeting recipients on the ground.

Because at first sight the differences between the two contexts are overwhelming, the first part of the thesis is devoted to establishing where the similarities lie. Starting from the analysis of the Bosnian experience with interventional reconciliatory intervention, I developed a conceptual framework in four parts to justify the comparison between the two contexts. Here, as explained more in detail in the 'Thesis structure' section at page p 21, I analyse discourses at a macro-level of justifying intervention rationales. During my fieldwork in Dorset, I identified 'community cohesion', a concept introduced 20 years earlier in the framework of race relations policies in the UK, as an intervention paradigm comparable with 'reconciliation' in Bosnia.

In the second part of the thesis, I present my multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork which explores how experiences of bridging divisions are narrated in Srebrenica and in Dorset. The main objective during my fieldwork was to explore the interplay between such wider discourses described in the first part and those used by the CSO staff who design interventions aimed at bridging divisions and by those who experience them. Here I analyse discourse at the micro-level collecting speech acts (Butler 2011) in order to explore how CSOs (as organisations and their activists) as well as affected people, on the ground (in Srebrenica and Dorset) define and experience societal divisions and interventions targeting these.

I chose Srebrenica as my case study because, for its historical significance during the war, it is one of the main destinations of reconciliatory projects. Moreover, as the project call required me to spend a shorter amount of time in Bosnia compared to the UK, my previous experience and collaboration with the association Adopt Srebrenica facilitated my access to potential interviewees and to conduct participant observation during CSOs' activities.

In Dorset, the PhD project call foresaw the partnership with Dorset Race Equality Council: an organization that supports victims of racial hate crime and minority communities. I conducted fieldwork with DREC's staff and their partner organization exploring their activities react to the changes at play after the Brexit referendum. There I explored how 'community cohesion' was affected by the referendum and what CSO meant when attempting to restore it.

In both Bosnia and the UK, I focussed on CSO practices whose aim was generally defined, in both contexts, as 'bringing people together'. However, depending on the specificity

of each context they addressed different problems. In Srebrenica I conducted fieldwork with civil society organizations leading projects aimed at 'dealing with the past' interviewing organizers and people who took part in the past and today. In Dorset, I focussed on practices called 'community projects', aimed at facilitating relations between parts of the population with different cultural backgrounds.

Research question

The general aim of my PhD project call was to explore what the experience of CSOs in Bosnia dealing with societal divisions in the post-war period could teach the work of CSOs in the UK after the Brexit referendum. In other words, the Bosnian context was the baseline to then analyse the original and primary research findings from the UK case study As I had previous experience in working in the CSO sector, before starting my PhD in 2017 (see 1.3), related to reconciliatory intervention in Bosnia, but no knowledge of the work of CSOs in the UK, I decided to give to my study an unfolding structure (Miles et al. 2013) in which my research question would emerge as my empirical work proceeded. I adopted a combination between inductive and deductive reasoning which is typical for anthropological and most social science research (Peacock 2001), developing an iterative-recursive relation between my previous experience working with CSOs dealing with the past in Srebrenica, theoretical literature and empirical data which emerged from a preliminary observation of the work at Dorset Race Equality Council as a volunteer. In this section I will present my research journey that led to the development of my research question.

As mentioned above, the main challenge, and also the main interest, of this project stems from the great difference between post-war Bosnia and post-Brexit referendum UK. Therefore, the first objective of my work was to demonstrate that these two contexts could be comparable and on what epistemological basis. In other words, I had to define the *tertium comparationis*, i.e. "a point of commonality without which no comparison seems possible" (Weber 2014, p.155) which could allow to draw a meaningful assessment of similarities and differences so that we can learn from one case for the other. I started from the assumption that reflecting upon the politics of representations adopted to describe these processes in the two different case studies could help an understanding of how both contexts, even if with different intensity, experienced how political and economic crises may set the conditions for a renegotiation of social hierarchies linked to claims of entitlements in regard to various citizens'

rights (see 2.1). The *tertium comparationis* in this study, therefore is that, in Bosnia and in the UK, at a specific point in time, people experienced that certainties, such as both a sense and rights of belonging, unravelled for reasons outside their control and led to new societal divisions. In the UK, the Brexit referendum and in Bosnia the fall of Yugoslavia, and the war that followed, constitute these macro processes. As I will show in my fieldwork chapter, in the case of the UK, for example, the Brexit referendum drastically changed the ways in which EU citizens living in the UK perceived their positionality in relation to their host country. At the same time, different from the Bosnian case, the referendum intensified hate crimes against other categories showing trajectories of discrimination already present in the pre-Brexit society.

My second objective was to explore how people made sense of post-war CSO initiatives to bridge divisions and what they thought worked in relation to them. According to previous literature on the topic, post-war Bosnia is often presented in terms of the failure of the international community and of initiatives of local CSOs that work within an internationally-dictated reconciliatory framework (Bieber 2002). These projects, especially those 'dealing with the past', became significant components of the complex transitional justice process and have been framed within a specific reconciliatory discourse that envisioned a pre-defined set of measures intended to (re-)build a shared future for the local people (Eastmond 2010). I will show how (in section 2.4.3) academic research questioned the normativity of the discourse and the self-congratulatory character of Western-funded interventions that often take for granted the 'inherently good' character of these projects. Literature has shown how this is questioned at the level of the experiences of people who are supposed to benefit from these interventions as these projects have often been perceived as alien to the context and in many cases deemed counterproductive (Sampson 2002; Eastmond 2010; Jansen 2013; David 2020) .

In my previous experience of work in relation to CSO initiatives in Bosnia, I had the chance to observe how people even today react showing weariness to the term 'reconciliation'. From high-sounding promises, this term becomes a 'buzz word' part of the language of the imported 'project society' (Sampson 2002; Helms 2003a; Šavija-Valha and Milanović-Blank 2013; Koutkova 2016) and blamed for leaving little or no visible change on the ground. The perception of it being externally imposed makes Bosnia a place where people, both those who took part in these initiatives and those who run them, critically address the limits of these interventions. At the same time, working in close contact with activists on the ground also

showed me that initiatives taking place within the reconciliatory framework have left changes deemed positive by the people involved, as I will demonstrate in the fieldwork chapter.

As the Bosnian experience was supposed to inform the design of the fieldwork in the UK, I had already conducted my research in Bosnia during the first year of my PhD, in 2018. I designed my fieldwork in Srebrenica to explore how CSOs staff, as well as so-called 'beneficiaries', define societal divisions and make sense of initiatives intended to 'bring people together' in Srebrenica since the end of the war until today. Through observing the way in which people talked about these initiatives, I wanted to capture: how did they interact with wider discourses of 'reconciliation'? How did they define problems and what solutions did they consider more appropriate than others?

From my observations on the ground in Bosnia, emerged the relevance of the concept of 'normality' to the research participants. Further analysis of the material collected helped to determine how my respondents mentioned the word 'normal' in relation to reconciliatory interventions carried out on the ground and how these contributed to the process or renegotiation of people's social identities and images of the environment where they live. This is in line with preceding work on Bosnia, and led me to a set of theoretical works on the meaning of normality and the role of silence after experiences of conflict from the wider field of conflict transformation, anthropology of conflict and reconciliation (Eastmond and Selimovic 2012) (see 2.2.1). These works show that the loss of social normality, and recuperation of a new social normality, is at the core of people's experiences and aspirations. In particular, these works focussed on how the reconciliatory discourse promoted by CSO's and donors can be perceived as intrusive and insensitive, when interacting with the efforts undertaken by people to rebuild 'normal lives' after the destruction of the social fabric previously taken for granted (Kolind 2007; Maček 2007; Jansen 2015).

My third objective was to understand how UK CSOs, based on my case study in Dorset, approached societal divisions emerging from the Brexit referendum. To this purpose, in parallel with the analysis of my first findings on Bosnia, in the summer of 2018, I started familiarizing myself with the UK context. Since the beginning of my PhD, I volunteered at the Dorset Race Equality Council – an organization working as a third-party reporting centre for hate crime and organizing community development initiatives. To be able to grasp peoples' perspectives, and their vision of the world, I started taking part in peoples' social lives. I went to DREC's office once a week to get acquainted with the staff before the official beginning of my fieldwork. This

inductive method allowed me to get acquainted with the UK reality that was new for me and discover issues and questions that I was not aware of. During my first observations of the UK context and the explorations of DREC's activities, I also noticed that 'community cohesion' emerged as a relevant trope mentioned frequently by CSO staff in a way that recalled the intervention paradigm of 'reconciliation' in Bosnia.

The final objective, then, was to tease out where the learning potential from Bosnian to the UK lies, thereby demonstrating what anthropological inquiry can contribute to the study of interventions in bridging societal divisions anywhere. This was based, firstly, on the call's original, very practice-based research question to find out about: "the transferability of educationally innovative tools for both recognising and bridging societal divides and counteracting hate speech, as tested and tried in the former Yugoslavia (YU) after the 1990s wars". My own learning journey however, during research and analysis, confronted with a hugely complex and 'messy' social field (Plows 2018), led less to identifying concrete, transferable CSO practices than a deepened epistemological understanding of the problems at stake.

My project then shifted to the epistemological exercise of exploring and comparing how similar problems are framed in one context and in another, questioning the 'taken for granted' internalisation and normalisation of them in the ways in which they are conceptually framed. Aware of the imbalance in applying symbolic hierarchies when looking at developmental interventions in the 'East' or the 'West', and aware of how intervention paradigms affect the success of interventions in the Bosnian context, I wondered if a similar critical gaze could be applied to the UK. I started from the main assumption that the role of civil society organizations to bridge societal divisions in the UK is not put into question as openly as in Bosnia, nor are the intervention paradigms that underpin them. This is because, as mentioned above, in the UK these initiatives are home-grown and not, like in Bosnia, 'imported' from the outside.

Aware of the effect that, in Bosnia, such normative concept had on the efficacy of reconciliatory interventions, I wondered: what are the intervention paradigms that drive CSO initiatives of bridging divisions in the UK and how do their normalised use relate to the aspired outcomes? While, in the case of Bosnia, the concept of 'reconciliation' had been questioned and its contradictions exposed by the literature and by people on the ground themselves, was it possible to say the same for the UK? What social imagery and narratives were connected to the

concepts used and problem fields deemed relevant? What do people on the ground, both CSO staff and beneficiaries, consider successful in terms of initiatives to bridge divisions?

Therefore, after the volunteering phase at DREC and the first interviews in the UK my main research question changed from the original call and evolved into the following: how does a focus on the intersection between politics of representations, intervention paradigms and people's experience with intervention practices, help to identify chances of success of CSOs practices in post-war Bosnia and in post-Brexit referendum UK?

Research area

This study aligns with the anthropology of policy and intervention. Accordingly, it relies on immersive, multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork (Marcus 1995) aimed at understanding of how global and local 'webs of significance' (Geertz 1974) intersect in different localities that are subjected to international interventions. The study explores how institutionalised and universalised paradigms of intervention both frame and shape CSO practices on the ground in either context (Bosnia and Dorset), querying the relationship between universalising, official imperatives and bottom-up epistemologies (e.g. Fassin and Pandolfi 2010). Anthropology since Malinowski (1922), and long before the 'local turn' in international relations (IR) and political studies or peace studies (MacGinty and Richmond 2013), has propagated the importance of a qualitative micro-focus. Critical studies of the interlink between local and global processes are evident in anthropological centre-periphery discussions from at least the 1950s (summarised by Hannerz 2015), culminating with Appadurai's seminal work in the 1980s (1986, 1990), long before the challenges of decolonisation was taken up also by other disciplines. A core demand of anthropological higher education remains to "identify local specificities of understanding and interpretation in the context of the wider social environments that shape them" (QAA 2019, p.4). However, the study of international interventions has traditionally been a subject at the intersection of IR, political sciences, and peace studies, which in the wake of a much more recent 'local turn' only recently discovered the anthropological legacy and potentials (Ejdus 2021).

The 'local turn' emerged as a response to the crisis of the 'liberal peace' paradigm, that aimed at exporting norms and institutions of the Global North into the Global South (Ejdus 2021). During the 1990s, the paradigms of liberal intervention and 'human security' became paramount, linking poverty and underdevelopment to security (Duffield 2001b; Albrecht et al.

2004). The 'irrational' character attributed to post-Cold War 'new wars' (Kaldor 1999), and the threat they might constitute for the international community, led to an intensification of interventions aimed at strengthening all aspects of political, social and economic life to lay the ground for a new beginning, based on liberal democracy and market economy (Paris 2004). The so-called 'liberal peace paradigm' assumed that top-down international interventions in post-war countries consisted in eliminating obstacles to open a linear path towards democracy, security and economic reforms (Duffield 2001a; Jabri 2013). In this framework of Western interventions in war-torn countries, Western democracies, international organizations and transnational civil society acted as the main moral, legal and political legitimate promoters of the 'liberal peace' (Chandler 2004). For contemporary anthropologists, such universalising epistemology is indiscriminately cultural, normative, historically-conditioned, and worth ethnographic study 'up' or 'sideways', just as the study of any local epistemologies.

This top-down linear approach of liberal peace has also been widely criticised in international relations theories in the face of their unsatisfactory results of peacebuilding operations (for example in Somalia, Rwanda and the Balkans). The conflict transformation school suggested that imposed top-down 'solutions' to conflict should leave space for societal practices and relationships and see people not as mere 'recipients' but as the main resources to build sustainable peace in the long term (Galtung 1969; Azar 1990; Lederach 1997). The so-called 'local turn' in peacebuilding shifted the focus from institutional elites to society 'bringing the locals back in' and substituting 'linearity' with 'hybridization' and 'non-linear' approaches (MacGinty 2011). Supporting local actors, often in the form of civil society organizations, has become one of the main aims of international intervention becoming expressions of soft power (Paffenholz 2015).

However, the 'local turn' has been criticized for essentialising and romanticizing the local (MacGinty and Richmond 2013; Paffenholz 2015). Others questioned the fact that 'local' solutions are necessarily good (Paris 2010; Donais 2012). In Bosnia, for example, where internationally funded civil society projects aimed at 'dealing with the past' became significant components of the complex transitional justice process, academic research questioned the normativity of the discourse and the self-congratulatory character of Western-funded interventions. Anthropological literature has shown how the international community often took for granted the 'inherently good' character of these projects while, on the contrary, supposed beneficiaries often perceived them as alien to the context and in many cases counterproductive (Sampson 2002; Eastmond 2010; Jansen 2013; David 2020).

My work draws on ethnographic research from localised experience of Bosnia with universalising 'reconciliation' demands and how these affected CSOs dedicated to bridging societal divisions in the post-war period, before exploring the ways in which CSOS in the UK apply 'home grown' solutions after the Brexit referendum. While situated in the anthropology of international intervention, it is also interdisciplinary for its intersection with the local turn in peace studies, international relations and security studies, given the ways in which these, more recently, turned to anthropology and prolonged ethnographic engagement to better understand the relevance of 'the local' for explaining intervention outcomes (Richmond 2010; Millar 2018; Ejdus 2021).

My earlier disciplinary background of study was in political sciences with an interest in anthropology. With this study, I have delved into anthropology and its focus on the local as an established source of knowledge, experience, and immersed learning, in order to contribute to the 'local turn' in political sciences. The innovative aspect of my study is the inversion of the gaze by comparing and applying learning from 'the local' of the 'Global South' (or East) to 'the local' of the 'Global North' (or West). Drawing from ethnographic insights into CSO actors' project experiences in post-war Bosnia, specifically by exploring the local dilemmas arising from the gap between external demands and expectations on the one hand, and unintended outcomes on the other, the study asks if similar dynamics are at play also in the post-Brexit referendum UK where solutions proposed have been developed locally and are not imported from the outside. By investigating how interventions are conceptualised, implemented and perceived by CSO actors in their respective contexts while applying the same anthropological gaze, this study reveals similar struggles in both Bosnia and the post-referendum UK, yet also some surprising differences in the quality, scope and limitations of the intended transformative endeavours towards bridging societal divisions.

Thesis structure

This first section of the thesis introduced the objectives of the thesis and the key concepts which will be expanded in the following chapters. In Chapter 1 I will present my methodology. I will explain the reasons I chose a multi-sited ethnographic approach to answer my research question, presenting the connections between this method and the research design, as well as the limitations of the comparison. Moreover, I will justify the choice of case studies and the implications regarding ethics and reflexivity I faced throughout the research.

In Chapter 2, I will present a conceptual framework, based on a literature review aimed at justifying the comparison. Such framework is composed of four parts. For each part I will review a body of literature addressing the overarching theories of interest for this study. Taking the experience of Bosnia with the war and post-war international intervention as a learning ground, this framework is structured in four parts which analyse each of the two contexts of study: how problems are framed; how people experience such divisions; what solutions are proposed; what actors are supposed to implement them. For each of these four aspects, I will highlight similarities and differences between the two contexts of study.

In the first section of this chapter (2.1) I applied a focus on discourses as a lens to explore how similarities regarding the 'problems' faced by the two contexts of study are hidden by geo-political hierarchies of power which differentiate them, especially presenting the Balkans as 'other' from the Western 'us'. I will show that essentialist ways of looking at societal divisions is not unique to the Balkans. In particular, the way in which the war in Bosnia was discursively located within the 'irrational nature' of the people causing it, in opposition to a 'civilised' West, is not so different from tendencies to essentialise the 'tolerant Britishness', hiding the structural origins of the societal divisions at play.

In the second part, I will show that both contexts experienced similar processes of categorization that determine a reshuffle of who belongs and who does not belong to a determined polity, unveiling similar human experiences characterised by a loss of social normality. In Bosnia the war marked a clear divide between the pre and post war period involving trauma, loss, and a sense of nostalgia for the past. In the UK the Brexit referendum brought to the fore more blatantly pre-existing forms of structural racism but, at the same time, created new lines of divisions by singling out new parts of the population that started feeling 'unwelcome' and become 'second class citizens', similar to what happened to many EU citizens living in the UK.

Thirdly, I will show that, in both contexts, specific intervention paradigms are proposed as solutions to the identified problems: in Bosnia 'reconciliation' and in the UK 'community cohesion'. Such tropes refer to specific paradigms with the aim of 'bringing people together', overcoming divisions and improving coexistence. Despite different origins, I will show, through an analysis of the literature, how such paradigms present similarities in their objectives as well as similar challenges.

Finally, I will present how civil society organizations, both in Bosnia and in the UK, constitute one of the main conduits through which the above-mentioned solutions to bridge divisions are implemented on the ground. By resorting to the Foucauldian concept of 'governmentality' I will show how civil society organizations have a governing aim to shape the conduct of people by changing peoples' behaviour and ways of thinking through specific practices. I will show that anthropological literature on Bosnia's experience with post-war CSO interventions on the ground provide specific examples of how such projects' objectives may diverge and clash with people's actual needs.

The second part of the thesis is dedicated to the two chapters presenting my multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Srebrenica and in Dorset. As I will explain in a brief introduction, because of the differences between the contexts of study, the two chapters do not mirror each other and are structured differently. However, in both sites of research, I explored how experiences of bridging divisions are narrated, with a focus on how the interrelation between wider discourses produced by intervention paradigms and people's experiences of divisions affect CSOs' practices and their chances of success.

In Srebrenica, I collaborated with the organization Adopt Srebrenica that implements educational projects aimed at 'dealing with the past'. I interviewed CSO staff from different organizations, as well as current and former participants, on their experiences with reconciliatory projects, exploring what they consider positive and successful on the basis of their own experience and their definition of 'social normality'.

In Dorset I collaborated with the organization Dorset Race Equality Council that offers support to victims of hate crime and promotes community projects. I looked at how they reacted in the aftermath of the referendum to 'restore' community cohesion. In the first part of the chapter, I will report insights into what disruption of community cohesion entailed in practice from the point of view of CSO practitioners and EU citizens living in Dorset: people described a 'change of climate' characterized by the rise in hate crime and in discriminatory episodes against members of minority communities as well as a change in the life experiences of EU citizens living in Dorset. In the second part of the chapter, I will focus on the practices of CSOs in Dorset whose activities are aimed at bringing people together in the newly-shaped post-Brexit referendum context.

From the analysis of the data collected emerged three macro-themes relevant in both contexts when analysing CSO's chances of success in attempts to 'bring people together'. First,

what change is expected, how it is described and achieved at the level of individuals and at the level of the wider society. Second, the strategies CSOs put in place to reach change, in particular to involve people in their activities. Third, how CSOs deal with stereotypical representations of their contexts. In the final discussion of this thesis, I will pull these themes together to show how the comparison with the Bosnian experience can offer a new way of looking at the chances of success of CSO work in post-Brexit referendum UK.

1. Methodology

1.1 Ontology and Epistemology

As the focus of my research was a comparison between political and social macro-processes in Bosnia and in the UK which produce wider context changes where previously taken for granted identities become redefined, the epistemological stance of this study is that, to gain knowledge of the world, the researcher has to consider the different realities as they are presented by the subjects but, at the same time, she needs also to acknowledge the structures and material conditions which may be producing and interacting with such realities. Therefore, the epistemology of this study combines interpretivism and social-constructivism (Gordon 2002). An intermediate stance between these two approaches "views human nature as both deterministic and voluntaristic: humans are born into an already structured society, yet societal structures evolve and change through human interaction" (Holden and Lynch 2004, p.407) . As stated by Crotty (1998), this epistemological approach can be underpinned both by a realist and relativist ontology, as saying that meaningful reality is socially constructed does not mean it is not real and it has real effects on people's lives. At the same time, we can acknowledge that "different people might inhabit quite different worlds" (Crotty 1998, p.64). For example, this study will show that both in Bosnia and in the UK, renegotiations of ethnic and racial identities in light of social and political changes, although socially constructed, actually have a very real effect on people's lives (Jenkins 1994; Brubaker 2002) (see 2.2).

If individuals categorise and create knowledge as they engage with and interpret the world (Mead in Reck 1964), the researcher can gain knowledge of the social world by trying to understand people's 'lifeworlds', intended as the lived world that people take for granted. The concept of 'lifeworlds' has its roots in the phenomenological works of Husserl (2008) and Schutz (1973). In its phenomenological conception, lifeworld is "the unquestioned ground of everything given in my experience, and the unquestionable frame in which all the problems I have to deal with are located" (Schutz and Luckmann 1973, p.131). While originally considered just the subjective construction of reality, this concept has been expanded in an epistemological constructivist approach (Yanow 2007; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2013). For the purpose of this study, I use the concept of 'lifeworlds' in a constructivist perspective, including also the material conditions that act upon a person's life. As people do not live in a vacuum, but within the context and circumstances of their life conditions, they are linked to their environment and their reality is influenced by it. Therefore, the researcher will have to

look at the ways in which social actors produce, reproduce, and experience their world, and investigate the material conditions which contribute to shaping it.

Nevertheless, the 'meaning-making' activity is central for both a social constructivist and an interpretivist approach: "because it is the meaning-making, sense-making, attributional activities that shape action (or inaction)" (Denzin and Lincoln 2018, p.220). Social constructivism emphasises the importance of human actors' motivations, perception and agency, and how people give meaning to social facts: "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty 1998, p.42). Similarly, interpretivists focus upon social contexts in which interacting individuals employ various practices to create and sustain particular definitions of the world: "Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them . . . [T]he meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows . . . [T]hese meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (Blumer 1969, p.2). Interpretivists demonstrate "how 'reality' and 'facts' are essentially social creations, negotiated through the interaction of various competing themes and definitions of reality" (Burrell and Morgan 2017, p.271).

To explain how people create and recreate meaning, this study is underpinned by the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism: "For interactionists, humans are pragmatic actors who continually adjust their behaviour to the actions and reactions of other actors. People can adjust to these actions only because humans are able to interpret the actions of others; that is, humans are capable of denoting actions symbolically and treating these actions, and those who perform them, as symbolic objects" (Given 2008, p.828). According to Geertz:

> "Thinking consists not of 'happenings in the head' (though happenings there and elsewhere are necessary for it to occur) but of traffic in what have been called, by G.H. Mead and others, significant symbols - words for the most part but also gestures, drawings, musical sounds, mechanical devices like clocks, or natural objects like jewels – anything, in fact, that is disentangled from its mere actuality and used to impose meaning upon experience" (Geertz 1973, p.45).

1.2 Doing ethnography in Bosnia and in the UK – a multi-sited approach

This study's epistemological approach implies that, to understand social life, and explore the symbolic worlds in which research subjects live, the researcher, in their practice methods, has to pay attention to the micro-level, focussing on subjective viewpoints and on how people interpret experiences and construct their actions in relation to other individuals in society. Therefore, ethnography as a methodology is relevant for this study because it allows the researcher to gain insights into the complexity of the context studied, engaging with the emic perspectives, understanding members' beliefs and practices and also being aware of the researcher's position as a constitutive part of the scene (Geertz 1973).

As one core objective of this study is to trace parallels between two contexts, I adopted a 'multi-sited' ethnographic approach (Marcus 1995). According to Marcus: "multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography" (1995, p.105). In multi-sited ethnography, instead of "being there", *away*, the ethnographer is "here and there", studying multiple sites and trying to map the relations, connections, and associations that bind those sites together (Hannerz 2010).

Among the ways suggested by Marcus in which a multi-sited ethnography can be conducted, my study is closer to 'follow the plot', that refers to "stories or narratives told in the frame of single-site fieldwork" (Marcus 1995, p.109). In the case of this study, the 'narratives' I focus on in the two contexts are those related to the ways in which societal divisions are presented and bridged. Unlike other studies that used multi-sited ethnography to explore the effects of the export of discursive practices from one site to another, in particular from the Global North to the Global South (Sakti and Reynaud 2018; Mikulewicz 2020), I started from the common human experience of bridging divisions in sites placed in different physical locations to find that such experiences are connected to discursive practices that, despite being named differently in each site, present similar objectives, challenges and associated practices.

To establish common ground, while keeping in mind context specificities, on how such narrations take place in post-war Bosnia and post-Brexit referendum UK, I worked horizontally across the two sites. A multi-sited ethnographic approach process requires a 'practice of translation' that "connects the several sites that the research explores along unexpected and

even dissonant fractures of social location. Indeed, the persuasiveness of the broader field that any such ethnography maps and constructs is in its capacity to make connections through translations and tracings among distinctive discourses from site to site" (Marcus 1995, p.101).

Being embedded daily with CSOs, as I will explain in the following section, first in Bosnia and then in Dorset, allowed me to identify such connections, in the form of tropes such as 'bring people together', recurring in both contexts, and 'community cohesion' in the UK as an equivalent to 'reconciliation' in Bosnia that sparked the conceptualisation of this project exemplified in the conceptual framework summarised in the end of the introduction.

As mentioned above, this comparative research project aims at reversing the usual East-West knowledge flow between two sites under study where the West has been traditionally treated as the producer of knowledge versus the East as receiver. This conception has positioned the two 'sites' that not only are in different physical locations but also at different levels of power, in an epistemological hierarchy that represent them as 'essentially' different, therefore incomparable. In fact, we might consider two phenomena 'incomparable' when we place the accent on the differences between them therefore expressing explicit evaluative overtones: "people say that two phenomena cannot be compared when they mean to rank one decisively above the other" (Handler 2013, p.278). If we think of the etymology of the Latin word '*comparare*' meaning 'to treat as equal'; to put the two objects of comparison side by side, at the same level, avoiding a hierarchical positioning. In the context of this study, a prerequisite for comparison is that we have to consider both that Bosnia and the UK are reliable in terms of producing knowledge, placing them at the same level, epistemologically speaking.

As a prerequisite to this comparison, this study draws from a Foucauldian conception of discourse and the role it can have in contributing to sustain unequal systems of power. As I will explain in more detail in section 2.1.1, it helps to explain how the West traditionally presented its relation to the Balkans in a binary logic (Christianity/Islam, civilization/barbarism, and so on) and looks at them as what Foucault (1997) calls 'subjugated knowledges'. According to his notion of power and domination, "knowledge of certain specific places, bodies, and histories is concealed and subjugated because such entities resist the discourse of universal rationality – indeed, their incorporation into that discourse would rupture it" (Bjelić and Savić 2002, p.7). This imbalance has been called, in the field of decolonial thinking, 'epistemic injustice' (Fricker 2007). This concept focuses specifically on the way norms and practices of discourse can produce injustices. Fricker calls these injustices epistemic

because they "negatively affect individuals in their capacities as knowers" (Dieleman 2015, p.801). She argues that "speakers—typically, members of historically disenfranchised groups—can be wronged as bearers and providers of knowledge because they might be subject to identity prejudices that affect how credible we think they are" (Dieleman 2015, p.794)

I will show that the two contexts are comparable and how intervention paradigms such as 'reconciliation' in Bosnia and 'community cohesion' in the UK, despite being called differently in different contexts, might not be so different in terms of their objectives, challenges and associated practices. There, stripping contexts off representations allowed the identification of ideas that are presented as solutions to 'problems' and, similarly, aim at bringing people, differentiated along ethnic and racial lines, together, accommodate differences and, ultimately, improve coexistence.

Having established the parallel between the two contexts, my multi-sited ethnographic approach fieldwork aimed at looking at how such wider discourses produced by intervention paradigms circulate, are defined, reproduced, performed and contested by CSO staff who design interventions aimed at bridging divisions and by those who experienced them. Through ethnography, I immersed myself into the two contexts studied in a way that facilitated the observation and the participation in spontaneous and informal interactions[2]. By exploring both formal and informal reactions and interactions between people, I could observe how people reacted to official discourses connected to intervention paradigms specific for each of the contexts of study. For example, as I will show for Bosnia (chapter 3), reconciliatory discourses officially presented as 'inherently good' can clash with people's everyday needs and aspirations and then stand in contradiction to their social experience.

Choice of case studies

I conducted fieldwork in two locations: Srebrenica in Bosnia, between May and June 2018, and Dorset in the UK between February and September 2019. In each place, I chose to start my fieldwork in connection with one local civil society organization. This allowed me to be deeply embedded into one organization while at the same time positioning their work in the

[2] For recent examples of ethnographies conducted in Bosnia see the following PhD thesis: Correia, S., 2018. Remembering ethnic cleansing in Republika Srpska. PhD Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE); Opacin, N., Peacebuilding Education Initiatives in a Divided Society: Dealing with the Legacies of a Violent Past in Bosnia and Herzegovina, PhD Thesis, RMIT University.

wider context, exploring the work of their partner organizations or individuals in the area, analysing how discourses affected the design of their practices and people's experiences with them.

The choice of Srebrenica was motivated by the fact that Srebrenica was a perfect point of observation of projects dealing with the past, as it is one of the main destinations for educational projects. As a matter of fact, in only a month and a half of permanence there I had the chance to observe several initiatives. Moreover, the experience in Srebrenica I had previous to embarking on my PhD journey facilitated the access to interviewees and to conducting participant observation in the limited amount of time I had at my disposal for the segment of the research in Bosnia.

My interest in Bosnia started in 2005, when I took part in a trip for international students organised by the Alexander Langer Foundation (Italy) on occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. The same year the Foundation awarded the Alexander Langer Award to the Bosnian psychiatrist Dr Irfanka Pašagić for her work, during and after the war in Bosnia, with traumatised women and children with the organization Tuzlanska Amica. That trip marked the beginning of my interest in Bosnia, and it was the first of many more. From 2006 to 2010 I became involved with an organization of fellow university students organizing summer camps for children living in the villages around Srebrenica and Bratunac. In 2009 I started my Masters, on Eastern Europe at the University of Bologna and in Sarajevo, where I lived for one and a half years and improved my knowledge of the local language. In 2014, I started working for the Alexander Langer Foundation on the project Adopt Srebrenica, that the Foundation developed in collaboration with Irfanka Pašagić back in 2005.

Adopt Srebrenica, as I will explain in more detail further on (see 3.2.1), consisted in supporting the creation of a multi-ethnic group of youth in Srebrenica and promoted educational activities in Bosnia and in Italy. My three-year experience supporting the development of initiatives dealing with the past in Srebrenica gave me deep insights into the complex character of reconciliatory projects in a post-genocide context. I decided to conduct my doctoral research in this setting to elaborate critically upon my own role in the 'project society' (Sampson 2002) and reflect with our previous Bosnian partners on what these projects meant for them. The ethnographic fieldwork conducted during my PhD therefore builds on these experiences and relationships.

In Dorset, the project call foresaw that my fieldwork in Dorset would have developed in partnership with Dorset Race Equality Council (DREC). Therefore, in order to guarantee my ethnographic engagement with the local context and with DREC's activities, I decided to conduct the fieldwork mainly in Bournemouth (where I lived from September 2017) and its rural vicinity. DREC is the main charity in the county that works, since 1999, as a Hate Crime Third Party Reporting Centre (TPRC), collaborating closely with the Police and with other partners on the ground to give support to hate crime victims and to improve the collection of data on hate crime. Moreover, DREC promotes multi-cultural community events all around Dorset which constituted the focus of my research. Being embedded in DREC and observing their work with minority groups considered affected by the Brexit referendum in Dorset, further brought me into contact with a number of affiliated organizations and individuals involved in work aimed at improving community relations.

As, in both Bosnia and Dorset, some of my interviewees had been working in the civil society sector for many years and had been interrogating themselves on the meaning and future prospects of their work, I chose a para-ethnographic approach (Holmes and Marcus 2006). According to para-ethnography, participants cannot "be treated as conventional natives or tokens of their cultures to be systematically understood. Instead, they must be treated as agents who actively participate in shaping emergent social realms". (Given 2008, p.596). I approached the majority of my respondents working in civil society organizations as 'partners in research' who "can often represent their own cultures to outsiders in ways that are self-conscious, analytical, and strategic" (Islam 2015, p.2). While I still able to identify the 'taken for granted' knowledge, at the same time they were able to take a 'critical distance' from their roles in the organizations offering semi-detached reflection in the cultures in which they participate (Islam 2015). Interacting with experts in the field of CSOs allowed me to triangulate my interpretations of the observations on the ground with them. For example, I run by Irfanka Pašagić my impression that people in Srebrenica, especially young people, felt the urge to tell me that in Srebrenica 'things were fine'. From her expertise as a psychiatrist who had worked over twenty-five years to address war traumas and her role as a CSO worker expert on children and young people she agreed with my interpretation and gave me her point of view on it (see p. 130). In general, triangulation in ethnography, as Flick suggests, is a way to "complement the limitation of ethnography – the here and now of what can be observed – by enlarging the perspective beyond situations of observation" to the knowledge of the participants (Flick 2018, p.6).

In the following sections I will describe more in depth how I conducted the fieldwork in the two different contexts.

1.3 Fieldwork in Bosnia – Interviews and participant observation in Srebrenica

I conducted my fieldwork in Srebrenica between May and June 2018. I drove there from Italy in my own car to be able to move around independently and I rented a flat in the town centre. My previous acquaintance with people living there and working in my field of interest, my knowledge of the language, coupled with the small size of the town, allowed me to immerse quickly in the local context. Thanks to my previous contacts with friends I used to work with before and other acquaintances, I managed to conduct interviews with 19 participants within six weeks and to access local organizations where I conducted participant observation. As I was there in late spring, beginning of the Summer, the town was more lively compared to winter months. In the short amount of time I spent there, I witnessed five initiatives on the topic of reconciliation and dealing with the past organized by Bosnian organizations involving local population. Partly serendipitous, this fact nevertheless demonstrates the ubiquity of such events in Srebrenica, hence its significance as a point of observation for these kinds of initiatives.

Besides observation of formal events and interviews, I engaged in 'deep hanging out' (Geertz 1998) with some of my research participants, both at their workplace and informal situations such as spending time at their homes or in cafes. Hanging out with people gave me the chance to generate trust and research legitimacy among those who didn't know me already (Browne and McBride 2015) and have informal conversations with some of my interlocutors to remain in the loop of the initiatives that were going on in the town and its vicinity. Spending time out together in informal settings gave me also the chance to be introduced to other people in town that became interlocutors or that helped me gain other interviews. This kind of informal social 'snowballing' (Parker et al. 2019) allowed me to get appointments with stakeholders such as, for example, with the Mayor of Srebrenica for an interview.

Generally, people were well disposed in talking to me. This was aided by the fact that when presenting my topic, I usually said I was interested in researching experiences of civil society organizations that people considered positive and successful. As one interviewee said when I asked him if he wanted to schedule an interview, he was glad I was not looking for something 'sad', which he felt was what most of foreign researchers were mainly interested in,

contributing to what Browne referred to as the ‘fetishization’ of research in conflicted environments (Browne and Moffett 2014).

On the other hand, the comparative aspect of my research raised contrasting reactions. I noticed that it often generated confusion when mentioned during an early research interaction. In two cases, to the explanation that my project wanted to look at what the UK could learn from Bosnia, people reacted with typical Bosnian humour and irony laughing and wishing me ‘good luck’ for expecting to learn something positive from Bosnia. Interestingly, however, during interviews, when describing CSO projects in which they took part, many interviewees stressed the importance of comparing the Bosnian experience to other contexts with histories of divisions (Rwanda, Chile, South Tyrol…) (see 3.2.2). These comparisons were usually described as beneficial for the Bosnian side rather than for the other. This showed how Bosnians themselves tended to position their context as incapable of producing valuable knowledge for other contexts perceived as more able than Bosnia to deal with local problems of divisions.

Most of the time, my knowledge of the local language allowed me to conduct interviews and participate in informal gatherings while grasping the nuances of communications. The presence of an interpreter would have made it more difficult, first because in certain contexts it is not easy to find professional interpreters and those available perform it to the best of their judgement and ability (Ficklin and Jones 2009). Moreover, the interpreter: “occupies a dual interpreter/gatekeeper role which carries methodological implications by actively or passively influencing the population research reaches, and potentially affecting narratives constructed in front of an interpreter perceived as a community 'insider' or 'outsider'” (Chiumento et al. 2018). Especially conducting participant observation would have been much more difficult as well as seizing informal conversations or impromptu comments. However, although my Bosnian level is advanced, there remains some limitations as there were moments where I felt I could not express as subtly as I would be in my native language.

On one occasion, I asked one of my interlocutors to conduct the interview in English because I assumed that he spoke it well. I soon realised his level of English was not as good as I thought. Although his thought might have been more succinct in Bosnian, I continued the interview in English so as not to offend him. As we had very little time and it was not possible to rearrange the interview another day, I ended up collecting data that I was only partially able to understand and use. As this example showed, fieldwork choices always require pragmatic

and flexible adaptations to the specific contexts, and some interviews are conducted in challenging circumstances, which explains why sometimes errors are made.

I planned my fieldwork at the beginning of the summer as youth projects and educational activities usually do not take place during the winter. I was able to follow the Youth Peace Camp organized by Sara Srebrenica and meet the group from the Youth Initiative for Human Rights. Moreover, Adopt Srebrenica organised an open-air photographic exhibition in the ruins of the former Hotel Lovac. Nice weather and growing temperatures make Srebrenica livelier, and it was easier for me to meet people outside in a café, go for a walk or participate in local events. I tried to follow as many events as possible. Even if not directly connected to my topic of interest, they gave me the chance to engage with people in informal environments like, for example, the Workers' Games, a sports event at the school playground. Doing fieldwork during the winter would have required different strategies to engage with people, such as a greater organization in advance as it would have been more difficult to rely on spontaneous or casual meetings.

During this ethnographic fieldwork phase, as in the case of observing Adopt Srebrenica's exhibition, I also followed the staff and observed them during their research and helped them during the preparation phase. With reduced staff and scarce volunteering forces, I was an extra set of hands. In my role as 'participant-as-observer' "the researcher becomes more involved with the insiders' central activities" (Baker 2006, p.177) and reveals her identity to the informants (Li 2008). If I had maintained a detached position because of my role as a researcher, would have compromised my relationship with my contacts. What could have happened was that "an observer who refuses to participate in the lives of informants tends to be 'sealed off from communication and access to data' because he may be regarded as a kind of 'inspector'" (Li 2008, p.254).

As part of the ethnographic fieldwork in Bosnia, I collected fieldnotes and a daily fieldwork diary including information collected through both observation and immersion: descriptions of events, fragments of conversations, accounts of interactions between me and the research subjects. The way in which I wrote fieldnotes depended on the situation. Most of the time, I could write down things while they were happening. My identity as a researcher was made explicit, by me or by my friends, in most of the situations in which I found myself, and me carrying a notebook was a usual image to the people I interacted with for my research. Nevertheless, as can happen when conducting participant observation, sometimes I felt my

writing could be perceived as intrusive by certain people (Denscombe 2021, p.222). In those cases, I used to write down at the end of the day, filling in gaps following a consciousness flow. Sometimes I recalled events in chronological order, sometimes giving predominance to those I considered to be more noteworthy.

As mentioned above, in Bosnia, I conducted formal interviews with 19 respondents. The criteria of inclusion for the interviews were that people had to have had experience of civil society interventions related to the topic of reconciliation as a participant or as organizers. Many of my respondents, now working in civil society, also used to be participants in these initiatives and offered point of views from both angles (as beneficiary and CSO activist). All my interviews took place in Srebrenica except for two: in Sarajevo I interviewed one member of Youth Initiatives for Human Rights following up on our meeting while he was accompanying a group of students from the former-Yugoslav region to a visit to Srebrenica. In Tuzla, I interviewed the president of Tuzlanksa Amica that collaborated with Adopt Srebrenica and the Alexander Langer Foundation.

1.4 Fieldwork in the UK – Interviews and participant observation in Dorset

My fieldwork in Dorset lasted from February to September 2019. The first week of September, the beginning of my third year of PhD, I had an accident that took me out of work for almost three months and I had to postpone some important interviews. Luckily, I managed to collect the last interviews in February 2020, and I concluded my fieldwork right before the start of the lockdown because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

During my ethnographic fieldwork in Dorset, I tried to participate in as many events organized by DREC and its associated organizations as possible. Compared to my fieldwork in Srebrenica, where I knew some of my main interlocutors and was spending time informally with them, in Bournemouth, I needed to find a way to remain in the loop of the events that were taking place and establish a steady and continuous contact with DREC. Going regularly to the DREC's office proved to be very useful in this respect and to establish a relationship of trust with the staff.

From the start, DREC staff was very welcoming: they provided me with a shared desk at the office, allowed me to attend monthly staff meetings and introduced me to their partners and possible interlocutors of interest for my research. At the beginning of my fieldwork, DREC had five employees. Conducting participant observation in such a small context meant also

kept contributing actual work, for similar reasons as in the Bosnian context (Li 2008): I helped them during their events and followed their initiatives and meetings in the community and with statutory agencies.

I conducted a total of 21 formal semi-structured interviews with staff from DREC, Citizens Advice, South-West Dorset Multicultural Network, Dorset Council and with EU citizens living in Dorset as well as countless informal conversations during the period I was embedded in this organisation. As some staff of the various organisations I met were also from other EU countries, I got their perspectives on both their work, and their personal experience with Brexit. Furthermore, I had several conversations with representatives of other organizations. These were not formal interviews but part of wider fieldwork and its encounters. Also, these conversations generated data like those which emerged during the interviews and served to affirm my findings.

Except in situation of public events, my identity as a researcher was always made clear, as I introduced myself, or was introduced by DREC's staff. During my ethnographic fieldwork, I entered into contact with numerous persons and organizations working in a field, in this cultural context, known as 'race relations' or 'equality and diversity', as these populate the Dorset environment. In 2018 and 2019, Brexit was still a constant theme in the news and its outcomes uncertain. This made it a frequent topic of conversation and impressions. Often it just popped up during interactions about other topics. While some interactions were explicitly sought out in order to find answers to my research question, many data were generated which I could not foresee, simply by being immersed in the post-Brexit referendum situation in a distinct local UK context. Like Bosnia, I kept a fieldwork diary, and I took notes of informal interactions, transcribing them either on the spot, if possible, or later at home.

Regarding the experiences of EU citizens, I wanted to explore if and how the changes brought by the Brexit referendum in their lives were intersecting with the activities of the organizations I was dealing with in Dorset. On the basis of my observation, on recent literature and on my personal experience, being an EU citizen living in the UK myself, it was clear that the span of affected people's experiences was much wider than hate crime or hate incidents alone: the political decision to leave the European Union was bringing uncertainty regarding the reconfiguration of citizenship rights, and it invoked fears of the practical and still unknown consequences this would have on everyday life.

In order to recruit participants for this part of the research, at the very beginning of my fieldwork, I made a poster (appendix n.5) saying I was looking for members of 'minority communities' willing to share how and if the Brexit referendum had an impact on their lives. I thought that expression would have included both Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) population and EU citizens. I thought this would have given me the chance to explore the impact of the Brexit referendum on a broader range of people categorized as 'different' living in Dorset. However, I soon questioned my word choice and the necessity to be more precise and better circumscribe my interviewee target. When I gave the poster to one of my interlocutors from Greece she said: 'I'm not a minority community, actually I am member of a very small community, we are two: my husband and I'. That reaction made me think that some EU citizens might not have felt part of a 'minority'. The European identity that many felt becoming stronger around the UK with Brexit does not suggest an association with a minority community. Moreover, in the UK the expression might be associated only with 'BAME', in itself a contested categorization. While some EU citizens could be BAME, others might not consider the term representative. This made me wonder if the differentiation occurred with the referendum was for many EU citizens something totally new, that constituted a rupture between a previous condition in which they did not feel different from the 'majority' to one where they did. This was confirmed by my findings, identifying Brexit as a rupture in the 'normality' of people's lives and becoming 'second-class' citizens. Through the help of some of my interlocutors, the original poster was shared on the Facebook pages of the organization It's All About Culture, Dorset for Europe and Dorset Race Equality Council, but nobody contacted me through these channels.

The EU citizens I interviewed were all recruited by me personally through snowballing. Others I found thanks to DREC or acquaintances at Bournemouth University. Two of the interviewees were DREC members, one from France and one from Poland. On the topic of EU citizens and Brexit, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. Some interviews were conducted in DREC's premises while others in places chosen in order to suit the needs of my participants – cafes or private apartments. Others, as well as informal conversations, for example with DREC staff, took place directly on the field, in the car or on the train while heading to the site where activities were taking place.

Data analysis

To analyse the data emerged from my fieldwork in both contexts I adopted a critical discourse analysis, a qualitative and interpretive method of analysing texts helpful to examine how meaning is created in different social contexts (Fairclough and Wodak 1997).

As explained above, within my multi-sited ethnographic approach, in each context I 'followed the plot', (Marcus 1995) looking at how experiences of bridging societal divisions are narrated in both contexts. To do this, throughout my research, I analysed discourses from two perspectives: at the macro-level, to understand what intervention paradigms guide CSOs' initiative and, at the micro-level, to understand how such macro-discourses are perceived, reinterpreted and contested be CSO staff and CSOs' beneficiaries.

In ethnographic studies generally, "data analysis starts with data generation and is recurrent and recursive throughout fieldwork and writing" (Hyland and Paltridge 2011, p.94). Analysing my data, I moved backward and forwards between fieldnotes, informal conversations, interview transcripts, and previous research literature to identify cross-cultural themes in the two contexts of study. In the initial phase of my research, I identified 'community cohesion' as a policy-concept referring to solutions proposed to local problems in the UK comparable to 'reconciliation' in Bosnia. As Wodak states, discursive acts can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations "through the ways in which they represent things and position people" (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, p.258). In the case of my study, in both contexts, terms referring to intervention paradigms, vehiculated normative visions of what a reconciled or cohesive society should look like.

When looking at discourse at the micro-level, I focussed on how people reacted to such intervention paradigms, how they defined them and contested them. Through successive levels of coding typical of a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 2013), I gradually moved from more context-specific themes to identifying three more general themes common to the two contexts. The first concerns the ways in which people, both, CSO staff and supposed beneficiaries, talk about change, how they define it on the basis of the problems and needs they regard as relevant; the second concerns what strategies CSOs adopt to try reach the desired change. In particular it emerged that both contexts present a problem of participants' involvement when willing to talk about 'difficult' and divisive topics. Finally, a third theme emerging was how the problems dealt with by CSOs are linked to stereotypical representations of their contexts.

In total I collected about 29 hours of interviews that were transcribed partially by me and partially by two professionals. In the Appendices (n. 6) I included representative samples of my coded interviews in the UK and in Bosnia for illustration of my transcripts and their coding.

1.5 Self-reflections

My position as a researcher in the two contexts studied was marked by the requirement to show respect and appreciation for the cultural contexts I was working in and for the people I interacted with, even when I did not share their political views. The only time I expressed my opinion was when one interlocutor in Bosnia presented me popular negationist theories about the Srebrenica genocide. As a matter of conscience, especially because some of my friends helping me in my research there lost their close relatives during the genocide, I decided to say that I did not agree with what he had just said, and I briefly substantiated my opinion. We did not engage in a discussion over it and the conversation proceeded smoothly. In Dorset, I found that pro-Brexit people expressed their views against EU immigrants freely, even knowing I was Italian because they valued me as the 'good kind' of immigrant, supposedly for my status gained by working in a highly qualified job at the university. For others, me being an Italian living in the UK, made them feel comfortable in expressing their negative opinions about Brexit taking my views for granted. While, when confronted with people's political views in Dorset I remained impartial, some of the practical issues that EU citizens were experiencing with the initial phase of the development of the EU Settlement Scheme were shared by me too and this resulted in them asking me how I was practically dealing with it.

Sometimes, in the UK, I was introduced by DREC staff as a researcher of BU, but other times I was introduced as member of staff. When they inaugurated the new website, for example, they included me on the website's 'about us' section to highlight their collaboration with Bournemouth University (BU). Despite my biography on their website saying I was a BU researcher, being among the staff made me look 'part' of DREC and I noticed that, when talking to people belonging to other organizations, I had to make clear what my role was. My immersion with DREC, as that with Adopt Srebrenica in Bosnia, might not have made me look fully impartial in the eyes of other respondents and I am aware that this might have refrained some people from sharing with me certain pieces of information. Moreover, my personal history and immersion with Adopt Srebrenica in Bosnia and DREC in the UK provoked some

unrelated respondents to ask me sensitive information related to these organisations' work. I made it a consistent research strategy in such cases, not least to avoid being dragged into gossip dynamics or breaking the trust I had established with these organisations, to always suggest to those inquiring that they directed any such questions directly to these organisations.

My identity as a woman was particularly relevant in the Bosnian context. In a town as small as Srebrenica, someone new coming to stay for a while is immediately noticed, especially a foreign single woman. The fact that with some of my main interlocutors on the ground I had previous friendship relationships meant that I was aware of some aspects of their personal life as much as they were of mine. Therefore, despite my cultural competences carrying off the performative aspects of a group's cultural expectations, and my awareness of how a single woman was expected to behave, I could perform the 'good woman' (Schwandner-Sievers 2009) just partially. For example, in the process of front staging 'impression management' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) in interactions with people I did not know well, I could not lie about my marital status, because, in such a small context, they would have found out quickly. Therefore, my status as a foreign single woman attracted the attention of some men and the gossip of some people who judged my interaction with them, motivated by research purposes, as potentially flirtatious. In one case, this meant I had to break off any research interaction, maintaining a friendly relationship.

1.6 Limitations of the study

One limitation can be identified based on the fact that the two contexts studied were at different stages in terms of the societal divisions analysed. In Bosnia the war that led to the development of the phenomenon studied, happened 30 years ago. In the UK, the Brexit referendum took place only one year after I started my research. So, while in Bosnia I could observe interventions that were trying to 'bridge the divisions' in a post-factum context, in the UK, while the referendum brought to the surface pre-existing divisions, I also observed the 'making of the divisions', for example the changing condition of EU citizens living in the UK and, subsequently, CSOs developing new strategies, or adapting old ones, to meet people's needs while events were developing. This result in the fact that the two finding chapters do not mirror each other. In the introduction to the fieldwork chapters at page 90, I explain more in depth how this difference between the contexts studied it affected the way in which I structured the two chapters.

In the introductory section to my finding chapter I also mention another limitation encountered during my fieldwork, concerning the imbalance between the Bosnian and the UK chapters in terms of the focus on practices and in the number of voices of participants collected. While Srebrenica proved to be the right place to observe projects 'dealing with the past', as many took place while I was conducting my fieldwork, in Dorset less occasions presented themselves and it was not always easy for me to collect impressions from the participants. For example, during the most participated events within the Multicultural Meet-ups project, for the presence of small children, it was sometimes difficult for me to engage in conversations as parents were easily distracted by having to supervise their toddlers. In other occasions, as mentioned in section 4.4 participants were a very low number and, in a few cases, besides DREC staff and me, nobody else came.

1.7 Ethics

My project received ethics approval by a BU panel in May 2018, before the start of my Bosnian fieldwork. In compliance with BU Research Ethics Code of Practice, before all interviews started, my participants received a participant information sheet (PIF) and a participant agreement form (PAF) approved by Bournemouth University. The PIF explained the topic of the study and how participants' data were going to be stored and used. The majority of them read it carefully. To those who didn't, I explained it briefly verbally. All my respondents both in Bosnia and in the UK signed the PAF to consent to the use of their information.

The participant in my first interview in Srebrenica asked to be anonymised and not to be recorded. I asked them for consent to use the interview verbally because as we were in a café with other people around, they might have felt uncomfortable to sign a paper. As my fieldwork progressed, all the other participants in my study signed the form with no hesitation. Many were members of CSOs were not intimidated by the bureaucracy behind the research process. Since many of the people I interviewed knew each other, including the first interviewee, I wanted to be sure everybody felt taken seriously and treated equally. I therefore got back to the first participant, after some time when we had built trust and I felt confident in doing that, and, after explaining the situation, I asked them to sign the agreement form, too. Being aware that it is not uncommon in Bosnia to hear people complaining about bad experiences with researchers perceived as 'preying' on people's life stories, I think that, in my

specific case, the agreement form did not distort the dynamic of the relationship between me and my respondents but actually was seen as a sign of professionalism and guarantee beyond my spoken word. They also received a scanned copy of it. In this respect, my experience is different to some situations in post-communist or post-war fieldwork contexts, where forms evoke distrust for their association with state bureaucracy (this is particularly the case in contexts where the state was experienced as violent or untrustworthy) (ASA 2011).

In Dorset, all my participants signed the agreement form and gave consent to the audio recording. Just one person asked to be anonymised and I changed some information about her (except her gender) in order to assure anonymity without, in any way, impinging on the significance of her contribution. In two cases during my interviews with EU citizens living in Dorset, who felt scared and uncertain about their chances to remain in the UK regarding the EUSS scheme, I signposted them where to find reliable information and suggested they contact Dorset Race Equality Council to get support.

The short time of my stay in Srebrenica did not allow me to keep a low profile which, in ethnographic research, could be a way to enter in more sensitive contexts. My role as a researcher was always made explicit either by me or by my friends when they introduced me during partner meetings to their acquaintances or to possible new interlocutors for my research. However, in ethnographic research there are many occasions in which consent is more difficult to establish, for example in fleeting informal interactions or during observation. One participant in Bosnia, for example, did not want to be formally interviewed, but we met many times, and we spoke about issues that would otherwise have come out in the course of an interview and which did inform my general understanding. In situations like, for example, the Youth Peace Camp intervention in Srebrenica, where I was introduced as a researcher to the whole group of young people attending, I decided to report what happened during the activities, while anonymising participants. I did the same during my participant observations of the Multicultural Meetups in Dorset.

In Srebrenica, I was initially very nervous about having to deal with people who were at the same time my main informants, key gatekeepers and my friends. Protecting our friendship and their privacy was my priority, and I did not want them to feel under constant research observation. As Tillmann-Healy notes, “ongoing and overlapping relationships in the research may make loyalties, confidences, and awareness contexts much more difficult for all to negotiate” (Tillmann-Healy 2003). I found that, not to spoil the relationship, it is important

to monitor how the interaction develops and understand when it is necessary to 'let go' (Owton and Allen-Collinson 2014), in the sense of avoiding to insist on the research aspect if the other person shows weariness or the conditions are not right. For example, while, sometimes, I was using my notebook in front of them while talking about topics relevant to my research, at other occasions, asking constantly if I could use what they said for my research would have risked burdening our relationship. Moreover, regardless of all ethics precautions and acquiring formal consent, there always emerges situations during ethnographic fieldwork when the researcher might encounter private information about people's personal lives or about their work. Both, during my fieldwork and the writing up process, I made sure to leave such private information out of my research and protect my research interlocutors' privacy.

1.8 Conclusions

In this chapter I explained the reasons why I adopted a multi-sited ethnographic approach to explore discourses at the macro and micro levels in both my contexts of study. I explained the choice of my case studies and, for each of them, I presented the strategies and challenges to collect interviews and conduct participant observation; I reflected on how my identity as a woman and as a foreign researcher differently articulated in such different contexts; I presented the ethical implications of my research. Moreover, I explained what the main limitations of my study were and their consequences on how my findings are presented in the second part of the thesis.

2. Pre-requisites of comparative learning. Framing problems and finding solutions

The main aim of this thesis is to explore whether the CSO experience of working in the divided society of post-war Bosnia can help generate a better understanding of how CSOs in the UK deal with the societal divisions that emerged with the Brexit referendum. Therefore, the first part of the thesis is devoted to justifying the comparison between the two contexts at the centre of this study which, at a first glance, might seem too different, therefore, incomparable. The idea that binds my work together is that, despite the differences, which will emerge throughout the chapter, the societal divisions, which these contexts face, present similarities and so do the processes in place to address them.

To justify the comparison, I constructed a conceptual framework that builds on an analysis of the situation of post-war Bosnia in the post-war international intervention. This framework aims at analysing discourses at a macro-level and is structured in four parts which focus on: 1) how societal divisions are framed; 2) how people experience societal divisions that result into new categorizations and processes of 'othering' and loss of social normality; 3) how specific 'paradigms of intervention' are proposed as solutions to such divisions; and 4) how civil society organizations are one of the main actors supposed to implement the abovementioned solutions with the aim of bridging divisions.

For each of these four aspects, I will highlight similarities between the two contexts. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, this study reviews four bodies of literature, one for each of the parts of the conceptual framework, addressing the overarching theories of interest for this study.

In the first section of this chapter (2.1) I applied a focus on discourses as a lens to explore how similarities regarding the 'problems' faced by the two contexts of study are hidden by geo-political hierarchies of power which differentiate them, especially presenting the Balkans as 'other' from the Western 'us'. I will show that essentialist ways of looking at societal divisions is not unique to the Balkans. In particular, the way in which the war in Bosnia was discursively located within the 'irrational nature' of the people causing it, in opposition to a 'civilised' West

is not so different from tendencies to essentialise the 'tolerant Britishness' hiding the structural origins of the societal divisions at play.

In section 2.2 I will outline how similar processes of identity categorization led to similarities between people's experiences of divisions in both contexts: both in Bosnia and in the UK, economic and political changes led to new processes of differentiation intended at determining who belongs to a determined polity and who does not, unveiling similar human experiences characterised by a loss of social normality.

In section 2.3, I will look at intervention paradigms adopted as solutions to bridge the divisions identified. In particular, during my fieldwork, I identified two tropes used when talking about the process of dealing with divisions on the ground: 'reconciliation' for post-war Bosnia and 'community cohesion' in the UK post-Brexit referendum. Such tropes refer to specific paradigms with the aim of 'bringing people together', overcoming divisions and improve coexistence: in Bosnia 'reconciliation' was introduced by the international community within the wider framework of the transitional justice process and, in the UK, 'community cohesion' was introduced by the Labour Government at the beginning of 2000s as a policy to deal with the issues raised by the British multicultural society. Despite different origins, I will show how these intervention paradigms present similarities in their objectives as well as similar challenges.

Finally, in section 2.4, I will look at how civil society organizations constitute the conduit through which the above-mentioned paradigms are implemented in practice on the ground. In both contexts CSOs play a governing role aiming at changing people's minds and orienting people's behaviours to specific ends. Here I will focus on previous research conducted on CSO's interventions in the Bosnian context that shows how paradigms guiding CSOs interventions can clash with people's personal experiences and strategies to bridge divisions.

2.1 Politics of representation

2.1.1 Balkanism – Europe and the Other within

In this section I will discuss politics of representations. By this term I refer to the processes of creation of images that make and unmake social groups and that are embedded in specific systems of power. I will show that the ways in which societal conflicts are represented in Bosnia and in the UK hide similarities. In particular, I will refer to the debate that developed around the Bosnian war of the 1990s, to show how primordialist interpretations of the war

placed the Balkans as 'Other' to intrinsically different and in opposition to the 'civilised' West (Bhabha 2004) and hid structural-economic explanations of the war. In the context of this study, retracing this classic debate is relevant in order to show that essentialist framing is also not alien to the British context. As I will show, interpreting the Brexit related divisions as alien to the tolerant nature of the British society, hides the structural roots of such divisions.

In the methodology section I mentioned how post-colonial discourse studies analyse how this applies to the construction of a non-Western Other as intrinsically different and in opposition to the West (Bhabha 2004). Throughout the incorporation of various 'essences', humans and their social or cultural institutions are described as "governed by determinate natures that inhere in them in the same way that they are supposed to inhere in the entities of the natural world" (Inden 1990, p.2). In this respect, Said's Orientalism (Said 1978) inspired scholars of South East European studies who, in the 1990s, wanted to confute the idea of the 'essentialised' Balkans as depository of determined and fixed characteristics.

This representational tradition has acquired the epithet 'Balkanism' as a term of reference. Todorova (1997) describes how external and internal representations were constructed for over more than four centuries through travelogues, diplomatic accounts, academic surveys and journalistic writings that contributed to build an 'imaginative archive' that 'invented' the Balkans as a reified Other opposed to an as much reified West (Anderson 1983; Todorova 1997). Many denigratory accounts come from Western travellers who during Ottoman occupation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "regarded the region as the antitype of the enlightened West. This was a place of savagery, unpredictability, lawlessness, moral turpitude and mystery, a set of motifs and evaluations that closely resembled those of colonial discourse" (Hammond 2017, p.xii). Bijelić argues that "the Balkans have functioned as the fulcrum for Enlightenment Europe's self-image, or the means by which 'progressive' Europe projects its anxieties and forbidden desires onto the other" (Bjelić and Savić 2002, p.3). Bakić-Hayden described how these representations created 'symbolic geographies' whose characteristics are systematized in a scale of values that determines civilizational hierarchy: the 'civilized', 'modern' and 'rational' West versus the 'uncivilized', 'irrational', 'primordialist' 'Balkans' trapped in a never-ending circle of violence (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992; West 1993).

While it is true that for the aspects so far described we can see a similarity between Balkanism and Said's Orientalism, other authors, starting with Todorova (Dragoumis 1997;

Goldsworthy 1998), warned against this comparison. Accordingly, the different history of the Balkan territories established Balkanism as a critical study of colonial representation distinctly different from Orientalism. It could "similarly be defined as a 'system of representations', but this system is based on different referents – historical, geographical, and conceptual" (Fleming 2000, p.1231). Moreover, Todorova seeks to demonstrate that "unlike Orientalism, which is a discourse about an imputed opposition, Balkanism is a discourse about an imputed ambiguity" (Todorova 1997, p.17). As Fleming argues, the relationship between the Balkans and Western Europe is one of "simultaneous proximity and distance" and "the sense that they [the Balkans] somehow constitute the 'outsider within'" (Fleming 2000, p.1220). What characterises the Balkans, then, is their condition of liminality - i.e., belonging to two different places or states - to be found in being geographically placed at the borders of Europe but, being nevertheless part of it. Their status as Europe's 'resident alien': "an internal other that is an affront and challenge by virtue of its claim to be part of the West" (Fleming 2000, p.1229). Whether influenced by orientalism or not, the Balkanist debate suggests that war and post-war processes in the region might be viewed and represented through specific terms and concepts which affirm those symbolic hierarchies in question.

2.1.2 The war in Bosnia – refuting essentialism

The conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995 is commonly seen as the most brutal of all the Yugoslav secession's wars and the level of violence hit very hard its once vibrant and intermixed multi-ethnic community[3]. The Bosnian war, in particular, was represented as the inevitable outcome of ancient ethnic hatred resurfaced with the fall of socialism (Baker 2018), while the atrocities that characterized it were attributed to the natural inclination of the 'Balkan' peoples. In 1993, in the midst of the Bosnian war, Robert Kaplan published his book "Balkan Ghosts". In this travel memoir across the Balkan Peninsula, the author depicted the local people as characterized by "psychologically closed tribal nature" and guided by "aggressive nationalisms whose traits were inherited by a distant tribal past" (Kaplan 1993, p.16). Kaplan's book became a bestseller, particularly influential in Western intellectual

[3] 96,895 dead were documented as October 2012 by the Sarajevo Research and Documentation Centre. The number should be seen as approximation of a minimum and not as the complete total. http://www.mnemos.ba/ba/home/Download

and political circles where it was used to explain the nature of the conflict that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Jović 2001). In 1993, the American Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, stated that the conflict was "really a tragic problem. The hatred between all three groups…it's almost terrifying, and it's centuries old. That really is a problem from hell" (Campbell 1998, p.49). The war was seen as something with an anachronistic character, an "unpleasant reminder of old ethnic and religious conflicts that the modern Europe had left behind" (Woodward 1995, p.20).

Therefore, if the origins of the conflict in Bosnia are discursively located within the irrational nature of the people causing it, how could we possibly compare it with conflicts occurring in the 'civilised' West? While the studies on Balkanism, quoted above, aimed at unveiling the reasons behind essentialist representations of the Balkans in policy and public discourse, other academic literature produced in the 1990s played a crucial role in refuting the 'ancient hatreds' thesis by looking at the conflict from different perspectives. Some authors focused on the 'betrayed' long-lasting tradition of coexistence that characterized Bosnia before the war (Donia and Fine 1994), others on attempts to 'deconstruct nationalism', seeing it as a top-down imposition (Malcolm 1994). As Bougarel states, though, these accounts risked to oversimplify the history of interethnic relations, to reify other aspects of the Bosnian reality such as the cleavage between the 'civilized' urban environment versus the 'primordialist' countryside (Bougarel 1999) or neglect the role of economic motivations in the dynamics of war and ethnic cleansing (Kaldor and Bojičić-Dželilović 1999).

Particularly, this last approach aligns with wider structural-economic interpretations of the war which explain the domestic crisis in the international context of declining communist regimes and Western pressures for liberal market reforms at the relevant time. Yugoslavia suffered seriously from the 1973 international oil crisis and, in order to repay the IMF rescue loan package, saw the beginning of a period characterized by heavy austerity measures, declining living standards, rising inflation and high unemployment in the period leading up to the so-called Yugoslav successor wars (Woodward 1995). The economic crisis, that reached its peak in the mid-1980s, intensified already deep disparities between the different Yugoslav republics (Ramet 1999). In an attempt to emerge from the crisis, the Former Yugoslav republics' positions polarized between opposing tendencies of centralization and decentralization within the Federation (Dević 2016).

The discussion over economic reforms progressed in parallel with debates over constitutional reforms of the federal Yugoslav government. The dilemma of 'state-ness', the redefinition of the basic units of the polity (Oberschall 2000), implied a redefinition of the criteria of access to resources of the basis of how the nature of rights was to be defined: do they reside in individuals or in the ethnic community as collective entities? Would all the people in a territorial unit be included in governance on equal terms, or would ethno-national affiliation be the principal criterion of citizenship (Burg and Shoup 1999)? Some authors have suggested that, if the answer to these definitions of claims and entitlements would have been differently interpreted on the ground, Yugoslavia's break up could have gone differently, maybe even peacefully, as with other countries in the international post-cold war scenario (e.g. Sisk 1996).

As I have demonstrated above, constructivist theories challenged primordialist, essentialising arguments regarding the collapse of Yugoslavia and the start of the war. They tend to consider contextual factors such as the combination of economic insecurity and the emergence of quarrels for the entitlement over power and resources that led to the disintegration of governmental authority (e.g. Ramet 1999). They also try to understand why ethno-nationalism resonated in the society, and to defy the stereotype that the Balkan people were more prone to respond to nationalist calls. In contrast, they stress socio-economic and political contextual factors. For example, they demonstrate that the victory of nationalist parties in the 1990s was the result of political leaders manipulating ethnic sentiments for political ends (Gagnon 2004).

Such arguments and their focus on context refute essentialist explanations of the Yugoslav wars and set the grounds for comparison with the UK. In order to move away from essentialist assumptions, which obscure relevant similarities, we have to take into account also how 'nationalism' and 'violence' have been represented in relation to the Balkan context.

2.1.3 Nationalism and violence – creating the enemy

The phenomena of 'nationalism' and 'violence' have been ascribed to the Balkans as unique traits of the region and differentiated to nourish, in particular, a representation of the Balkan context as 'irrational' in opposition to a 'civilised' West.

In the study of nationalism, there have been recurrent attempts to make a clear-cut distinction between two kinds of nationalisms, one progressive and benign and one reactionary and malign (Spencer and Wollman 1998). The former, also called 'political' or 'civic' is

considered typical of the West: originated in the Enlightenment project, accordingly its aim was to create a liberal, rational and inclusive civil society (Kohn 1955). The latter, 'cultural' or 'ethnic' nationalism, is attributed to the East and looked "for its justification not in reason but in emotion, not in the present but in the past, turning inwards, to the imagination, to tradition, to history and to nature" (Spencer and Wollman 1998, p.5). This clear-cut dualism recreated a heavily value-laden geographic hierarchy that recalled the same Balkanist concepts of backwardness, inferiority and incompleteness which essentialist representations applied to the Balkans, representing this region in opposition to the presumed, civilized and modern West (Plamenatz 1976). Many authors have criticised this distinction as it ascribes fixed characteristics to the respective regions and its people without considering the impact of contextual factors on outcomes such as peaceful or violent divisions of society (Brubaker 1999; Shulman 2002).

As Bieber notes, another distinction of nationalisms can be made, not based on geography and values, but on levels of exclusion and inclusion. 'Latent' nationalism, what Billig (1995) calls 'banal nationalism', is ubiquitous, constant and steady, "an endemic condition that shapes society", while 'virulent' nationalism "rejects the status quo and seeks to reassert the will of an imagined community over a political or cultural space" (Bieber 2018, p.520). For virulent nationalism to emerge, and therefore a high level of social and political exclusion to take place, a global crisis is required. It can occur in the form of a response to indigenous or exogenous ideological, economic, institutional or social shocks (Bieber 2018). Here it becomes already obvious how wider contextual factors can shape nationalist emotions, whether this be in the Balkans before and during the Yugoslav succession wars, or among social stakeholders fearing loss of privileges or claiming entitlements for their precarious situations (Skey 2011), such as in the UK in the wake of the Brexit referendum, as we will see more in detail in the next section (2.1.4).

In relation to the Yugoslav context, the growth of virulent nationalism was seen as a reaction of regional elites against the federal government and the translation of "socioeconomic and political divisions into contests over territories" (Woodward 1995, p.225). Others, like Kaldor (2004) considered the transnational dimensions of the "new" nationalism as a reaction to globalization and to its transformation of the nation-state. Moreover, sociological research conducted at the time showed that nationalist political elites' ideas did not mirror the views of the population (Dević 1997). As Dević points out, far from being inherent to the Yugoslav society, the growth of nationalism at the level of the republics' leadership, did not affect

immediately the overall positive perception that average citizens had of inter-ethnic relations in their everyday life. Prior to the elections, in the spring of 1990, polling indicated that 74 percent of the population opposed the formation of nationalist parties, showing that the major grievances and concerns of the wider population in the former Yugoslavia were about non-ethnic issues (Gagnon 2004). Furthermore, the winner-takes-all nature of the electoral system minimized the seats won by non-nationalist parties, and the most extremist positions emerged in nationalist parties just *after* the elections (Dević 1997).

For virulent nationalism, as nationalism itself, to take root anywhere, it has to be promoted and people have to develop a sense of belonging to a specific group (Brubaker 2002). Nationalist parties in the collapsing Yugoslavia heavily relied on media, controlled by opposing sides, spreading fears of domination, oppression and demographic shrinkage to a population made more vulnerable by the growing insecurities dictated by the disastrous economic situation (Dević 2016). One tool that proved very effective was the production and diffusion of a discourse that drew on selective collective memories shifting from the socialist Yugoslav foundation myth of 'brotherhood and unity' to mono-ethnic foundational mythologies (Kaufman 2001). While, after the Second World War, events that did not fit the framework to legitimize Party rule were silenced, such as ethno-political dimensions of mass violence, artistic and academic revisiting of the past became public topics in the mid-1980s. Anthropologists (e.g. Denich 1994; Verdery 1999) documented a struggle over political symbols, for example the symbolic value of dead bodies which juxtaposed contrasting versions of events and number of the dead for each ethnically-marked side in relation to the events of the Second World War (Baker 2018). These factors contributed in the successive ideological shift from virulent to violent nationalism; the latter justifying the use of violence against those newly defined as the dangerous 'other' (Bieber 2018).

Those authors representing the war in Bosnia as the result of ancient ethnic hatreds and aggressive nationalisms looked for a confirmation of their theses, in what arguably qualifies as tautological reasoning, in the high level of violence that characterized it. This kind of violence they considered as so extraneous to Europe that it could be explained by just attributing to it an irrational character, as if it was the eruption of an untameable mental illness. As will be discussed in the last section of this chapter (see 2.4.3), such pathologisation of entire populations in the Balkans continued after the war (Hughes and Pupavac 2005) and it helped construct the post-conflict Balkans as 'protracted emergency' justifying continuous large-scale international interventions (Fassin and Pandolfi 2010).

Representing the conflict as a clash of "all against all and neighbour against neighbour" (Mueller 2000, p.42) again contributed to obscure how political narratives on the one hand and policies and institutional transformations, concurred in making violence possible. Ethnic identities, from being one of many "markers of cultural and regional characteristics", were transformed into "individuals' main political motives in the late 1980s of living in ethnically homogeneous states" (Dević 1997, p.142) bringing in-group and out-group distinctions to the level of impermeable categories (Tajfel and Turner 1979). The constitutions of the newly-independent republics attributed the status of 'inferior others' to minorities and nationalist ideologies were institutionalised to construct homogeneous nation-states in territories traditionally heterogeneous (Verdery 1994).

Instead of being the direct result of these processes, Gagnon (2004) considers that violence was employed as a strategic tool to speed up the reconfiguration of ethnic identification and reconstruction of territorial spaces in ethnic terms in order to facilitate the incorporation in one state or another: "Violence of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s was a part of a broad strategy in which images of threatening enemies and violence were used by the conservative elite in Serbia and Croatia" with the aim to "silence, marginalize and demobilize challengers and their support in order to create political homogeneity at home" (Gagnon 2004, p.xv). In a country characterized by a high level of ethno-national heterogeneity like Yugoslavia, where people with different national backgrounds coexisted, ethno-political violence against ordinary people, involving mass atrocities and population displacement, was the most effective way of 'unmaking communities' (Hayden 1996) towards territorial ethnic homogenization. Ethnicity was reconceptualized for political ends as a hard category, in sharp contrast with the social reality on the ground, where pre-war studies showed how instead it was a fluid and contextual concept (Sorabji 1989; Bringa 1995). The brutality of violence contributed to a hardening of exclusive ethnic identities, suggesting that such exclusive national identities were a consequence rather than a root cause of war. As Woodward puts it, enacting a violent conflict was the strategy to create real political mobilization: "The element of ethnic conflict was initiated by the war itself" (Woodward 1995, p.237).

Therefore, we could say that violence has to be seen as to fulfil specific social functions (Simmel 1955), at different levels of society. In regard to the war in Bosnia, the 'globalised industry of war' transformed the country into a real 'gangster economy' (Kaldor and Bojičić-Dželilović 1999) aimed at perpetuating violence for political and economic gain. Especially ethno-national parties benefited from this system. Also, after the war, the continuation of

nationalism can be linked to the ways in which ethnic nationalism was used as a source of legitimization for elites that kept reproducing violence and ethnic segregation to maintain the status quo (Kostovicova and Bojičić-Dželilović 2014).

In this section I showed that explanations of the war in Bosnia based on the 'ancient hatred' theory considered ethnically-framed violence as an innate character of the Bosnian society, instead of looking at it as an organized tool that created divisions and radicalised identities. In the case of the UK a similar process is at play, but of an opposite sign. As I will show in the next section, the tendency to essentialise the tolerant nature of the British society hides the structural roots of hate crime violence that manifested around the Brexit referendum.

2.1.4 'This is not who we are' – the loss of 'tolerant Britishness'

In the previous sections we saw how the Balkans' positionality in relation to Europe is one of liminality, on the border between opposing essentialised versions of West and East. On the other hand, on the opposite geographical end, we could say the United Kingdom's positionality in relation to Europe as a political entity, until the final exit of the EU, the UK has also been that of the 'outsider within'. Contrary to the Balkans, the UK can be placed on the opposite side of the spectrum in terms of power differentials, explaining this position not with the same exclusionary representations applied to the Balkans but as a way to preserve power and autonomy. In this section I will look at how societal divisions in the Brexit context are represented at the discursive level. While societal divisions are not usually explained through the trope of nationalism and violence, specifically 'ethnic violence' as for the Balkans, I will show that the UK is not free from the politics of representations that essentialises certain characters hiding pre-existing structural inequalities.

Despite Britain's historical ambivalence towards the European Union, and although the end result of the referendum was fairly close (52% for Leave; 48% for Remain), the win of the Leave campaign took everyone by surprise (Khalili 2017). The sudden news of the UK leaving the EU led national as well as international debates associating the word 'Brexit' with different kinds of crisis imaginaries. 'Crisis' can be defined as "a socially and politically mobilizing concept that builds specific past-to-future connections…a state of greater or lesser permanence, as in a longer or shorter transition towards something better or worse or towards something altogether different" (Koselleck and Richter 2006, p.358). Brexit opened up a crisis scenario with very different possibilities of competing futures affecting both Great Britain and the rest

of Europe. As Anderson noted, Brexit "saturated everyday life in multiple, disjunctive ways: some anticipated the excitement and joy of the return of something perceived as lost, such as regained 'sovereignty' and 'control'; others felt the despair and worry of an uncertain present foreshadowed by future losses of, for example, 'influence' or 'economic well-being' (Anderson and Wilson 2018).

Among these conflicting imaginaries, many narrations of the referendum's outcome included the end of a specific representation of British society as welcoming and open to cultural difference (Wilson 2016). This vision was linked in particular with the extraordinary spike in incidents of violence and crimes against EU citizens and other minorities. This violence, in the UK, was talked about through the trope of 'hate crime', which was not found in the literature perused in regard to Balkan supposed nationalist or inter-ethnic violence. The concept of hate crime, which has roots in the civil rights struggles in 1960s and 1970s America, gained international relevance at the beginning of the 1990s in processes of "governance of diversity and community cohesion" (Chakraborti 2014, p.13). In the UK, hate crime is defined as "any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic" (Home Office 2020). The five centrally monitored strands of hate crime in the UK are: race or ethnicity; religion or beliefs; sexual orientation; disability; and transgender identity[4].

In August 2016, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discriminations issued a report expressing concern at the increase of racist hate crimes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in the weeks before and after the EU referendum. Documents issued by the Home Office and the local Police confirmed an increase in hate crime reporting in the months before and after the vote. The increase of reported offences appears to have started with the beginning of the referendum campaign in mid-April, reaching its peak in July. Just from the date of the referendum, 23rd of June, and the end of the month, more than 3000 hate crimes were reported across the UK: a 42% increase on the same period in 2015 (Home Office 2017). These data

[4] The event that acted as a catalyst for the development of current UK policy and legislation was the murder of Stephen Lawrence in London in April 1993. The failures of the criminal justice system to investigate the murder led to the Macpherson Report, in 1999, which underpinned the subsequent policy response to hate crime (Hall et al. 2014).

caused concern as hate crimes are considered to be particularly dangerous to society. Research has established that: "Hate crimes hurt more than parallel crimes in respect of the experience of post-victimization distress" (Iganski and Lagou 2015, p.1714). In addition to the impact on victims, they also cause (Brown et al. 2016).

The vote seems to have legitimated an extraordinary outburst of xenophobic or racist attacks against migrants, especially those from Eastern Europe, residents and visitors as well as long-established Muslim, black and brown British (Komaromi and Singh 2016). The dominant narrative in the media and in political discourse has represented the phenomenon of hate crime after the referendum, attributing to it specific characteristics: first of all, presenting it as a matter of public order that needed to be dealt supporting victims, improving crime-reporting and increasing judicial responses. Secondly, looking at it as a series of actions committed by isolated 'thugs'. In a statement the Deputy Commissioner of Scotland Yard, Greig Mackey, referring to the episodes of violence, said that the referendum had "unleashed something in people" (Burnett 2017).

Presenting hate crimes as irrational acts goes against the literature on the subjects that define hate crime as a socially-constructed phenomenon where the "interactions between subordinate and dominant groups provide a context in which both compete for the privilege to define differences in ways which either perpetuate or reconfigure hierarchies of social power" (Perry 2012, p.106). In cultural studies, 'hate' Hate is not described about abnormal or 'extreme' psychology' (Hall et al. 2014, pp.83-84). Rather, different authors (Levin and Rabrenovic 2001; McDevitt et al. 2001; Iganski 2015), suggest that hate is a "part of the culture of the society in which it exists and when conceived as such, it is part of the totality of an individual's learned and accumulated experiences, including beliefs, values, attitudes, roles, and material possessions, which intensifies as it incorporates widely shared myths and stereotypes" (Hall et al. 2014, p.84). Therefore, "Hate crime (…) involves acts of violence and intimidation, usually directed towards already stigmatised and marginalised groups. As such, it is a mechanism of power and oppression, intended to reaffirm the precarious hierarchies that characterise a given social order. (…) It is a means of marking both the Self and the Other in such a way as to re-establish their 'proper' relative positions, as given and reproduced by broader ideologies and patterns of social and political inequality" (Perry 2002b, p.10). The performance of hate violence, therefore, confirms "'natural' relations of superiority/inferiority. It is a form of interpersonal and intercultural expression that signifies boundaries. And, significantly, the boundary is capable of organizing personal interactions in sometimes lethal

ways" (Cornell and Hartmann 2006, p.185). Contrary to these suggestions in the academic literature, the popular impression in the UK individualises hate crime as aberrant, thus maintaining a symbolic boundary between similar processes in former Yugoslavia.

Presenting these manifestations of racist and xenophobic hate as 'unprecedented' and surrounded by a 'rhetoric of shock and outrage' has the effect of representing racism as something exceptional out of the sphere of the ordinary (Emejulu 2016). It portrays 'inter-group' violence as something extraneous to British society, "an aberration in an otherwise tolerant country" (Burnett 2017, p.94). More specifically, Brexit was represented by different commentators as marking a 'purge of inclusive values', and the loss of 'tolerant Britishness' (McBride 2016; Timmermans 2016; Ford and Sobolewska 2020) demonstrating a specific way of constructing British national identity and values.

Representing hate crimes as extraordinary, isolated events, localised, reactionary, inter-personal episodes of violence, detaches them from the context where they take place, ignoring structural causes of racism. First of all, it ignores how a 'toxic' media campaign considered "the most divisive, hostile, negative and fear-provoking of the 21st century" (Moore and Ramsay 2017), normalised hostile narratives constructing immigrants as an economic and cultural threat. As highlighted by Moore and Ramsay's study (2017) the media portrayed immigrants as the bearers of alien customs and practices and blamed them for many of Britain's economic and social problems. The 'uncontrolled mass immigration' caused by the right to freedom of movement within EU member states became the reason of the unsustainable pressure on public services such as housing shortages or the strained National Health Service (NHS). UKIP's slogan 'take back control' was presented as the solution to avoid immigrants 'taking jobs that British people could do'. Specific nationalities were singled out for particularly negative coverage – specifically Turks, Albanians, Romanians and Poles (Moore and Ramsay 2017).

Moreover, such representation of the phenomenon of hate crimes conceals the influence which structural factors might have in contributing to shape hate crimes actions. While in the case of Bosnia, I showed that post-war divisions and radicalized identities were very much caused by the war and ethnically-framed violence, in the UK, post-Brexit hate crimes were not an entirely new phenomenon. Also, in the Bosnian war, states were involved in the implementation of violence, while in the UK hate crimes were the result of individual actions. However, hate crimes drew from government policies and institutional practices already in place that contributed in stigmatizing whole communities and seemingly giving racism and

anti-immigrant sentiment legitimacy (Komaromi and Singh 2016). As Perry notes, "hate crimes are more than the acts of mean-spirited bigots. Such violence is embedded in the structural and cultural context within which groups interact (…). It does not occur in a social or cultural vacuum, but is a socially situated, dynamic process" (Perry 2002a, p.486). The most blatant example of these policies being the 'hostile environment' policy implemented by the Home Office since 2012 under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition (Yeo 2018). It consisted in making staying in the UK as difficult as possible for people without leave to remain, by denying them basic needs such as housing and health care. It was based on the principle of 'deport first, appeal later', whilst encouraging leaving the country voluntarily though strategies including 'Go Home' vans as part of 'Operation Vaken'[5]. The case that raised more attention was the Windrush scandal when people from the Windrush generation started being treated as illegal immigrants. People who had spent their entire lives in the UK started to lose their jobs, homes, benefits and access to the NHS, some were wrongly thrown in immigration detention and sometimes deported out of the country. Even if this process had started as early as 2013, the UK parliament did not acknowledge the problem until 2018. More recently, the report published in March 2021 by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities shows a continuation by the Tory government in this direction. The report of the Commission, appointed by Prime Minister Boris Johnson in response to Black Lives Matter protests in summer 2020, was criticised by equality watchdogs for dismissing structural factors of racism completely in an attempt to debunk 'institutionalised' discrimination (Walker and Parveen 2021).

In relation to Brexit, some authors offered another perspective on the image of 'tolerant Britishness' highlighting how the above-mentioned policies, as well as the success of the Brexit media campaign, found their roots in structural racism and in how 'colonial racism' and the history of racialization of immigration in Britain impacted on the formation of English nationalism and English national identity (Kumar 2003; MacPhee and Poddar 2007; Virdee and McGeever 2017). Data on the referendum suggest that the majority of the Leave votes were cast in England and voters identified 'more English than British' or 'English not British'

[5] Operation Vaken was part of the government's "hostile environment" strategy which aimed to increase the uptake of illegal immigrants' voluntary departures. It included the controversial vans carrying the message "In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest", also known as the "Go home" vans. For the Home Office report evaluating the campaign see https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/operation-vaken-evaluation-report

(Lord Ashcroft 2016). This fact led scholars to reflect on how 'Englishness' emerged as an exclusivist category at the intersection between race, nationalism and the Empire and acted as an "invisible driver for Brexit" (Virdee and McGeever 2017, p.3). The Brexit referendum contributed in hardening categories of 'in-group' and 'out-group' (Tajfel and Turner 1979) where the 'real' English nation defined itself against racialized minorities and migrants. In this 'racializing nationalism', characterised by a deep sense of loss of prestige and nostalgia of the British imperial project culture, nationality and religion "take the place of pseudo-biology but secures the same intended outcome of generating public support for the permanent exclusion of some people from membership of the imagined national community, placing 'them' beyond the boundary of what it means to be British" (Virdee and McGeever 2017, p.7) .

While, according to the Balkanist discourse, the dissolution of Yugoslavia brought back to the surface the divisive and belligerent nature of its nations, one way of representing the burst in hate crime after the referendum showed tendencies that to some were extraneous to the 'essentially' tolerant nature of Britain. As I have demonstrated for Bosnia, violence as well as peaceful coexistence are not inner characteristics of certain people more than others neither occur in a vacuum, but are strategic, contextual and historically shaped phenomena. Stripping Britain of its inner 'tolerance' myth shows how the most negative consequences of Brexit, such as episodes of hate crime and discrimination, did not constitute a change in 'nature', but resulted from the combination of economic, political factors and structural inequalities. This favoured changes in a reshuffle in the hierarchy of who belongs and who does not belong to a determined polity. As Khalili has argued, the leave result has highlighted that representational veneers are transient and show just how easily they "can be peeled back to reveal the virulence of racism and xenophobia seething under the skin of British life" (Khalili 2017).

As I have demonstrated, specific politics of representations, in one context and another, can effectively distract from understanding processes that are not so dissimilar: mechanisms of differentiation determined by changes in external and structural circumstances that redefine who belongs to a polity and who does not. Questioning the politics of representations applied in public (including media) and academic discourse in either case, respectively, make comparative factors become most evident. The major events described in both contexts characterised by international economic crisis, nationalist discourses and discriminatory policies embedded in institutional settings, contributed in producing similar shifts of in/out-group relations in both contexts and in which people are 'problematized' as different. Even if

in very different ways, these processes redefine the ways in which subjects are positioned in society and relate to each other both situationally and globally. It is people's relations that we can call the 'fabric of coexistence', the terrain on which CSOs initiatives at the local level aim at intervening. As I will show in the fieldwork chapters, CSOs' project act upon relations between people in order to solve the identified 'problems'. In the next section, I will analyse more in depth the social differentiation processes, how that takes place and what it means in terms of people's experiences.

2.2 Groups and categories

After focussing on how specific politics of representations position different contexts on a hierarchy hiding similar socio-political processes, the second part of this conceptual framework focusses on the impact such context changes have on the lives of people. First of all, it is relevant to explore how in both contexts took place processes of differentiation that determined changes in who is considered to belong or not to a determined polity. Then I will look at what this means in terms of changes in people's social normality, highlighting the differences and similarities for post-war Bosnia and post-Brexit referendum UK.

In the context of Bosnia and the wider Former Yugoslav region in general, the concept of 'ethnicity' has usually been used as the English translation of the term 'nation' (*narod* or *nacija* in Serbo-Croat) and 'nationality' (*nacionalnost*) referring to the six South Slavic constituent peoples of the Yugoslav federation (Serb, Croat, Slovene, Macedonian, Montenegrin and Muslim). Ethnicity has been treated as "the central category that has organized group and individual identities and social relations in the area" (Todorova 2006, p.3). In a very different fashion, in the UK the expression 'race relations' refers to a system of policies aimed at regulating relations between different components of the society, in particular dealing with immigration issues. It is not the aim of this section to debate the differences between the term 'race', 'nation' and 'ethnicity' and their history, rather to trace the similarities in the processes of categorization that takes place in both contexts.

As mentioned above, this study adopts a constructivist approach that considers racial and ethnic identity as socially constructed (Reiter 1984). As Brubaker states "ethnicity, race, and nation should be conceptualized not as substances or things or entities or organisms or collective individuals - as the imagery of discrete, concrete, tangible, bounded, and enduring 'groups' encourages us to do - but rather in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful, and disaggregated terms" (Brubaker 2002, p.167). This vision opposes primordialist approaches

that consider relations among individuals based, more than on interaction, on 'primordial attachments' and 'natural affinity' (Shils 1957). Ethnicity and race therefore are conceptualised as 'natural' and 'immutable'.

However, even in constructivist theorizing, what sometimes occurs is what Brubaker calls 'groupism', that is the "tendency to take bounded groups as fundamental units of analysis (…) to which interest and agency can be attributed" (Brubaker 2002, p.164). This view still risks representing social conflicts as struggles between groups in primordialistic terms, reinforcing the primacy of ethnic groups, treating them as fundamental units of social analysis. In order to avoid reinforcing the reification of ethnic groups, Brubaker suggests that social analysts should distinguish between 'groups' and 'categories'. A group is a "bounded collectivity with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity, and capacity for concerted action", whereas a category is rather a "potential basis for group-formation or groupness" (Brubaker 2002, p.169). Rather than treating ethno-national identification as given and rigid, Brubaker suggests to investigate the conditions under which people do (or do not) feel and act as members of a specific ethnic/racial/national category by focusing on the processes and circumstances that create and reproduce them: "analysing the organizational and discursive careers of categories - the processes through which they become institutionalized and entrenched in administrative routines (Tilly 1998) and embedded in culturally powerful and symbolically resonant myths, memories, and narratives" (Brubaker 2002, p.169).

The processes of categorization are strictly connected with power relations. In Bourdieu's analysis, regionalist, or ethnic, discourse is described as a 'performative discourse' that retains the power of generating realities by virtue of naming: "the act of categorization, when it manages to achieve recognition or when it is exercised by a recognized authority, exercises by itself a certain power: 'ethnic' or 'regional' categories, like categories of kinship, institute a reality by using the power of revelation and construction exercised by objectification in discourse" (Bourdieu 1991, p.224). This power is what Bourdieu calls 'symbolic power', that is the power of 'world-making', to make things with words: "a power of consecration or revelation, the power to consecrate or to reveal things that are already there" (Bourdieu 1989, p.23). In any society, conflict, according to Bourdieu, rather than being between groups, is between symbolic powers that aim at constructing groups, by imposing the vision of legitimate divisions and hierarchies.

Brubaker states that saying that the reality of ethnic groups "does not depend on the existence of ethnic groups or nations as substantial groups or entities" does not, in any way "dispute their reality" (Brubaker 2002, p.168). The Bosnian war has shown how, although socially constructed, ethnic identity actually has a very real effect on people's lives: "although categorization may not necessarily change the name or boundary of an identity, it may have considerable potential to define what it means to bear it, the experience of 'being an X'" and entails specific experiences (Jenkins 1994, p.202). Nevertheless, in his theory of practice Bourdieu (1977) overcomes structure/agency and subjective/objective dichotomies with the concept of 'habitus' that explains behaviours associated with social structures, such as class, gender, and ethnicity, as a combination of non-deterministic external influences and individuals' agency:

> "The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (Bourdieu 2018, p.53).

In fact, for Bourdieu the process of categorization takes a double direction, 'from above' and 'from below': "From above, we can focus on the ways in which categories are proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalized, discursively articulated, organizationally entrenched, and generally embedded in multifarious forms of 'governmentality'. From below, we can study the 'micropolitics' of categories, the ways in which the categorized appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade, or transform the categories that are imposed on them" (Brubaker 2002, p.170, in reliance on Dominguez 1986). In the previous section we have seen how, in Bosnia, the performative character of ethnicity has been used from above by, for example, ethnopolitical entrepreneurs who, by reifying groups, contribute to producing what they describe. This reifying vision has been applied also by external observers giving interpretations of the war in Bosnia and, as we will see in the last section of this chapter, it has persisted in the post-war period in the ways in which interventions have been implemented by the international community to address the consequences of the conflict.

In the case of the UK, Brexit has been interpreted as a return to nationalism and national identity primordially grounded in the myth of the former British Empire (Dunin-Wasowicz

2017; Newbigin 2017). The episodes of racism around the referendum have been linked to new forms of racism that have "the capacity to link discourses of patriotism, nationalism, xenophobia, Englishness, Britishness, militarism and gender difference into a complex situation which gives 'race' its contemporary meaning" (Gilroy 1987, p.43). These new forms of racism pose an essentialist deterministic biological explanation to culture and ethnicity, seeing them as fixed categories of difference. Racialisation processes, therefore, do "not [anymore] require putative phenotypical or biological difference" and race is not an essential characteristic of migrants, "but rather the socially constructed contingent outcome of processes and practices of exclusion" (Fox et al. 2012, p.681). In the definition of the 'internal others', 'race' became "the valorised language through which structured inequalities (measured in labour market position, differential access to scarce resources, legal status, and cultural stereotypes) are expressed, maintained, and reproduced against whom the nation defines itself" (Fox et al. 2012, p.681).

This has been the case, for example, in a wider public representation of Eastern European migrants living in the UK. Research shows how, well before the Brexit referendum, they experienced a shift in the way they were represented and positioned in relation to British society. While, in the first phases of their migration, because categorised as 'white', they were considered to be unproblematic and able to blend in the host society (Rzepnikowska 2019), after the 2008 economic crisis they started being represented in negative ways, especially by the press. The category of 'whiteness' proved to be a "category with shifting borders and internal hierarchies" (Rzepnikowska 2019, p.64), that can be crossed by certain groups but not by others (Dyer 1997). Around the referendum, this became particularly evident, and the racialization process made them 'visible' in a problematic fashion.

Another category that was introduced in the debate around Brexit is that of 'autochthonic politics' (Geschiere 2009), which can be defined as the 'return of the local'. As a trope of popular representation, it can be linked, specifically, to the phenomenon of mass immigration within the context of globalization. Geschiere, in his comparative work on autochthony in Europe and Africa, defines 'autochthony' as "the appeal to the soil as the ultimate truth", implying "strong claims for primordiality and particular forms of temporal-territorial racialization, of exclusion and inferiorisation" (Cassidy et al. 2018, p.194). According to Geschiere, autochthony can be described as a 'new phase of ethnicity'. Compared to ethnicity though, as he points out, it does not need a name or history or a language; it needs only to be based upon the simple notion of 'who came first'.

Cassidy, connecting the trope of autochthony with Brexit, notices how the referendum activated another dimension of social life, which is based on the quasi-nationalist invocation of community and a sense of belonging paired with the need to exclude: "Brexit made a definite change to everyday understandings of inclusion as now there is a felt imperative to decide who is a rightful autochthonous member of society (as opposed to a stranger or allochthon). This lays emphasis on larger groups and communities ('the' British society), which are implicitly made more relevant than just minorities or particular status groups" (Cassidy et al. 2018, p.191). Brexit polarized the British population into 'Brexiters' and 'Remainers', and in those who belong and those who do not. As Cassidy puts it, Brexit "is a project of homogenization under the banner of autochthony" (Cassidy et al. 2018, p.198). The simplification stemming from representing the social reality as dichotomous alternatives hides more complex individual positionings and related senses of belonging, as the next section will demonstrate.

2.2.1 Experiences of losing social normalities

In this section I will show that the main socio-political events considered in both contexts had a strong impact on the lived experiences of people, in particular how their position into society changed following identity reconfiguration processes. As mentioned in the methodology section regarding my ethnographic fieldwork, a focus on people's experiences of societal divisions is crucial as that is the terrain where CSOs intervene to promote change as will be explained in the following sections of this chapter. The concept of social normality emerges from the literature on civil society intervention in post-war Bosnia and emerged from my fieldwork in Bosnia as still relevant for people referring to CSOs initiatives implemented today on the ground. Building on the experience of post-war Bosnia, I will show how the concept of loss of social normality, despite the differences, can also be found in the UK post-Brexit referendum.

Research in Bosnia highlighted the ways in which the focus on ethnic relations, as the main 'problem' to be dealt with in the post-war era, prevents observers from seeing the multidimensional character of the impact which war had on ordinary people's lives. It hides the many ways in which people deal with these changes and how they make sense of these in their quest of fulfilling their aspirations to live a 'good life'. While the trauma of having lived through a war and the memory of violence and atrocities can play a role in solidifying group's boundaries, therefore confirming the intent of the political elites' ethno-nationalist projects (Koneska 2016), ethnic relations are contextual and "emerge and are made relevant through social situations and encounters, and through people's ways of coping with the demands and

challenges of life" (Eriksen 2002, p.1). Looking at the categorisations process 'from below', shows how 'the categorised' can actively contest the homogeneity of the categories imposed from above by different actors, be these actors ethnic entrepreneurs or the international community.

The process of economic and political changes that undermined Yugoslavia at the end of the 1990s had a great impact on the lives of ordinary people. On the one hand, the economic crisis and the austerity policies, with unemployment, decreasing living standards, and a perceived growth of social inequalities, led to a sense of powerlessness among people and a parochialisation of social ties as indicated by studies conducted at the time (Dević 1997). On the other hand, this went in parallel with a sense of cultural deprivation due to the dissolution of the Federation and the subsequent shrinking of social experience: people went from a cosmopolitan Yugoslavian "frontier-less cultural space as the main reference of their identities", to national/ethnic restricted ones (Dević 1997, p.148).

The concept of 'normality' emerged in research on Bosnia during and after the war and it has been used as a lens to understand emic perspectives on life changes in times of crisis. In the Former Yugoslavia, compared to other war contexts, 'normality' did not mean that people became accustomed to conditions of violence, reclassifying the 'abnormal' as 'normal' in the sense of accepted and expected. For people in Bosnia, for example, there was always a clear distinction between what was 'abnormal' to them, therefore considered unacceptable, and the 'normal', as a condition to aspire to and, where possible, to be recreated. As Maček notes, based on her fieldwork in besieged Sarajevo, references to 'normal life' described how people wanted to live and normality was "charged with a sense of morality, of what was good, right or desirable" (Maček 2007, p.39). This concept applied also to people: a 'normal person' was someone 'sane', whose behaviour and way of thinking was considered by others as acceptable and preserved by the 'abnormal'/'insane' conditions they were living in.

In most cases, the concept of normality referred to pre-war life conditions which were taken for granted at the time and that were abruptly substituted by sudden experiences of loss. Jansen noted that people often described their present in the light of their past and in relation to their future: "a 'normal life' described what one had lived before the 1990s (the 'was') and it evoked an aspiration for the future (the 'ought'). Research in the post-Yugoslav states provides substantially different insights, showing previous everyday lives to be a central

positive source for the evocation of 'normality'. The 'ought' was, thus, opposed to the 'is' but intimately related to the 'was'" (Jansen 2015, p.38).

The concept of Yugonostalgia (Velikonja 2009) can also help to understand the sense of loss many people felt after the war. Yugonostalgia is not only to be intended as a nostalgia of the political aspects of the previous regime, but most of all its social ones. It consists of the perception of having lost what once was taken for granted and part of everyday normality, and that in the unsatisfying post-war present had become inaccessible. Maksimović (2017) calls it 'normalostalgia', the longing for a 'normal life' that, "is tightly connected with economic security and well-being, as well as specific social values, such as ethnic co-existence [*sužívot*] and good-neighborliness [*komšiluk*], which used to be a cornerstone of the social life in socialist Yugoslavia" (Maksimović 2017, p.1071).

At every stage of the gradual process that led to the fall of Yugoslavia, people looked for explanations, for ways to deal with the most bewildering, unimaginable and unacceptable changes they were facing, including the eruption of violence. Different authors support the focus on social normality as the core issue at stake. They address the continuum (Schmidt and Schröder 2001; Richards 2005) of a process ranging before, during and until after the war, from experiencing social normality as a given, the traumatic loss of it, to the post-war rebuilding of a new social normality (Maček 2007; Stefansson 2010; Jansen 2015). Normal lives were recovered not through "some grand gestures in the realm of the transcendent but through a descent into the ordinary" (Das 2001, p.7), negotiated through the 'simple' continuation of everyday activities.

Despite the majority of these studies referring to the period of the war or its immediate aftermath, my research shows that this concept recurs still today in the utterances of members of different generations in Bosnia. Some elements, such as the impossibility of planning different lives, the feeling of being stuck and not being able to move forward, the longing for certain kinds of social relations felt as lost, remain part of the discourse people use to define their lives. My fieldwork will show that what is 'normal' varies consistently according to different people and constitutes something to restore, or preserve, according to the needs and aspirations of individuals. In my fieldwork chapter on Srebrenica, I will show that CSOs carrying out interventions to bridge societal divisions on the ground find themselves to deal with these different notions of 'normality'.

I suggest that the concept of normality can be useful to look also at the condition of EU citizens in the UK post-Brexit referendum. During the period of my research in the UK, between 2018 and 2019, uncertainty was at its highest: the date of the official exit of the UK from the EU was constantly postponed, the negotiations on the deal with the EU often reached hostile tones and no-deal Brexit continued to be a looming option. Moreover, what Brexit was going to mean practically for people was nothing but a matter of speculation. EU citizens living in the UK suffered this climate of uncertainty, as their status was particularly unclear. They feared Brexit was going to lead to a loss of status and making of them second class citizens in a country that many perceived as 'home' (Rzepnikowska 2019). Many felt 'in limbo' (Remigi 2017), stuck in a position of uncertainty about the future, waiting for something to happen over which they felt they had no control. Grassroot organizations lamented EU citizens in the UK (as well as UK citizens living in the EU) were being treated as 'bargaining chips' and expressed the fear that a no deal scenario or flaws in the settlement scheme registration system, could have left them, especially more vulnerable ones, without any legal status. Activists feared that EU citizens could have faced hostile environment procedures, such as detention or deportation, experiencing what happened in 2018 with the Windrush scandal mentioned above. In the case of EU citizens, the experience of loss of normality was evident in a sense of lost security and residence rights previously enjoyed.

The spike in hate crime contributed to causing generalised concern among members of different communities. As mentioned above, hate crimes represent symbolic acts (Bourdieu 1991) that are perceived as sending a message of hostility and intolerance to anyone who shares the identity or characteristic of the victim targeted (Paterson 2018). Despite the research on the experiences of the people targeted after Brexit consists more of media reports than academic literature (except for e.g. Rzepnikowska 2019) it is nevertheless possible to rely on previous research on the direct (Iganski and Lagou 2015) and indirect effects of hate crimes that leave "significant physical and psychological consequences for victims that are more severe than similar non-hate motivated offences" (Brown et al. 2016, p.6).

As I showed above, Brexit introduced in the public discourse, and also later in the legal system, a categorization of who had superior rights of belonging and residence. This stated a hierarchization where the 'majority' ('the' British society) became more relevant than minorities or other status groups: "Being British or part of a 'community at home', or developing a sense of social-normality-altered-by-Brexit, now may encompass a far broader understanding of social difference, inequality, separateness from others, and 'natural' in-

/exclusion than the terms ‘national identity’ and ‘national belonging’ usually suggested in the past” (Cassidy et al. 2018, p.190). This sense of ‘abnormal present’ involves altered ethnic/national belonging, as in the case of Bosnia. At the same time, clearly, people in the UK did not have to deal with the much harsher difficulties of planning their futures in a post-war reality, characterised by human losses, political instability and economic deprivation.

The social-constructivist approach of this study is employed to avoid reproducing racial and ethno-national dimensions as the primary form of identification in divided societies. This sub-section about the loss of social normality demonstrated that this tendency is still commonly used in everyday parlance, policy and media discourses in both contexts where processes of differentiation risk to reify social groups, according to ‘groupist’ notions of belonging (Brubaker 2002). Moreover, despite the reconfiguration of identities representing a significant aspect of people’s experiences through the political and social changes under study in this thesis, reducing people’s experiences to only ‘ethnic’ and ‘racial’ issues clash with the multidimensionality of people’s experiences. As I will demonstrate in empirical detail based on my fieldwork chapter (see 4.2), the idea of ‘losing social normalities’, borrowed from the studies on post-war Bosnia, can also be applied to the experiences of some citizens in the UK after the Brexit referendum and allows to encompass different experiences.

In this section I addressed both the framing of the ‘problems’ as well as the question of how the change of rights regime was experienced in both contexts under study, from the double perspective of politics of representation at the macro level and people’s experiences at the micro level. In the next section I will move to the conceptual framing of potential solutions to societal divisions in both contexts.

2.3 Intervention paradigms – Looking for solutions

In the previous sections I have shown how, by unpacking the politics of representations and experiences of social reality of both Bosnia and the UK, the major events described, characterised by international economic crisis, nationalist discourses and discriminatory policies embedded in institutional settings, contributed in producing similar shifts of in/out-group relations in both contexts where differences between people were constructed. Besides the differences, both contexts saw processes of identity reconfiguration through mechanisms of categorization that led to similarities in people’s experiences of ‘loss of normality’.

After focussing on how problems are framed and what effects they have on the lives of people the third element of this conceptual framework concerns the solutions proposed. In this

section, I will focus on the aftermath of this crisis, particularly on two main intervention paradigms, adopted in Bosnia and in the UK, aimed at addressing societal divisions and restore and maintain peaceful coexistence: 'reconciliation' and 'community cohesion'. The choice of these two concepts is the result of the inductive/deductive reasoning that guided my research journey as explained in the introduction to this thesis (p. 15). The literature on international interventions in Bosnia, together with my personal experience in the field of international cooperation, identified 'reconciliation' as the main intervention paradigm that guided international interventions in the country. Since the beginning of my fieldwork in the UK, as specified in my research journey in the methodology chapter, I identified 'community cohesion' as a trope routinely mentioned by CSO staff when referring to the impact of the Brexit referendum on society and to the aim of reaching out through their actions. While in Bosnia the reconciliation framework was adopted to deal with the divisions that followed the war, in the UK, community cohesion refers to a set of policies adopted by the UK government long before the Brexit referendum, as a 'home-grown' solution to national issues related to the so-called 'politics of difference'. Despite the different use of terms in the two cultural contexts, I unveil connections between the two tropes through the 'practice of translation' typical of multi-sited ethnography in order to assess similarities and differences "between distinctive discourses from site to site" (Marcus 1995) (see 1.2).

I will show how both terms constitute 'policy concepts' in the sense that they aim at orienting people's behaviours to specific ends. Foucault's theories on governmentality are referred to in the anthropological literature on policy studies where policies are considered 'technologies of government' that "not only impose conditions, as if from 'outside' or 'above', but influence people's indigenous norms of conduct so that they themselves contribute, not necessarily consciously, to a government's model of social order" (Shore and Wright 2003, p.5). To the question on 'how' to bridge societal divisions, the two policy concepts seem to give a generally similar answer: 'bring people together' to overcome differences and create common ground. As the literature reviewed in this section will show, both are connected to practices aimed at producing 'bridging social capital' (Putnam 2000). Social capital refers to relations among individuals as well as networks, norms of reciprocity and social trust that facilitate co-operation generating benefit for the parties involved and, potentially, for the whole society (Putnam 2000). While 'bonding social capital' refers to relationships among people from within groups, 'bridging social capital' aims at developing interactions directed at solidarity and reciprocity among different groups. The bridging character, in particular,

requires the use of 'contact theory' as the main tool to 'bring people together' in the two contexts and bridging divisions. This theory was initially developed to address race relations in the USA and it is based on the assumption that learning about the out-group would reduce prejudice (Allport 1954): "it assumes that values and behaviours can be modified in a progressive way by favouring contact and interaction between individuals from antagonistic groups, conducted in non-hierarchical and non-threatening conditions" (Hughes 2017, p.637).

For the purpose of this study, I will highlight differences and similarities and focus on the similar critiques to the implementations of these paradigms in the practice of people's lives. The first concerns these intervention paradigms' nature of discourses that constitutes and naturalizes the subjects of political life. They both provide answers to the question: 'who' are the actors that need to be brought together? Both paradigms have been criticised for reifying group identities. Moreover, in both cases, the prevalence given to the local level raises concerns over the possible dismissal of structural causes of division over individual agency and responsibility; the second critique relates to their aims: 'what' is supposed to happen when the contact takes place? In both cases, these paradigms aim at contributing to the construction of the 'national self' by creating common identities, intended as common narratives of the past, in Bosnia, and common identities in terms of shared values in the UK.

2.3.1 Reconciliation

The term 'reconciliation' was adopted as a paradigmatic 'policy concept' intended at addressing specific problems faced by countries emerging from war. In post-war Bosnia, reconciliation became the cornerstone of internationally initiated peace-building initiatives, associated with transitional justice and peacebuilding processes. These processes involved a wide apparatus of actors at different levels, such as states, national and international courts, as well as civil society organizations. Despite the term being considered as under-theorised and lacking a shared definition, in the literature on post-war Bosnia the terms reconciliation can broadly be defined as different sets of measures aimed at building long-lasting peace for post-conflict societies (Eastmond 2010). At the core of 'reconciliation', in the way in which it has been implemented in the Balkans after the 1990s wars, lays the idea that, beyond formal peace agreements, inter-personal and inter-communal relationships between people at the grassroots level constitute the main terrain where re-establishing 'community' to guarantee sustainable peace.

On a spectrum, the idea of reconciliation ranges from a 'thinner' and a 'thicker' notion (Crocker 2000). A 'thin' notion of reconciliation can be defined as simple coexistence and absence of violence (e.g. Sampson 2003; Stefansson 2006). Moving towards the other end of the spectrum, the quality of relations between people improves, the exchanges increase and cooperational activities for the common good intensify. On the other end of the spectrum, we find the so-called 'thick' version of reconciliation. This notion combines political language of 'rights', 'truth' and 'justice', religious language of 'repentance' and 'forgiveness' (Brooks 1999; Porter 2003; Barkan and Karn 2006), drawn from the origins of the term in Christian theology (Doxtader 2003), and psychological language connected to the idea of finding 'closure' and 'healing' from trauma by developing empathy and improving relations between conflicting parties (Potter 2006; Moon 2007; Herman 2015).

These different components, political, religious and psychological, can be found, contested and debated, all together or differently combined, in different approaches to reconciliation aiming at a rediscovery of the common humanity of all the sides involved in the conflict (Chayes and Minow 2003; Eastmond 2010; Pundak 2012). The overarching aims include the construction of national unity and of a political community. This makes of reconciliation as oriented towards the future as it looks at an ideal shared society as an ultimate reachable goal but, at the same time, it is also backward looking. Firstly, this is because it seeks to rectify the wrongdoings of the past as a condition to move forward and, secondly, because the image of the expected future recalls specific characteristics of the pre-conflict past. So, as Schaap (2004) notices, communities are expected, through the adoption of certain behaviours, to go back to an 'original commonality'. Reconciliation can therefore be intended as a state that can be imagined before getting there, a form of teleological and normative theory, implied to be a 'good' thing that will be beneficial for all the parties involved (Hughes 2017).

Since the end of the war, within the framework of the local turn in international peacebuilding (Arriaza and Roht-Arriaza 2008; Paffenholz 2015; Milošević 2017), one of the main features of civil society interventions promoted by internationally funded CSOs were face-to-face encounters between people with different ethnic backgrounds. As mentioned above, the bridging character of these initiatives was based on 'contact theory' (Allport 1954) which claimed that increased interaction between opposing parties can play a role in the de-escalation of conflict and in its resolution (McEvoy et al. 2006). One of the main focuses of these initiatives was 'dealing with the past', as 'divided narratives' of the war past was identified as one of the main problems to address to build a democratic society (David 2019).

These initiatives took inspiration from the Franco-German reconciliation process, after the Second World War, that lies at the core of the founding myth of the EU (Guisan 2011). This process, depicted as 'the biggest product of reconciliation in history' (Kurbjuweit 2010), became a model, a clear moral imperative for political leaders to confront the past. As Dragović-Soso pointed out, many initiatives in the Balkans were based on three main assumptions: a psychological one based on the notion that working through the past is the necessary way towards healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, possible by giving victims spaces to work through the trauma; a political one sustains that accountability fosters democracy and promotes peace and human rights; the third a moral one, according to which dealing with the past is a moral duty to remember the victims and acknowledge their trauma (Dragović-Soso 2010).

These initiatives refer to a 'thick' notion of reconciliation, part of what David (2020) called the 'human rights memorialization agenda': a "proper, morally-driven memorialization can transform and direct nationalist realities in conflict and post-conflict societies towards a non-violent course, simultaneously placing them on a safe path to a brighter and democratic future" (David 2020, p.3). Civil society organizations and human rights activists assume that these practices are "essential for 'healing' societies with a difficult path and moving beyond trauma and violence" (David 2020, p.3). The great part of the reconciliation practices in post-war Bosnia, as David highlights, has been organized around 'opposing groups' coming together.

As a normative discourse, reconciliation can provide not only a general template-script of how things should look like to get to the final step of a 'reconciled society', but it also delineates the characteristics of the subjects that take part in the process through categorizations (Moon 2006). As mentioned above, in socio-psychological literature, reconciliation is mainly intended as a process where former enemies rise above their differences highlighting similarities, in particular a 'common humanity', rather than differences. In contexts of divided narratives, the construction of a common identity is often linked to the resolution of the 'conflict of narratives' as a prerequisite for a settlement of the conflict once and for all under the 'never again' motto.

Thinking of conflict only in terms of an opposition between groups, reconciliatory activities risk recreating the same problem they are trying to address re-categorising people along ethnic lines (David 2020). Research has shown how interventions focused on inter-

national encounters could have the opposed result of entrenching divisions offering a reductionist definition of the sides of the war in a national sense hence reinforcing "a version of history, both wartime and pre-war, that is itself nationalist" (Jansen 2013, p.232). As shown in section 2.2, where I talk about categorization, reducing the war in Bosnia to a fight among factions categorised along homogenous ethnic groups excludes the multifaceted reasons of the war as a conflict over state formation and citizenship, fights over economic resources involving organised crime and business interests and neglects other aspects of identity, like gender and class (Jansen 2013). Research has shown how people on the ground often did not identify with, and shy away from, the categories imposed by the reconciliation discourse. Moreover, it can categorize whole populations of post-conflict countries as in need for reconciliation where every individual is assumed to be a potential 'beneficiary' of reconciliation initiatives. The concluding section of this chapter (see 2.4.3) suggests that this can lead to 'pathologizing' whole societies (Summerfield 2001; Hughes and Pupavac 2005). The experience of Bosnia in the post-war period up until today, shows many examples of how the local turn has meant also that the local population has been treated as the 'political problem' and became the main 'field of intervention' for external actors. More than political elites and institutions, "'life' becomes the subject of governance" (Chandler 2013, p.22).

As Hugh (2018) suggests, contact theory reifies agency over structure while structural divisions persist. The focus on the development of inter-personal contact between members of conflictual groups to change relationships and build peace, contrasts with the fact that conflicts are driven by structural factors (Hughes and Kostovicova 2018). Moreover, the risk of romanticizing the local as the place that harbours the 'real' values of coexistence, tracing a clear-cut opposition between an essentialised 'good' local and a 'bad' international sphere, can end up in placing on local communities a responsibility that results in unrealistic expectations that often clash with the difficulty of changing structural factors of division. Nevertheless, as research shows, the local does not necessarily represent the site of resistance against nationalist narratives or against the dominance of the hegemonic international liberal actors (Paffenholz 2015). For example, it can even actually reproduce the dynamics opposed to the reconciliation processes in re-establishing new social normalities where previous social normality is seen as irreplaceably lost (Schwandner-Sievers and Klinkner 2019).

2.3.2 Community cohesion

As argued in the previous section, the politics of reconciliation emerged as a feature of countries in 'transition', exemplified by Bosnia, to deal with divisions in the aftermath of civil

wars and connected to transitional justice processes to address historical legacies of violence, oppression, and human rights violations. In Western countries considered consolidated democracies, on the other hand, social conflict has been increasingly addressed by the so-called 'politics of difference', aimed at developing new and more pluralistic forms of democratic citizenship (e.g., multiculturalism) as recipe for overcoming racial and ethnic hierarchies evident in various forms of social exclusion (Kymlicka and Bashir 2008). In the UK, the 'politics of difference' is described as the realm of concepts employed to regulate coexistence of different components of the society and are embedded in policies at state level directed at dealing with diversity as a consequence of immigration from inside and outside Europe (Modood 2007). Nevertheless, as Kymlicka and Bashir note, the two realms are not completely separated as debates about 'multicultural citizenship' intersect with experiences of historic injustices also in the West: "the politics of reconciliation has migrated to the established Western democracies and has become an influential framework for thinking about the claims of historically oppressed groups within these countries" (Kymlicka and Bashir 2008, p.4). This translated into policies, not successful, to address, for example, aboriginal rights in Canada (Kerr 2021) or in dealing with the past issues of slavery and colonialism in the US (Balfour 2010).

In the post Brexit referendum scenario, the language of reconciliation was used by the Archbishop of Canterbury who, since 2017, advocated to 'bridge the divisions' caused by the referendum. In prevision of the Brexit day on 29th of March 2019 (later postponed) he declared his intention to organize five days of public prayer. He advised parish churches throughout England to invite their members to come to the church for a chat considering stimulating dialogue around questions such as "What effect has Brexit had in your family relationships, friendships, etc and, if you disagreed, has it been possible to disagree well?" (The Church of England 2019). In the same days, Robin Richardson, former director of the Runnymede Trust, advocated for a possible role of faith communities and religious organisations to promote truth and reconciliation commissions and citizens assemblies to address the divisions between Leavers and Remainers (Richardson 2019).

In August 2019, in the prospect of a 'no-deal' Brexit, Welby was offered to chair a citizen forum put forward by mostly remain-backing MPs: "The need for national healing and eventually for a move towards reconciliation is essential, and will take much time, a deep commitment to the common good, and contributions from every source" (Welby 2019). Interestingly, in December 2019, Boris Johnson borrowed the language of reconciliation

himself when, the day after his General Election victory, he appealed to the whole country to move on from the divisions caused by Brexit, became an "increasingly arid argument", and urged "everyone to find *closure* and let the *healing* begin [my italics]" (Wood 2019).

While reconciliation was mentioned, I assumed that, besides Johnson's rhetorical reference, the language of reconciliation in the UK was relegated to the religious world. During the course of my research indeed, I found that civil society organizations staff used different language, in particular the expression of 'community cohesion' to indicate the 'thing' that was impacted by the Brexit referendum and that needed to be restored through their work. As I have shown in section 2.1.4, Brexit divisions were rooted in issues of immigration, belonging and processes of categorization - issues that the concept of community cohesion had the task to address when it was introduced in the policy language in 2001. While I will talk about it more in depth in the findings chapter, here I will trace the history of this term and highlight some parallels with 'reconciliation' in Bosnia when translated into practices intended to 'bring people together'.

Contrary to the case of Bosnia, where the concept of 'reconciliation' started being applied to the context in the post-war phase, 'community cohesion' is a concept that has been coined well before the Brexit referendum. Today's politics of difference in the UK is still framed by the policies shaped at the beginning of the early 2000s, when the discourse of 'liberal multiculturalism' was replaced by the language of 'community cohesion' (Payne and Harrison 2020). In the summer of 2001 urban unrests took place in towns in Northern England, Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, involving hundreds of white British men and British Asian youth, predominantly of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origins. To investigate the causes of the disturbances, the Home Secretary established an Interdepartmental Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion and a Community Cohesion Independent Review Team. The Cantle Report, named after the Chair of the review team, pointed to the high level of segregation of Asian and White communities as the factor that caused the riots. Different communities were said to live 'parallel lives' and the cause of the unrests was seen to be: "the fragmentation of communities along faith and ethnic lines and ... the lack of contact between these communities which were also divided by different levels of disadvantage and discrimination" (Cantle 2001, p.9).

The riots in the North were interpreted in the light of a global crisis of multiculturalism and a failure of populations to live with, or to easily experience and encounter, cultural

differences (Schuster and Solomos 2004; Cheong et al. 2007). After the 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, these policies developed in a period of heightened national security threats from international and 'home grown' terrorism, speeding up the domestic debate on coexistence. The agenda was further developed by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC) in 2005, after the London terrorist attacks. British society was represented as 'sleepwalking to segregation' (Phillips 2005) and segregation, despite evidences to the contrary (Sabater 2008; Peach 2009), became the ready-made explanation for social conflict.

The community cohesion agenda sought to address these issues through the development of shared values, the promotion of cross-cultural contact and measures to tackle the underlying causes of disadvantage and discrimination (Lowndes and Thorp 2011). While it was implemented taking into account both economic and social aspects, the original definition by Ted Cantle marked a separation between the two. Contrary to 'social cohesion', focused on socioeconomic factors, community cohesion refers to societal divides between "identifiable communities defined by faith or ethnicity, rather than social class" (Cantle 2008, p.50). A cohesive community was defined as one where: "the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued (…) and strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods" (Cantle 2008, p.14).

Britain's community cohesion agenda was founded on the principle that 'bringing people together' in cross cultural initiatives promoting contact and dialogue between groups of people who do not normally have the opportunity to meet could help foster understanding and respect and break down barriers (CIC 2007). 'Contact theory' was the main framework adopted to implement community cohesion plans. Contrary to reconciliation in Bosnia, community cohesion does not focus on elements of 'truth' and 'justice'. However, as in the case of Bosnia mentioned above, interventions based on contact theory are rooted in the premise that intercultural encounters can potentially reduce prejudice and facilitate sustained positive social interactions between groups, increase reciprocal knowledge and develop a shared identity (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). In tracing the foundations of the community cohesion policies, Cantle referred explicitly to socio-psychological and reconciliation literature of experiences in countries outside the 'modern Western democracies' comparing community cohesion with initiatives in 'deep-seated and violent inter-ethnic conflicts' in other places like the Balkans, Rwanda, Sudan, South Africa, and India: "Much of the work done to resolve conflicts and rebuild relations tends to reinforce the tenets of community cohesion and is based

upon breaking down barriers by promoting interaction and removing structural inequalities" (Cantle 2008, p.223).

The new community cohesion framework adopted a significant change in terms of language and approach moving the focus from previous concern with diversity and equality to the need to "changing attitudes and values" in order to "repairing the fractures between communities" and "helping people to see the human face of others" (Cantle 2001, p.51). The new emphasis on commonality, common values and identities was seen as the way towards building 'bridging social capital': "As a policy agenda, community cohesion prioritises the quality, and not just the regulation, of relationships between 'identifiable groups', and seeks to promote change in underlying attitudes, as well as in observable behaviour" (Lowndes and Thorp 2011, p.516).

This aspect raises similar questions to those I highlighted above in relation to reconciliation in Bosnia as community cohesion is a policy concept that constitutes and naturalizes the subjects of political life, and the definition of the subjects is part of a specific narrative that tells how the conflict is framed. Like the reconciliation initiatives in Bosnia, considered by critical observers to potentially strengthen ethnic identities, one of the main critiques of community cohesion policies relates to the relevance given to 'identifiable communities' in culturalist terms (Flint and Robinson 2008). This implies, firstly, that initiatives that aim at fighting segregation and favouring interactions between different groups to reduce prejudice could risk to focus solely on the cultural aspects of community identifications, neglecting other dimensions such as gender, age, class, disability or sexual orientation (Valluvan 2018).

Another main feature of the community cohesion discourse is its communitarian approach, reflected in its focus on the 'local'. Communitarianism traces back to the work of sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies' who conceptualised a difference between '*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*' (1887) (Tönnies 2001). Tönnies placed the moral basis of community life in face-to-face relationships and social interactions (*Gemeinschaft*), counterposing these to impersonal relationships mediated by state bureaucracy (*Gesellschaft*). Contemporary communitarian thinking shifts the focus from the individual towards the interests of society and a return to small-scale community life which is promoted as a way of ensuring the endurance of values such as trust, kindness and tolerance (Tam 1998; Etzioni 2007). As Cowdon notes, communitarianism aims to reconstruct a romantic conception of 'traditional community', what

Robinson calls the 'curative powers of community' (Flint and Robinson 2008), where individual engagement is seen as a crucial component to produce that which makes civil society 'civil'.

Similarly, as with reconciliation in the liberal peace framework, the community cohesion agenda suggests that the government cannot create 'cohesion' on its own, but that individuals and communities have to be active 'agents' in the process (Thomas 2011). The focus on agency and individual responsibility can lead to attributing the failure of integration to deficits on the part of individuals without addressing the structural and cultural issues of racism as barriers to equal opportunities. Emblematic in this sense is the analysis of Kundnani of the riots that sparked policy changes in 2001: segregation in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford was neither a cultural problem nor "the result of a liberal over-emphasis on diversity but an interaction between industrial decline, 'white flight' and institutional racism" (Kundnani 2007). In 2007, the Commission for Integration and Cohesion released the document 'Our shared future' that proposed increased attention to be paid to the importance of the 'everyday' to achieve a cohesive and integrated society:

> "the most valuable contribution though comes from all of us as local citizens. Yes, it is true that government – local and central – is essential to the mix of activity. It is also the case that the third sector is critical. However, it is through *millions of small everyday actions* that we can all either improve or harm our local communities [my italics]" (CIC 2007, pp.4-5).

This document was read by some commentators as the exemplification of the risk of relying on the 'curative power' of community overshadowing structural problems (McGhee 2008). Despite community cohesion policies are being potentially directed at all members of society, many commentators have pointed out that, throughout the years up until today, the responsibility for the community cohesion agenda is placed particularly on migrant and black and minority communities rather than homogeneous white British communities (Flint and Robinson 2008; Holmwood 2018). Moreover, as Cowden and Singh have noted, communitarian thinking can take a neoliberal turn when social breakdowns are framed "essentially as a problem of 'interpersonal interactions and values' (2012: 176) allowing questions of material inequalities and state power to be displaced from the policy discourse" (Cowden and Singh 2017, p.275).

The community cohesion discourse promotes the importance of building a shared identity based on 'commonalities' among people rather than 'diversity' (Thomas 2011). Compared to the previous multiculturalist discourse, based on multiple cultures, traditions and identities, community cohesion prompted citizens "to participate in forging and upholding an overarching culture of Britishness and British values" (Lowndes and Thorp 2011, p.517). This was carried out, for example, with the introduction in 2007 of citizenship tests, language tests, and ceremonial oaths of allegiance to the Queen besides the questioning public funding for individual ethnic or religious community facilities and organisations (Thomas 2011).

This shift from rights and social justice typical of multiculturalism (Kundnani 2007) to the construction of a common identity was criticised as a form of governmentality acting to modify attitudes and behaviours and resulting in the problematisation and exclusion of certain communities that could assert identities and values at odds with the dominant moral order.

Then "the communitarian political project therefore centres on identifying valued forms of community and devising policies designed to promote and protect such communities where they already exist and to reconfigure community forms that stray from this ideal" (Flint and Robinson 2008, p.20). Some commentators (Werbner 2005; Burnett 2007) argued that community cohesion is therefore conceived as being about "enhancing the power of a majority 'community' who have the 'right' values, vis-à-vis minority groups" (Lowndes and Thorp 2011, p.517) while particular communities, such as asylum seekers, Muslims, Eastern European migrants are targeted and presented as 'the problem' (Alexander 2004; Craig 2007).

In this respect, while in Bosnia the target of reconciliatory initiatives was, potentially, the whole population, as all were touched by the effects of the war, in the UK, there seems to be an imbalance in the categorization of who is supposed to be the 'beneficiary', showing the connection between community cohesion and the ethics of hospitality. The British community, the majority, acts as 'host' to migrant minority communities. Even if host communities are made to 'feel at home' (Cantle 2001), hospitality is not granted in absolute terms (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000). Community cohesion "outlines a hospitality constituted by pacts, exchanges and expectations that delimit those who are welcome" (Chan 2010, p.41). As recent policies which favour the hostile environment over the consequences of the Brexit referendum have shown, if hospitality is made possible, it is also possible to revoke it.

While there is not only one way of understanding the implementation of reconciliation or community cohesion initiatives, and both of them escape single definitions, I have

highlighted some of the main critiques to the concepts, respectively in relation to the Bosnian and the UK context. I have demonstrated that these concepts raise similar problems, although their relation with time, past and present, differs. They are both future oriented, but community cohesion does not usually present the backward-looking character typical of reconciliation. There are exceptions, such as in the case of Brexit some references were made to the necessity to go back to a previous state of 'tolerant Britishness' through processes of 'healing' and 'closure'. Moreover, as will emerge from my fieldwork in Dorset, CSO staff interpreted their role as that of restoring 'community cohesion' to what it was before the disruption caused by the referendum. In both cases, these policy concepts aimed at 'bringing people together' by disciplining and orienting behaviours pointing to the creation of an 'ideal' community that serve specific aims. Both place importance on the 'humanisation' of the 'other' and on the 'local' as place of negotiation and resolution. I have also highlighted that the practical implementation of both can be problematic because of the risk of reification of identities and of an excessive responsibility being placed on individual agency while neglecting structural problems.

By tracing a parallel between reconciliation and community cohesion, my aim was to show that paradigms of intervention to bridge societal divisions are shaped within wider relations of power that can obscure similarities. Critically addressing biased ways of seeing things can help uncovering these and, in particular, understanding the processes and mechanisms which CSOs should consider when employing these paradigms to solve the problems at stake in their respective contexts.

2.4 Civil society

The previous section demonstrated how in both case-studies, scholars as well as practitioners adopt intervention paradigms that are assumed to provide solutions to societal divisions identifying problems based on specific representations of the people and places affected. The fourth and final part of this conceptual framework aiming at justifying the comparison of the two contexts at the centre of this study concerns the actors who are supposed to implement on the ground the solutions to the societal divisions mentioned above. In particular, I will focus on civil society, in its narrowed definition of non-governmental organization (NGOs) and charity organizations, as one of the main conduits through which

‘reconciliation’ and ‘community cohesion’ are implemented on the ground in the respective contexts.

In the following section (2.4.1) I will briefly introduce the concept of civil society and clarify how the ‘civil society sectors’ in Western and Eastern Europe developed following different trajectories in the 1990s and 2000s and how in both contexts they were intended to deal with ‘social problems’. In the case of Bosnia, the civil society sector became the expression of the local turn in the liberal peace framework, while in the UK, it was adopted as part of government strategies in the light of the reconfiguration of the welfare state.

In section 2.4.2 I will show how civil society organizations can have a ‘governing’ role, in the Foucauldian sense, as the involved actors are able to influence people’s values and behaviours, suggesting visions of how a society should look like. Of particular interest for this project are the ways in which discourses and ideas, expressed through intervention paradigms mentioned above, aimed at bridging societal divisions circulate, are translated into practices by the civil society sector and are perceived by the intended beneficiaries. In section 2.4.3. I will show how such discourses might clash with strategies people put in place individually to deal with divisions on the ground, through the academic literature on the Bosnian experience with CSOs interventions after the war.

2.4.1 Between East and West

In this section I will briefly introduce and clarify the concept of civil society in both the East and West to show how different discourses developed around the concept of civil society (Anderson 1996).

The use of the term ‘civil society’ is broad, and it has been covered by the work of scholars as diverse as Ferguson, Marx, Hegel, Adam Smith, Tocqueville and Gramsci. One of the main features of the concept of civil society is that it has been employed to reflect on the relation between society and the state. Western contemporary understanding of the concept of civil society has its roots in the Enlightenment when French, Scottish and German theorists reflected upon “the problematic relation between private and the public, the individual and the social, public ethics and individual interests, individual passions and public concerns” (Downey and Fenton 2003). In the second half of the eighteenth century, the term 'civil society' was tied to liberal individualism and came to signify a space between families and kin groups,

market and the state and was characterised by self-organizing and spontaneous character (Hall 2013).

In the 1990s, the concept of civil society took the centre of the scene both in Eastern and Western Europe and the discussion intensified around its role in dealing with the reconfigurations of the relations between state and society in the chaotic post-Cold War period. At that time, in both contexts civil society was conceptualised as an actor of change and specifically, in moral terms, of a change aimed at achieving benign social goals (Tonkiss et al. 2000). Civil society was associated with notions of trust, reciprocity and cooperation intended as prerequisites for good government performance and economic development ideals (Putnam et al. 1994).

In Central and Eastern Europe, the discussion on civil society took place in relation to the transition of countries undergoing legal, political and economic changes towards the construction of democratic structures and market economies (Hann and Dunn 1996). The concept, originating in European intellectual discourse, and already so diversely declined in different Western European countries, was applied to very different contexts as a 'shining emblem' (Gellner 1994, p.1). It carried a strong normative dimension, and "a distinctive vision of a desirable social order" (Hann and Dunn 1996, p.2). Among all the different levels of the transformation expected for the transition from Communist rule to democracy, citizens also needed to change and adopt new attitudes and social values. Therefore, much emphasis was put on 'bottom-up' structures which were supposed to be empowered in order to develop counternarratives in opposition to despotism. Aligned with the growing international focus on development in the region, the post-Cold War era of a complex network of civil society actors proliferated. Their ideas were mostly based on a simplified representation of a Western reality and an idealised aspiration of what civil society should be and do. Far from being just a bottom-up process, it grew into what Kaldor (2003) called the 'global civil society': a network that encompassed complex processes of peacebuilding, state-building and post-war reconstruction, with the interaction of many actors at different levels, national, regional and international. Putnam's communitarian ideals of democratization as working towards the greater good had direct influence on development ideals/industry or practice (Brass et al. 2018).

In the same period, in the West, liberal democracies revived the concept of civil society as part of government strategies in the light of the reconfiguration of the welfare state. Civil society was given the role to deal with a wide range of social problems acting as a 'balancing

force' (O'Connell and Gardner 1999). It constituted a means of regulating individual and collective behaviour in terms of delineation and limitation of state power (Tonkiss et al. 2000). In the UK in particular, from the time when Margaret Thatcher uttered her famous aphorism – 'there is no such thing as society' (The Sunday Times, 1988) politics changed its course - from Labour's Third Way, followed by the Conservatives' Big Society in 2010, which stressed the importance of building a strong civil society. Both policies shifted responsibilities from the state to the people, giving more relevance to community-based initiatives and voluntary organizations (Jordan 2012). Stating the importance to empower voluntary and community enterprise in society to mend 'Broken Britain', David Cameron renamed the former Office of the Third Sector within the Cabinet Office, the Office for Civil Society. He also rebranded the 'third sector' as the 'first sector' of the new economy (Evans 2011).

In both the East and the West, in the 1990s, the concept of civil society became conflated with the so-called 'civil society sector', also known as voluntary, non-profit, independent, or third sector (Salamon and Anheier 1997). NGOs, charities, voluntary associations and similar groups are taken as examples of trust-based relations within society. For their social vicinity to people, these entities were considered to be in a more effective position to identify needs, problems and implement solutions, both in terms of service delivery and for the improvement of relations between people and antagonistic groups.

However, the ways in which civil society was interpreted, implemented and understood on the ground are not static but change in different social and political contexts. As Hann puts it, the overlap between civil society and non-governmental organisations is the "discourse of one type of regime" (Hann and Dunn 1996, p.19) linked with deregulated and increasingly globalised economies. But it is just one example of many possible others. In the context of this study, the ways in which the civil society sector and associate discourses and ideas aimed at bridging societal divisions circulate, are translated into practices and are perceived by the intended beneficiaries is of relevance. So, from now I will refer to civil society organizations (CSOs) as a term that generally includes non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the term mostly used in the Bosnian context, and charities, the term mostly used in the UK.

2.4.2 Civil society and political power

The function attributed to CSOs as actors able to influence values and behaviours refers to the concept of governmentality. Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' provides insights into the technologies of power at play in these processes (Lewis 2017). Governmentality can

be defined as 'the conduct of conduct', that is the rationales and the strategies aimed at influencing or guiding the comportment of others. Governmentality scholars "note that government is inherently a problematizing sphere of activity – one in which the responsibilities of administrative authorities tend to be framed in terms of problems that need to be addressed" (Inda 2008, p.8). Nevertheless, Foucault does not reduce governmentality to a characteristic typical only of the state and its institutions but broadens this concept to: "any rational effort to influence or guide the conduct of human beings through acting upon their hopes, desires, circumstances, or environment" (Inda 2008, p.1). Therefore, governmentality can pertain to the relations between a multitude of different entities: states exercising political sovereignty, international organizations, translational and local civil society, local communities, as well as interpersonal relations.

Looking at the actors that are part of the civil society sector through the lenses of governmentality shows their capacity to exert political power. Foucault does not intend political power as an exclusive monopoly of the state, but it considers it referring "to all endeavours to shape, guide, direct the conduct of others, whether these be the crew of a ship, the members of a household, the employees of a boss, the children of a family or the inhabitants of a territory" (Rose 1999, p.3). In the Post-Cold era, globalization and 'new wars' 'spatialized power along different dimensions' rather than only along the borders of the nation state. Hence the state appears more and more as only one element of government and not the main actor of political power. Instead, there are "multiple circuits of power, connecting a diversity of authorities and forces, within a whole variety of complex assemblages" (Rose 1999, p.5). Civil society organizations can be considered part of this circuit. They are rendered governable, for example through their dependency on policy frameworks and funding bodies. At the same time, they can govern, for example through advocacy (on policy making) or by participating in the process of shaping the conduct of their 'beneficiaries'.

In fact, governmentality is intended by Foucault as a combination between technologies of government and technologies of the self: technologies of government are "a domain of strategies, techniques and procedures through which different forces seek to render programmes operable, and by means of which a multitude of connections are established between the aspirations of authorities and the activities of individuals and groups" (Rose and Miller 1992, p.183). Technologies of the self "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being" (Foucault et al. 1988, p.18).

Hence, subjects are not passive objects on which power is exerted, but key players in the operation of power with capacity for action. The relation with the subjects with which CSOs interact with is not one of domination or imposition but they contribute in 'making up' citizens without destroying their capacity for actions, signifying a kind of regulated freedom (Rose and Miller 1992). Civil society organizations can exert a form of power which works upon the individual while, at the same time, individuals exert their own technologies of regulating self and shaping their own conduct in response to an external discourse. Therefore, when we look at the practical effects of CSOs, there might be a discrepancy between the intended aims and what actually takes place at the level of the supposed beneficiaries of the interventions. This becomes clear in the case of the Bosnian post-war experience as I will show in the next section.

2.4.3 Post-war Bosnia's 'necessary corrective'

One of the tools through which the international community aimed to achieve securitization and democratisation as part of sustainable peacebuilding in post-war Bosnia, was the development of the civil society sector. As Fagan notes, a significant amount of money was invested based on the assumption that "a vibrant sector of local advocacy networks can entrench democratic values, heal the wounds of ethnic conflict, and facilitate economic growth, bringing an end to the international administration of Bosnia (BiH)" (Fagan 2005, p.100). CSOs' supposed autonomy and ability to "pluralize the institutional arena and bring more democratic actors into the political sphere" (Mercer 2002, p.10) led to the suggestion that their mere presence in post-conflict BiH is evidence of democratization (Jeffrey 2007).

The wider, critical anthropological debate which overlaps with development studies and international politics, suggests that Western countries exported models that underpinned active social engineering projects (Bierschenk 2014) to the 'Global South' (in this case, the 'Global East'[6]). In a Western, self-superiorising project justifying developmental intervention, the 'Other' was to be modified and shaped in order to acquire Western standards of democracy. The concept of 'civil society' thus emerges as a normatively loaded concept that implies 'civility' (Hann and Dunn 1996). As Putnam's work, which informed such developments projects, suggests, non-Western (read: 'primitive') societies, guided through Western models

[6] 'Global East' has been used to refer to Asia (Müller 2020). However, here, it is used used as a derivative of the Balkanist debate indicating geopolitical inequalities. The Wester Balkans are, of course, 'East', not 'South' in relation to the capitalist centre of Western Europe.

had to replace primordial ties with ties of interest and citizenship in order to "provide horizontal linkages and produce social capital that, in turn, may foster alternative political ideas and groups to keep incumbent governments in check" (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993; Putnam, 2000; Robinson, 1993).

On the one hand, civil society interventions have thus been criticised for their disciplining character, seen as a precondition for limiting conflict and boosting tolerance and pluralism (Bojičić-Dželilović et al. 2013). On the other, much anthropological literature on the topic has also pointed to the unintended consequences arising out of the ignoring of specific, local experience and knowledge. For example, they point to the pitfalls of ignoring specific historical trajectories and culturally-specific notions of civil society among the intended beneficiaries, such as the role of the Church in post-socialist Poland (Buchowski 1996); the role of traditional elders in local neighbourhoods (Mandel 2002); or the tendency to treat all voluntary organizations as inherently good in opposition to non-voluntary organizations based on traditional allegiances, blood ties or birth – like castes, clans, tribes, ethnic and religious groups (Parekh 2004). Parekh argues, they cannot be dismissed as all being 'inherently bad' as, by encouraging social obligations, mutual commitment and a spirit of sacrifice, they have performed critical functions for 'good society' (Parekh 2004, p.16). They also demonstrate how these culturally-embedded ideas may or may not lead to resistance against what might be perceived as a Western cultural imposition (e.g. Mandel 2002); or to new, syncretistic cultural and social outcomes or a new, donor-dependant 'project cultures' (Sampson 2002). Such outcomes might transform or subvert the original intervention's intentions (e.g. producing new elites and social inequalities). In the anthropology of intervention, the debate has focussed exactly on these unintended outcomes, for example in regard to right-wing populist and nationalist, local transformations of the civil society model (e.g. Schwandner-Sievers 2013).

Even though Bosnia, during Yugoslavian times, counted hundreds of organizations that today would be associated with 'civil society', the international community still treated Bosnia as a 'clean slate' and acted as if civil society was non-existent prior to post-war transition (Koutkova 2016). Rather than trying to retrieve social networks existing before the war, the international community introduced a new system, with its corollary of expert lexicon and procedures, which was therefore perceived as a Western imposition. Moreover, a reductive definition of civil society was applied in practice: "the aid industry's narrow definition of civil society conflates the term with professional NGOs who can master the donors' terminology and ways of working, and who can satisfy strict accountability processes" to international

donors in Bosnia (Banks et al. 2015, p.709), thereby neglecting other forms of pre-existing formal or informal associations and civil society experience and knowledge.

Furthermore, such interventions were flawed through unrealistic expectations. Civil society was expected to function as the 'necessary corrective' (Bojičić-Dželilović et al. 2013) of a weak and fragmented state and of ineffective internationally-led solutions. Despite the huge amount of funds invested in the sector, for a long time its role was considered 'palliative rather than transformative' (Banks et al. 2015). This system of structures and practices, that Sampson called 'project society' (2002), for Bosnia, has been accused of being too donor-dependent and donor-oriented, to promote 'hit and run' projects without independent sustainability, or to exist only on paper for their creators to obtain funds. This contributed to generating a general distrust of the local population towards internationally funded CSOs, disillusioned by the persisting divisions and inequalities. Sampson argues that the civil society sector raised unrealistic expectations of solving Bosnian problems as if these sectors were somehow independent of other structural aspects, such as, among others, an effective government.

In the field of international intervention, Bosnia has been described as an experimental ground for civil society and reconciliation projects (Bieber 2002). Among all kinds of interventions, those focussing specifically on 'reconciliation' were, within the framework of the liberal peace, those directed at securitizing the population by aiming to re-build good relations between conflicting parties. As argued above, the concept of reconciliation was defined in a very normative way, providing the same 'recipe' for different contexts and not considering that "norms of justice, human rights, and peace are not neutral and may be dissonant with local understandings of how security and peaceful relations are restored" (Eastmond 2010, p.5). Moreover, the objectives of these initiatives, often centred on 'overcoming ethnic divisions', 'dealing with the past', 'improving interethnic dialogue and coexistence', were expressed very 'loudly' and based on being explicitly staged, widely announced and pronounced high morality which rarely chimed with people's everyday needs and the ways they saw their reality. This led international reconciliation initiatives to be perceived as an intrusive Western-imposed idea, there to serve more the needs of the intervening parties than those of the people on the ground.

Bosnia's experience with these interventions provides a clear example of how technologies of governing, proper of the 'global reconciliation industry' (Wilson 2003)

emerged to formulate and implement policies to reconstruct post-conflict countries, clashed with technologies of the self, meaning people's own conceptions of reconciliation and their own strategies of dealing with the effects of war, as the fieldwork chapter will demonstrate. Among the main critiques of reconciliatory interventions, emerging from the anthropological literature, is how these interventions might clash with the notion of 'normal lives' as mentioned in section 2.2.1., and with the strategies which people are implementing on the ground themselves, to deal with the 'abnormal precariousness' (Jansen 2010) of their post-war reality. These strategies privilege informal ways to rebuilding social relations, sometimes including even silence and inconspicuous social interactions (Eastmond 2010; Helms 2010; Jansen et al. 2017), over flaunted declarations on the positivity of multi-ethnic coexistence. However, the latter is what internationally-funded CSOs have articulated.

The notion of normality can help to shift the attention from loud interventions based on externally defined problems to 'quieter' interventions based on how the intended beneficiaries would like to define their reality. This anthropological body of literature supports my supposition that often prejudicial, generalising or misled representations obscure a need of normality over the externally-oriented definition of the problems to be dealt with. For example, Pupavac and Hughes note that many reconciliatory interventions were driven by the 'therapeutic paradigm' deriving from moving the site of conflict from society and international relations to irrational individuals, "whose acts are not the continuation of politics but of psychology" (Hughes and Pupavac 2005, p.857). Therefore, interventions are aimed at 'healing' war-affected populations from mass trauma that supposedly traps them in cycles of never-ending violence. Jansen, on the other hand, notes that interventions focused on international encounters, had the opposite result of entrenching divisions offering a reductionist definition of the sides of the war in a national sense hence reinforcing ethnic categorization (Jansen 2013, p.232). Moreover, the above-mentioned representations insisting on an identitarian matrix of the conflict or on trauma as a category that affects a whole population, obscure the comparability between Bosnia and a non-post war country also in terms of the kinds of intervention that could help to bridge the societal divisions in place, rendering invisible other inequalities or structural factors perpetuating divisions (Hughes 2017).

In this first part of the thesis, I analysed discourses at the macro-level and I presented a conceptual framework to justify the comparison between the two contexts of study. I

highlighted how similar problems are hidden by geo-political hierarchies of power and how people are affected by similar experiences of loss of social normality. Then I presented how comparable solutions are proposed, in the form of intervention paradigms specific for each context and, finally, how civil society organizations act as conduits to implement such solutions on the ground. In the second part I will present my ethnographies: in chapter 3 I will present my fieldwork in Srebrenica, conducted between May and June 2018, while in chapter 4 I will present my fieldwork in Dorset, conducted between February and September 2019.

PART 2

Introduction to the fieldwork chapters

As already explained in the method section, during my fieldwork I adopted a multi-sited ethnographic approach. Following the project's perspective of 'inverting the gaze', I looked at the experience of Bosnia with international interventions first in order to formulate questions that I later applied to the UK context. In both sites of research, I explored how experiences of bridging divisions are narrated, with a focus on the interaction between wider discourses produced by intervention paradigms and micro-discourses related to people's experiences of divisions and CSO practices. In both contexts I explored how the results of such encounter impact CSO's practices and their chances of success, according to CSO staff and participants.

However, despite looking at the same aspects in each context, the reader should not expect that the two fieldwork chapters mirror each other. In this introduction I will briefly explain how some of the deep differences between the two contexts of study, as well as the different circumstances I encountered on the field when I conducted my research, influenced the structure of the two chapters. The most evident difference is that, despite my fieldwork in Srebrenica lasting considerably less time compared to that in Dorset, a greater focus on CSO practices pervades the whole chapter on Bosnia. Moreover, besides the voices of CSO staff, in Bosnia I managed to collect more voices of participants to CSO initiatives compared to the UK.

When I interrogated people in Srebrenica on their experiences with reconciliatory interventions, they referred to a variety of initiatives in a period spanning from the end of the war until the time of my research, covering, in some cases, more than 20 years. Some of those I interviewed took part in these initiatives throughout the years at different stages of their lives. Some who are today members of staff and promote reconciliatory interventions on the ground, happened to be themselves participants in similar initiatives in the past. Such initiatives appear to be a significant part of the life of many people and represent a visible presence in the life of the small Bosnian town. Srebrenica, because of its symbolic value for what happened during the war, attracted a high level of international attention and funding and, as my fieldwork will show, is one of the main destinations of projects that aim at dealing with the past in the Ex-Yugoslav region.

Therefore, the structure of the following chapter on Bosnia is chronological and starts with the experiences of CSOs' work in the immediate aftermath of the war to explore what CSO work towards 'reconciliation' meant back then and what strategies were adopted by my interviewees at the time to improve coexistence after the horrors of a war. The chapter continues with the description of initiatives developed in the years 2000s, in particular Adopt Srebrenica, funded in 2005, and ends with the analysis of other practices I observed directly during my fieldwork in 2018. The experiences from the post-war period help to better understand people's critiques to CSO initiatives in the present day and the challenges CSOs face today when trying to succeed.

In the UK context, only two and a half years had passed from the date of the referendum to the start of my fieldwork, therefore, an obvious difference with the Bosnian context is one of timeframe. However, compared to Bosnia, where all CSOs I interviewed were funded after the war, in Dorset, the CSOs I collaborated with had a long history that preceded the Brexit referendum. Dorset Race Equality Council, for example, was funded in 1999. Therefore, the changes brought by the referendum intersected with a pre-existent trajectory of work to support victims of hate crime and minority communities in Dorset. As it will emerge from the fieldwork description, CSOs in Dorset are embedded in a network of relations already in place before Brexit that involves not only other CSOs but also local institutions such as Dorset Council and Dorset Police. This presents another difference to Bosnia, where the CSOs I observed mainly rely upon international support rather than national.

This difference in timeframe is the reason why the first part of the UK chapter is dedicated to the description of how the Brexit referendum disrupted 'community cohesion' and how CSOs reacted to deal and adapt to the unprecedented circumstances dictated by the Brexit referendum. I will focus on the experiences of people, in particular of the, as defined by interviewees, 'change of climate' after the referendum, characterized by a rise in hate crimes and in episodes of discrimination against categories of people identified as different from the majority. One section is dedicated to the experiences of EU citizens living in Dorset. I will show how their social normality in terms of identity reconfiguration, legal rights and life possibilities underwent considerable changes. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to the description of two CSO practices I observed during my fieldwork. In this case, the voices of participants were difficult to capture due to the low participation during the activities observed and the difficulty of engaging with participants during the activities observed. In this respect, another difference emerges between the two contexts regarding who the people

involved in these initiatives were. In Bosnia, in most cases, ethnic proportionality is considered to be a *conditio sine qua non* for reconciliatory interventions (with the problems that I highlighted), while in the UK, as I will show, the initiatives I observed involved mainly groups known as minority communities.

Despite these differences between Bosnia and the UK, from the analysis of the data collected three macro-themes emerged as relevant in both contexts when analysing the interaction between wider discourses produced by intervention paradigms and micro-discourses related to people's experiences of divisions and CSO practices. The first theme concerns how people carrying out and taking part in CSO initiatives describe change. In both contexts CSOs try to produce change at the level of single individuals and at the level of the wider society. It emerges that expectations, as enunciated in general CSOs' objectives, often do not match actual results on the ground as CSO face limitations (to be mentioned) that are always contingent on the specificities of the given context.

The second macro-theme that emerged concerns the strategies which CSOs use to enable change and counteract such contextual limitations. In both contexts CSOs deal with the necessity of widening their audiences. This is a task that proves difficult, in both contexts yet for different reasons, such as when CSOs in Bosnia try to bring people together to address sensitive issues that are considered divisive, e.g the war past. As I will show, In the UK, staff expressed the difficulty of involving people beyond those who are not already interested in the topic of diversity and those belonging to the white British 'majority'.

Finally, in both contexts the work of CSOs is linked to stereotypical representations of the respective contexts. From the words of the interviewees emerged a polarised representation of Srebrenica: a 'place of death', whose image seems indissolubly connected to the war past, and a 'place of life', linked to people's desire of moving forward. As I will show, CSOs in Srebrenica have to deal with these representations when delivering initiatives on the ground. CSOs in Dorset, on the other hand, try to debunk the image of 'Idyllic Dorset', a coastal tourist destination, predominantly rich and white, presented as 'unproblematic' in the sense of being free of racial diversity and social conflict. This is a representation which CSOs, long before Brexit, aimed to debunk by trying to bring to wider attention the needs and challenges faced by non-majority communities.

In the final discussion of this thesis, I will pull these guiding themes together to show that the comparison with the Bosnian experience can offer a new way of looking at how general

objectives connected to intervention paradigms correspond to actual changes on the ground in the case of CSOs work in post-Brexit referendum UK.

The following chapter presenting my fieldwork in Srebrenica is divided in five parts: 1. I will present the challenges met right after the end of the war by those who started working in the emerging civil society sector and what reconciliatory projects meant for people, the intended beneficiaries, activists and practitioners at that time. 2. Through selected aspects of the project Adopt Srebrenica, within which I was ethnographically embedded, I will explore what it meant for individual participants to deal with the past in Srebrenica. The focus here is on activities aimed at constructing a multi-ethnic group of youth in the mid-2000s. 3. Subsequently I will demonstrate how the uses of 'reconciliation' as an intervention paradigm can create contrasting stereotypical representations of Srebrenica contingent on people's needs and ideas of normality. 4. Through describing the activities observed of the Peace Camp directed at youth dealing with the past, I will trace how today's organizations are trying to mitigate the flaws of the 'project society' (Sampson 2002) taking into account people's needs of normality. 5. The chapter will conclude with another ethnographic description: an initiative of Adopt Srebrenica which allows me to summarise this CSO's attempts to have an impact not only on individual participants, but on wider local society as well.

3. 'Bringing people together' in Srebrenica - Learning on the ground

3.1. 'Making the impossible': rebuilding normality through re-humanisation

One of the key figures during my fieldwork in Srebrenica was Valentina, who I knew through my previous work at the Alexander Langer Foundations. She is one of the founding members of Adopt Srebrenica ('Adopt' from now on) and she is also the director of another CSO, Sara Srebrenica ('CSO Sara' from now on). We spent a lot of time together during my fieldwork in Srebrenica. She introduced me to other interviewees and allowed me to conduct participant observation of CSO Sara's activities such as the Peace Camp that I will describe in section 3.4.1. CSO Sara's office was one of the places in town where I used to spend time with Valentina and her colleague Stana. The office occupies a big space on the second floor of the *Dom Kulture*[7] in the centre of Srebrenica. A long table runs along a row of big windows overlooking the roundabout. The place looks lively, with visible traces of the many activities that take place all year long: posters of past projects on the walls and shelves full of brushes, paint, knitted clothes and decorated wooden boxes. I have visited this space many times throughout the years, and I remember the long table surrounded by young people and sometimes covered in tasty homemade food to welcome visitors from different countries. I have also seen the office during more quiet times, with Valentina and Stana sipping coffee on the comfortable couches while chatting with occasional visitors.

Valentina and Stana founded Sara Srebrenica in 1999. They had met a couple of years before, during a training for caregivers in a project promoted by an Italian organization. Valentina was in her 20s and when she moved to the area of Srebrenica, towards the end of 1995, she found on the ground many international non-governmental organizations looking for local staff. In the end, the caregivers project never took off because the Italian organization left Bosnia to redirect its resources to Kosovo, where the war had just started. As a consequence, Valentina and Stana decided to found 'their own' CSO. In 1999, after one year of research looking for members who could share their ideas, they founded Sara Srebrenica, to support women and children especially. With the help of funding by Care International, they were able to restore a large space in the *Dom Kulture*:

[7] Domovi Kulture (Houses of Culture) are institutions distributed territorially at a capillary level built during the Yugoslav period with the task of organizing cultural, educational and entertainment activities for the general public (Jajčević 2020).

> "We started as amateurs, but with a lot of heart and enthusiasm we believed we were going to make some changes. We invested every moment in the organization. We used to bring things from our homes, we used to steal coffee cups, two me and two Stana. The space was very big and cold, and, in the winter, we used to steal a couple of logs - ours of course! [laughs] - parking the car behind the house, so that no one noticed. With our own money we bought a rug…one day we got a computer…" (Val, 2018)

Despite funding from a large international organization which gave support to restore the venue, Valentina's words show how, to get everyday activities going, they had to build everything from scratch, step by step, often resorting to their own possessions and money. In the years right after the war, when the signs of the destructions were still visible everywhere, the coffee cups, a must of Bosnian hospitality, and the rug represented the basic elements to make the place feel welcoming for guests and staff. For the two activists, these items were no less important than getting the first computer in the new office.

Valentina referred to those memories, stressing the enthusiasm of building up something new with the intention of bringing about 'social change' in a town such as Srebrenica, heavily hit by the war. At the same time, as Valentina said, she and her colleague were feeling 'amateurs', as they had to get acquainted with all the requirements to be part of the new 'project culture' (Sampson 2000) of non-governmental organizations. The first project they applied for was a four-year project by the Open Society Foundation through which they started educational and leisure activities for young people. They got ten computers which people could use on their premises, as well as sewing machines for women. They organized courses of journalism, photography, painting, and many events such as masked balls, movie screenings and poetry nights. She recalled how a considerable number of young people participated in these initiatives. Their office was busy from 9 am to 9 pm at night: "It was really fun; we had a huge heater from UNPROFOR, where we made fire. It made so much smoke that, in the evening, we were all black. But it was great for us…". (Val, 2018)

The story of how Valentina and Stana started their work in the civil society sector has some aspects in common with that of Željana. I met her in CSO Sara's office during a meeting between different partner organizations from Srebrenica and Bratunac, a town six miles away. Željana is the director of *Priroda* (Nature), an organization that had partnered with CSO Sara for a long time and which works to support women, focussing on economic empowerment, education, and the promotion of gender equality. I asked Željana how *Priroda* was born, and

she said it all started as "quite a coincidence", based on the experiences of an informal group of women. Like Željana, who used to live in Sarajevo before the war, many others from other parts of Bosnia ended up in Bratunac (Nettelfield and Wagner 2014). These women and her started spending time together exchanging clothes, helping each other out in looking after their children and facing together the difficulties of the post-war period: "When we arrived here, we had no clue. There is no job, just poverty, you don't have your home, you've got nothing, the situation after the war was awful" (Žel, 2018). Željana, who studied Economics, before the war used to work in administration for the Railway Transport Company in Sarajevo. In Bratunac, she found a job at the local Council: "…and then that organization Oxfam came to the Council and asked if there was any organized group of women and so they called us, because it was not formally organized, and then we registered and did everything else [we needed to do]" (Žel., 2018). Oxfam's offer to transform an informal group of women, born out of the need to cope with the immediate needs of the post-war period, into a formal organization, was part of the diffuse top-down approach implemented by international donors to develop the civil society sector. In particular, since the 1990s new conflict management approaches were informed by social psychological models taking up the idea of women as peacemakers and 'agents of ethnic reconciliation' (Helms 2003b).

Like Valentina, who used the word 'amateur', Željana described the beginning of *Priroda* as a period of constant learning of how to comply with the language required by the new 'project life' (Sampson 2002) and the tasks required by the non-governmental sector such as writing projects, contacting donors, organizing activities and involving participants: "I think it is interesting that they came to us and asked us what is our 'mission'. We didn't know we needed to have a mission…what was our main objective" (Žel., 2018). By the time she started collaborating full time with the organization she was made redundant at the Council. Then, what had been a side activity became her full-time job.

For both Željana and Valentina, working in the CSO sector represented an employment opportunity allowing them to enhance control over their lives in a highly volatile environment. At the same time, their opportunities were also dependent on the top-down approach implemented by international CSOs. These were training individuals to become active in the society through a process known as 'building up competences' that were seen as useful in the newly-imported non-governmental sector and transforming informal groups into formal organizations. The process did not always go smoothly, as the episode shows, narrated by Valentina, of how an Italian organization left Bosnia for the next emergency. Many other CSOs

left projects halfway, a fact contributing to creating a sense of widespread mistrust towards post-war international intervention intentions and practices.

Among the activities that CSO Sara carried out in the initial phase, there was the supporting of Bosniac[8] returnees on the territory of Srebrenica. As part of a project by the Catholic Relief Service, they used to visit returnees and collect interviews to understand their needs "so that they could feel welcome and could slowly come back to their town" (Val., 2018). They also worked with local Bosniac politicians, who had already returned to Srebrenica in previous years, to research their conditions of security and people's levels of satisfaction with the return process. Despite significant sums of money flowing into Bosnia from international sources, Srebrenica and other neighbouring areas lagged behind other parts of the country due to the international embargo on areas of the Republika Srpska (until June 1999) (International Crisis Group 1999). Therefore, compared to other parts of Bosnia, the Podrinje region, and Srebrenica in particular, remained mainly inhospitable for Bosniacs who wanted to return to their previous homes and permanently re-settle in the area.

Refugee return was an important paradigm of international intervention and part of policies rooted in the strategy of containment designed to limit the undesirable consequences of forced migration. Therefore, people were encouraged and supported to return 'home'. As commonly known, during the war, these strategies were enforced with the creation of 'safe areas', of which Srebrenica represented the most fatal failure (Nettelfield and Wagner 2014). After the war, this meant attempting to re-establish pre-war population patterns (where the members of the three dominant ethno-national groups — Serbs, Croats and Bosniacs —lived in intermingled ways) disrupted by campaigns of 'ethnic cleansing' (Helms 2010). What was called 'minority returns' was actually the return of pre-war residents to territories inhabited predominantly by the opposing ethnic group, although these returnees had been the majority before the war, such as in the case of Srebrenica. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, supported by the NATO-led Stabilization Force, the Federation Police and the Republika Srpska authorities, arranged visits of Bosniac refugees to their previous homes to envisage the

[8] In 1993 the term 'Bosniac' (*Bošnjak*) became the official national name for Muslims in Bosnia. This term is not to be confused with 'Bosnian' (*Bosanac*), referring to all the inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina. See Xavier Bougarel, "Comment peut-on être Bochniaque?" [How Can One Be Bosniac?], in Alain Dieckhoff and Riva Kastoryano (eds.), Nationalismes en mutation en Méditerranée orientale [Changing Nationalisms in the Eastern Mediterranean], Paris: CNRS éditions, 2002, pp. 173 -193.

possibility of a return. However, the majority of houses had been partially or totally destroyed and the infrastructures heavily damaged. For many potential returnees the feeling of being unwanted and unsafe prevented them from considering return as an option. Things started to change at the beginning of 2000s, when Srebrenica municipality became the target for a special reconstruction aid delivered by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The level of security increased, and many people returned. They started the long processes to rebuild their destroyed houses or regaining the rights on their properties which, in many cases, had become occupied by Bosnian Serb refugees from other areas.

International return policies were partly motivated by the tensions between displaced people and the host communities. Many refugees from Srebrenica and the Podrinje region found shelter in collective centres and in reconverted buildings in the cities of Sarajevo and Tuzla. For many, facing the hard conditions of the return seemed to be a better option than that. For others, the return represented an act of defiance, affirming their right to be back: their presence becoming a statement to challenge the dominant nationalist narrative that wished to wipe them away (Eastmond and Selimovic 2012).

In this complex environment, despite their original enthusiasm, Valentina also remembered the difficulties that they encountered at the beginning of their work. Being "young, women and Serbs", Valentina said, did not help them in gaining social and institutional recognition in the early stages. Despite international attempts to put women at the centre of the reconciliatory discourse, it must be considered that, after 50 years of socialism, the war had led to a repatriarchalization and retraditionalization of the Bosnian society (Majstorović 2011). Moreover, their ethnicity as Bosnian Serbs was a relevant factor in their interactions with the Bosniac population. As Valentina elaborates:

> "At the beginning it was difficult, there was no understanding in the community, in families, like, this is some kind of utopia, why do you do that if people died, how can they be together again. Our activities kept going, at the beginning there was always mistrust…women and young people become friends easily, there was never any problems. It always depends from what angle you look at it. Someone thought we were spies, others that we were traitors, someone else a sect…it was hard then". (Val., 2018)

The role CSOs were supposed to play in post-war society was also contested by the local population. The word 'utopia' which Valentina used, can refer, not just to something that has been lost, but also to a model to strive for. As we saw in chapter 2.4.3, the CSO sector was

presented by the international community as the 'necessary corrective' (Bojičić-Dželilović et al. 2013) towards democratization and reconciliation, dictating a normative vision of what reality should look like. After the war, Bosnia was a society where people's lives became more and more interwoven with the omnipresent international presence which penetrated every aspect of social and economic life. After the post-war shift from emergency responses to sustainable development projects, the mistrust that people felt towards the non-governmental sector persisted. This happened also because the initial phase of the post-war reconstruction was characterised by critical mistakes in distributing the aid that contributed in shaping the general mistrust of the population towards international interventions. After the boom of CSOs at the beginning of years 2000, for a few years, Valentina felt that, to gain trust of the local population, her organization had to constantly "prove something". The word '*špijuni*' (spies) that she reports as being used by local people distrusting her organization's work and intentions denotes the tendency to think that these new entities would privilege the interests of international actors at the detriment of local ones. Mistrust was coming not only from local people, the target of their interventions, but from local institutions as well. It was hard to work in partnership with the local municipality as the non-governmental sector was perceived as useless, "a loss of time", and it was seen as a competitor in the access of funds.

The use of the word '*izdajnik*' (traitor), instead, carries a strong ethnic connotation. Željana too said that *Priroda*'s work had to face hostilities from people who saw them as "state enemies of one ethnic group" ('*narod*'). Being Bosnian Serbs working with both ethnic groups could be seen as a betrayal of the 'Serb people' by nationalist-minded Serbs, in addition to being viewed by Bosniacs as generally suspicious. For many people, those were the first occasions in which they had the chance to meet someone from a different ethnic group after the war. Valentina remembered how difficult it was just to gain any basic trust required to establish first contact with anybody. What were they, Serbs, doing with Bosniacs, and vice versa? Why would someone be doing something about bridging divisions after what happened? Željana said these were some of the comments people made of their work at that time. She and her colleagues recalled several episodes of antagonism and mistrust between people from different ethnic backgrounds at the time, and Valentina remembered isolated incidents in which she and the rest of the staff were actively provoked or directly attacked.

In Valentina's recounting of the critiques that people made about CSO Sara's activities, a key challenge of post-war emerges: the difficulties of rebuilding a 'normal life'. As I showed in section 2.2.1, the concept of normality in Bosnia has been explored by anthropological

literature. On the ground, it was "charged with a sense of morality, of what was good, right or desirable" (Maček 2007, p.39). What Sara Srebrenica's activities aimed at achieving seemed 'utopian' to many, because it envisaged contact between people of different ethnic groups in a moment where that seemed impossible. The war determined a shift from citizenship to ethnic belonging and national identity had emerged as a very real boundary between people, even for those who had not considered it to be of utmost importance before (Jenkins 1994). As I have demonstrated in section 2.1.3, after the war "people had come to be understood as nationals first, and the relationships between those of different nationalities now required navigation of socially sanctioned segregation" (Jansen 2010, p.36). The accounts of my interviewees confirm how the material impact that the war had on the life of people came with a loss of the previous social fabric. Rebuilding harmonious relations seemed a distant possibility. According to the etymology of the word, 'utopia' (*ou-topos*) is a 'place that does not exist', therefore reflecting the geography of relations, in this case lost because of the war. What was considered 'normal' before became 'extraordinary', in the sense of 'out of the ordinary', almost impossible, in the light of the divisions and the harsh life conditions of the immediate post-war period (Maček 2007; Stefansson 2010; Jansen 2015). At the same time, in their recollections of the difficulties faced in the initial years of their work, Valentina and Željana remembered also how women and young people of different ethnic groups would participate in their activities and "found it easy" to spend time together and become friends. Being 'women' or 'young' gave them common grounds on which to establish pleasant relationships and some sense of 'normality'.

While CSOs contributed in creating spaces where these interactions could take place, the gradual remaking of everyday life was taking place mainly outside these spaces. After the war, especially during the process of return, people were experiencing, in their everyday life, interethnic contacts that went much beyond the simple conflict/peace dichotomy and to whom they were not necessarily attributing any moral character (Jansen 2010). Muamer's account of his post-war personal experience is relevant because it shows that the attempts to rebuild 'normality' encompassed different levels of interaction where ordinary people, independently from CSOs work, adopted specific strategies to establish relations that they considered important. In section 3.4.2 I will show how CSO staff adopted similar strategies in order to be more effective.

Muamer left Srebrenica with his mother in July 1995, at the age of 11, when the town fell under the attack of the Bosnian Serb Army. They fled first to Tuzla, until 1996, and then moved to the nearby town of Živinice, where they lived for twelve years. The majority of

displaced inhabitants of Srebrenica found refuge in the Tuzla Canton because it was under the Bosnian army and the city, for the whole length of the war, managed to maintain its non-nationalist politics (Armakolas 2011). Muamer liked his life in Živinice because the town was not devastated by the war and the way people lived resembled the "old Srebrenica" to him:

> "…There people used to live more or less in a multi-ethnic way (…) when I arrived there, I found two of my best friends, by chance one was Serb and one Croat, and I was a Bosniac from Srebrenica (…). We together celebrated the Orthodox Christmas at a friend's place, they came to my place for Bajram". (Mua., 2018)

He added that it was not an idyllic situation, as there were people who judged them and belittled them for hanging out together, but he thought that the situation in Živinice was incomparably better than in Srebrenica: "I visited Srebrenica a couple of times when I lived in Živinice and it was awful (…) It was worse than I thought, but also better than I thought" (Mua., 2018). On the one hand, he said he found much more nationalism and divisions than he expected. On the other hand, he also remembered a lot of unity:

> "There were people who really honestly spent time together and wanted to do so but also wanted to be discreet and do that secretly so that others wouldn't see. Oh, that was so beautiful for me to see! That's how I started to hang out with specific people. And then you have to go through all those stories, and you see that, on both sides, everything is the same, consequences [of war] are the same, they are visible, obvious, the loss of family members, the loss of houses, the loss of the best years, of the future…". (Mua., 2018)

What Muamer described about his process of returning to Srebrenica, are examples of the ways in which new possibilities of coexistence were shaped by a gradual rebuilding of relations, which was part of a process of a 'recontextualization' of narratives of loss and destruction. Through the sharing of personal stories, he said, experiences of loss were equalized to some extent. The 'commonality of suffering' allowed people of different sides as result of the conflict, to re-humanise the other. Commonalities were based on the shared past of suffering and the shared fight in satisfying practical needs. People acknowledged this commonality on the level of personal stories without necessarily questioning responsibilities on a larger scale. In Muamer's experience, those with whom establishing commonalities was possible were in a minority and, in his attempt to rebuild what he considered to be 'normal', he had to modulate different patterns of voice and silence, accordingly. The volume of interactions

of mutual acknowledgement had to be kept very low. First, because silence was a way to avoid painful memories or topics that could potentially cause conflict. Second, in his view, the immediate post-war society did not appear to be ready, and those interactions could have been seen by some locals as a 'betrayal' of their own ethnic group.

The accounts presented in above sections set the scene where CSOs staff started their work in post-war Srebrenica, during a phase in which people were facing the harshest consequences of the war. CSOs acting in this environment were trying to address the most pressing needs of the population. CSO staff I interviewed recalled interacting with people who were still profoundly marked by experiences of human losses, displacement, and returns, facing the difficulty of establishing relations up to the point of this seeming 'impossible', while simultaneously longing for the lost 'normality'. Meanwhile, CSOs such as those discussed dealt with the distrust of the locals and still had to acquaint themselves with the newly internationally imported 'NGO model'. My interviewees highlighted processes of 're-humanisation' of the 'other': CSO staff were trying to provide spaces for interaction based on shared needs such as spaces for 'women' or 'youth'. At the same time, as Muamer's words show, re-humanisation processes were already taking place outside these designated spaces. Here, people interacted while strategically negotiating alternating silence about sensitive topics and the sharing of experiences of suffering, where possible. In section 3.2.1 I will show how from the work of the organization Adopt Srebrenica, emerged similar dynamics of modulating volumes of intervention in order to achieve their aims.

3.1.1 Bringing people together - the participants' point of view

As we saw in section 2.3.1, among the initiatives of CSOs in post-war Bosnia, the international reconciliation discourse translated into local CSO practice of facilitating face-to-face encounters between people categorised ethnically. Often the contacts that were taking place within the spaces created by CSOs were explicitly framed within discourses of reconciliation by foreign organizations. They stressed the interethnic character of the initiatives attributing to them a moral character (Jansen 2010). This led to critiques in scholarship as explained earlier, especially regarding the ways in which these initiatives problematised relations between people while strengthening ethnic categorizations. Here I report past experiences as remembered by people who participated in CSOs' project aimed at bringing people together right after the war and I explore how they made sense of these experiences.

Mladen, a journalist and media developer in his 30s (during the interview in 2018), started taking part in these projects at the end of the 1990s. He remembers that, through schools, students were involved in trips of a few days in other localities of Bosnia:

> "When I started as a teenager, that was basically an occasion to travel, because we were all born in very small places. And then we had the chance during the summer to go visit family that was maybe living in bigger towns. (…) The advent of the non-governmental sector actually created the opportunity for people to get to know each other, that was the first step to tear down those barriers, that's been the first experience I have had – it was [the chance] for us to try something, to see something different" (Mla, 2018).

Mladen's experience highlights two main aspects of these projects. The first one was that of "breaking down barriers", which relates to the specific function of 'reconciliatory projects'. As my conversation with him was focussing on civil society project relating to the concept of 'reconciliation', I can assume that the barriers he referred to were those perceived to be present between people of different ethnic backgrounds living in Srebrenica and in different parts of Bosnia. The second aspect relates to a practical problem which Bosnian youth faced after the war: the chances of travelling around the country were limited. Through these projects, young people had the possibility of escaping their everyday social *milieu* for a while, making new acquaintances, across the ethnic divisions - or not - and, on the side, taking the opportunity to visit relatives living in bigger cities.

I asked Mladen if, at the time, he was aware of the reconciliatory discourse underlying these activities. He answered: "it was interesting…and back then we didn't know about that, and that's why it was interesting" (Mla., 2018). At the end, he summarised his opinion on these initiatives as opportunities that "made me widen my perspectives" and "find myself", and he expressed an overall positive memory of those experiences he lived as a participant at that time. Looking back at those experiences, he attributed to them the reconciliatory function that they had, but of which, at the time, he was not clearly aware of. The enthusiasm of discovering new places as a teenager and enjoying time with his peers seemed to prevail over the, more or less loudly stated, objectives of the CSOs which facilitated such trips.

Bekir, a law student and local activist, like Valentina a member of Adopt, returned to Srebrenica in 2003, when he was 9 years old. As a child, he remembered taking part in different kinds of internationally funded workshops involving art, music, and theatre. When asked about what initiatives he considered the most successful, he said that the most valuable were those

"without lots of philosophy", meaning those initiatives aimed at "bringing people together" without being too explicit about their underpinning objectives. He provided the example of actions he knew took place in the years after the war, which were aimed at facilitating people of different ethnic groups to spend time together. This included inviting people to enjoy *ćevapčići* (typical Bosnian sausages) together for the celebration of 1st of May, the important Yugoslav workers' holiday. Values and concepts were not explicitly stated, rather these were 'simple' actions aimed at facilitating meetings between people of any ethnic backgrounds in a context where occasions to spend time together in a festive and convivial way were very rare indeed: "They did not go there saying directly let's work on reconciliation! Instead, they were saying: 'here's *ćevapi*, some music, come to join us and spend time together'. So, people come, sit, talk, chat and then, after that, you see what happens" (Bek., 2018). The intention was to provide people with an occasion to spend time together in informal interactions. Directly mentioning the word 'reconciliation' would have contrasted with the sense of spontaneity that these initiatives were meant to create.

Another initiative Bekir remembered as significant was the 'International Peace Camp' organized by the organization Srebrenica 99, led by Hakija Meholić, former chief of the Srebrenica police during the war and long-standing president of the Srebrenica's branch of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). In 1999, Srebrenica 99 organized a camp on the lake Sapnja, bringing together Bosnian Serb children living in Srebrenica and Bosniac children originally from Srebrenica but living in refugee settlements in the Tuzla area. Even if Bekir was too little to have participated in the original event directly, he was actively involved in 2011, when the idea of organizing the peace camp was relaunched. What attracted him to the initiative was its underlying philosophy back in 1999: "Maybe there were some prejudices, maybe someone was afraid, but children are children, aren't they? It gave some incentive to older people as well, to show that despite all that had happened, it was still possible to be together" (Bek., 2018). Referring to the children, he said that while he didn't know how much they were aware of the aims of the initiative, it was certainly sending indirectly a strong message to the older generations.

Similar to what Valentina and Željana said about how young people and women took part in their organizations' initiatives and got along easily, Bekir's words that "children are children" sits on the assumption that participants could form a bond on the basis of assumed common needs and interests. Identifying such commonalities was seen as a possible way to overcome, or prevent, ethnically-based prejudice. But the 'reconciliatory' aims of the

initiatives were not always explicitly revealed to participants and, as Mladen said above, the will of young people to have fun, travel and discover new places, constituted a reason for attraction. It is for these motives that these events prevailed in the memory of the participants, independent over the CSOs and their projects' declared aims.

Muamer, referring to some civil society initiatives he participated in after the war, highlighted the problems that could arise if the philosophy underpinning these initiatives was made too evident:

> "I have followed these events here, there were those workshops. I took part when people invited me, I went, I watched, and immediately saw the problem and the mistake. I saw that what you get is the opposite effect, because people go and it says 'reconciliation', 'respect', 'dealing with the past'. I don't know, maybe it was necessary in that phase, maybe it still is, but to me that note was overrated. Then I realized that it creates a problem where there isn't any, and I thought that it is necessary to act totally the other way around. Someone comes and says, okay let's do a workshop, we need four Serbs and four Bosniacs, that is wrong". (Mua., 2018)

In his words, the reconciliation discourse mobilised social categories of difference which reproduce the problem these initiatives were trying to solve. Terms like 'reconciliation', 'respect', 'dealing with the past', are turned into slogans representing a specific way of shaping the problem of coexistence, presenting it through ethnic lenses only. In his view, starting "the other way around" would have meant bringing people together with any other good reason to enjoy time together, especially through music, theatre, arts in general. Besides criticizing however, like other most critical activists, the excessive importance placed on the ethnic proportionality seen as a prerogative of success of these projects, he did not reject them altogether: "Of course, maybe there were also good things, great projects, where people met each other…many people told me, 'that's the first time I have spoken to a Serb, or to a Bosniac', it had never happened before…". (Mua., 2018)

This recalls Mladen's and Bekir's insights and experiences. They defined those initiatives as a "first step" to break barriers, in Mladen's words, and Bekir described them as an opportunity of putting people together "and then see what happens". It shows that for some people, personal needs prevailed over organizations' intended aims. Participants might have taken out of these initiatives just what they needed, not paying necessarily a lot of attention to the intent of the organizers. At the same time, little expressive emphasis on the underpinning

intention to promote reconciliation did not mean these initiatives were politically neutral: even if the participants were not necessarily aware of the underpinning reconciliatory aims, it did not mean others around, such as for example participants' families, were not as well. My interviewees who participated in these events did not attribute to those initiatives any particular hopes of conflict resolution. Rather, they identified the tentative, possible, catalyst functions of long-term processes, describing the impact of these events as serving as small tiles in a bigger mosaic.

3.2 Talking about 'problems'

3.2.1 A multi-ethnic group in Srebrenica

Among face-to-face encounters in these CSO initiatives, those aimed at 'facing the past' gained more prominence for the human rights peace agenda. In this section I will focus on initiatives developed in the mid-2000s that aimed at dealing with the past explicitly. In particular I will present the case of the group Adopt Srebrenica, whose aim was to involve people and encourage them to talk about difficult topics in a period when, despite things improving since the end of the war, it was still very difficult to talk about the past. The idea of Adopt Srebrenica was born in 2005 from a collaboration between the Alexander Langer Foundation (ALF) and Dr. Irfanka Pašagić, a psychiatrist originally from Srebrenica who had worked since the war to support traumatised women and children. The idea was to facilitate the birth of a multi-ethnic group of young people from Srebrenica that could contribute to "positive initiatives and change, to improve common life and coexistence in the town" (Irf., 2018). Although the history of the project would require a study on its own, for all the actors involved throughout the years and the many kinds of activities realized, in this section, I will focus only on how members became involved and on some of the implications of implementing activities in Srebrenica and abroad. These aspects selected as examples of Adopt's work will shed light on the group's strategies, such as the ability to modulate different levels of sensitivity in order to deal with difficult topics and produce change.

The idea of the project started taking shape in the Summer of 2005. After a study trip of international students at the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, some young people from Srebrenica started gathering around the idea of the project 'Adopt Srebrenica' (Adopt) proposed by the Langer Foundation and Irfanka. While Adopt was commonly referred to as a 'project', it was conceived since its inception as a 'process', in

opposition to the international development discourse seeing interventions as a succession of hit-and-run projects (see section 2.4.3.). The name itself, 'Adopt', reflected the idea of a relationship between a local and an international part that was not meant to have an 'expiry date' after the end of a project cycle, but implied the attempt to develop a long-lasting relationship between two components, as Irfanka told me in our interview: "one, local, who knows what is needed and one international, with a deep knowledge of the local, who can support realizing it" (Irf., 2018).

The Adopt project was inspired by the experience of Alexander Langer, a South-Tyrolean journalist and politician who, as mentioned in the introduction, focussed his work on coexistence in South Tyrol between Italian and German speakers. His philosophy included placing at the centre the importance of fostering meaningful contact between people of different linguistic groups (Langer 2015). During the war in former-Yugoslavia, in his position as member of the EU parliament, he promoted a wide network of civil society actors in former-Yugoslavia to try to stop the worst consequences of the conflict[9]. Based on his experience in divided contexts in Italy and in former-Yugoslavia, he developed numerous writings, among them the 'Decalogue of coexistence' which, after his death in 1995, inspired the work of the Alexander Langer Foundation in Bosnia:

> "The promotion of common events, opportunities for meetings and common action, does not appear spontaneously, but requires a stubborn and yet delicate work of awareness-building, mediation and familiarization, which must be carried out with care and credibility. Given the identity of the different ethnic groups and the more or less clear borders between them, it is fundamental in such societies that someone be dedicated to the exploration and crossing of borders: this is an activity which in situations of tension and conflict may seem like smuggling, but it is decisive in softening rigidities, relativizing borders and favouring interaction" (Langer 1994).

[9] Alexander Langer funded the 'Verona Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in ex-Yugoslavia' in September 1992 and coordinated it from his office in the European Parliament. The aim of the Forum was to bring together peace activists, civil society organizations and political parties from all regions of former Yugoslavia to initiate a permanent process of dialogue and proposing solutions to the conflict. The Forum held international conferences in Verona (1992), Strasbourg (1993), Verona II (1993), Vienna (1993), Brussels (1994) and Paris (1994), Tuzla (1994) and Budapest (1996). For more info A. Langer, 'The Verona Forum: presentation, history and activities' https://www.alexanderlanger.org/en/861/3671 [accessed 23.05.2019]

As argued above, 'multiethnicity' was one of the main features of the internationally imported reconciliatory discourse in post-war Bosnia. As highlighted by Muamer above (3.1.1), ethnic proportionality in reconciliatory projects was criticized for mobilizing social categories applying ethnic labels to participants. It was common throughout my years of experience in Bosnia to hear CSO staff criticise what they considered an 'obsession with multiethnicity', as Irfanka called it during my fieldwork. Sometimes a declaration of multiethnicity by an CSOs was considered a way to satisfy donors, more than an actual commitment to consider different perspectives. For example, in the past years, I heard often Irfanka using the expression '*ikebana* people'. She used the word *Ikebana*, the Japanese art of flower arrangements, to refer to situations where mono-ethnic groups or organizations were involving people of other ethnic backgrounds only to perform along donors' multi-ethnic expectations.

In the case of Adopt, the multi-ethnic character of the group, according to the intentions of the organizers, was not an end in itself, but a conscious political statement, a prerequisite to start a discussion in an environment where identities were rigidly delimitated and separated by an ethno-nationalist discourse. Langer's words on the need for "bridge builders and wall jumpers", resonated with Irfanka who envisioned Adopt as a group of young people who could be, in Langers' words, "real traitors to the ethnic hard line" (Langer 1994). In a group whose aim was explicitly that of talking about the past, the multi-ethnic character was also strategically intended to give legitimacy to the process in the eyes of the rest of the community and of potential new members by guaranteeing openness to all sides' experiences of war. In the Adopt group, the figure of the 'traitor' mentioned above by Valentina and Muamer (see 3.1), when describing their experience in establishing relations after the war, within and outside the framework of CSO's initiatives, was given a recognised social function.

What my interviewees remembered as a decisive factor in the origins of Adopt Srebrenica were the favourable political circumstances, in particular the support given by the Mayor at the time, Abdurahman Malkic (SDA), who himself survived the genocide. These favourable political circumstances coincided with a period of relative openness of the Government of the Republika Srpska (RS). In 2004, following a decision of the Human Rights Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2003, and under the pressure of the High Representative, it set up a commission of inquiry on the crimes committed in Srebrenica. Although many of the facts related to events in Srebrenica were already well documented by other investigative bodies, the RS commission added important information. The conclusions

of the report included a list of the locations of thirty-two mass graves, a list of names of the missing people and an examination of the role of the RS Ministry of Defence, RS Ministry of Interior and of the army and the police of the RS in the operation "*Krivaja*". The fact that this information came from an authority constituted by the RS itself should have constituted an incentive for Bosnian Serbs to accept facts more easily. Despite this constituting a step forward towards a shared acknowledgement of the facts of Srebrenica, revisionist accounts subsequently persisted, and RS officials kept playing down the gravity of the crimes committed, until the rejection of the 2004 report by the Parliament of the Republika Srpska in 2018.

The first event that Adopt and its partners organized in Srebrenica, was the so-called 'International week of memory' (IWM) in the summer of 2007. The initiative consisted of five days of activities including cultural workshops, concerts, and seminars on war-related issues. It assembled journalists and representatives of civil society from Bosnia, Serbia, Italy, Rwanda and Chile. Since then, the IWM has become an annual occasion and, in 2021, had its 13th edition. Valentina remembered that in the first edition of the IWM, civil servants of all ethnic backgrounds participated:

> "At the beginning it was much easier. At the beginning of that year, we had a group of support from the Council…the Mayor was Bosniac, but we had people working in the Council that were Bosnian Serbs who were talking with us about genocide and about what had happened" (Val., 2018)

The Mayor appointed Arif, a municipality official, to follow the development of the relationships with the Italian partners and to involve other local organizations. In 2018, I met Arif through a friend in his office in the Municipality building where he still works. We had probably met before, back in 2005, but we did not remember each other. He had started working in the Municipality in 2004, in the department on relationships with the civil society sector. Among the first organizations he contacted to be involved in the collaboration with ALF was CSO Sara. As he told me, at the time they looked for organizations that were "more liberal", meaning more open to talk about the past and hear perspectives from people with different ethnic backgrounds.

During her work with CSO Sara, Valentina remembered that her experience running projects dealing with the past started approximately during the same period:

> "We [CSO Sara] started talking openly about problems already in 2004, 2005. We implemented projects about inter-religious dialogue as conflict prevention where we talked a lot about problems, about the war, about dealing with the past, about those narratives that divide people, about the influence of religious leaders on the war in Bosnia...So that we have always been, maybe one of the few organizations, I don't say the only one, that have called things by their own name". (Val., 2018)

The topics Valentina mentioned were still taboo but, at the same time, in her view, needed to be addressed to "move forward". Compared to when she started her work with CSO Sara in 1999, she said that, in 2005, it was easier to deal with these topics, people were more used to living together and there was more collaboration between the different ethnic sides. At the same time, "calling things by their own name", attributing individual responsibilities to crimes committed and naming crimes constituted one of the biggest challenges in a context where official narratives were divided and denial widespread, especially around the events of July 1995 in the area of Srebrenica. CSO Sara's staff dealt with tensions and threats for touching sensitive topics. This was particularly evident during periods around the elections or the anniversaries of war events, when both sides were particularly tense.

In her recollection, when interviewed in 2018, Valentina remembered that after Arif contacted her, they went to Italy together with other young people to start developing the project of Adopt Srebrenica. She liked the idea and agreed to participate, especially because she trusted Arif with whom she was already friends. Other people were involved later through either of them, respectively, "Azir, Dijana, Almir, Jelena", both Bosnian Serbs and Bosniacs. As I showed above, people joined Adopt because they shared the idea to improve life in Srebrenica and believed an open discussion about the past was a difficult but unavoidable step to go through to make this possible. However, involving new members in an initiative that was explicitly multi-ethnic and devoted to talk about the past was not an easy thing to do in a context like Srebrenica where, still today, someone can feel negatively judged for having coffee with someone of a different ethnic background. The interviewees described the process of acquiring new members as requiring a particular degree of sensitivity. As I will show below, new potential members were invited to join based on previous acquaintance and an assumption of trustworthiness that their views could fit with the overall purposes of the group.

Muhamed joined Adopt Srebrenica at the occasion of the second year of the International Week of Memory (IWM), in 2008, the same year he returned to live in Srebrenica

after he left during the war. He told me that his friend Azir, who was already part of Adopt, called him to go for coffee a few days before the beginning of the IMW. At the café, they met a couple of volunteers from South Tyrol and they talked about the event that was about to start. He decided to have a look at the initiative out of curiosity: "I was younger, then. I decided to go instead of staying home and get bored" (Muh., 2018). While initially the IWM represented a chance to escape the dull life of Srebrenica, after he got more familiar with the initiative, he decided to join the group Adopt Srebrenica for very specific reasons:

> "The aim of the IWM was to deal with yesterday, today and tomorrow. Deal with the past, so deal with the crime of genocide, how this past is looked at, what effects it has on today's life and, from this, how to make a better future. This is how I understood it, and I was conscious that my life was connected to Srebrenica, that I had lived here before the war, that I was here during the war, that my father was killed in 1995 during the crime of genocide, as well as other members of my family. All this played a role in my decision to join". (Mua, 2018)

For Muhamed, who lost his father in the genocide, 'dealing with the past' was inextricably connected with 'dealing with the crime of genocide' and calling it as such. As for many who had experienced life in Bosnia before the war, the introduction of mixed groups seemed an oxymoron (David 2020, p.137). While national categories were not dominant in their everyday life (Bergholz 2013), they had acquired a different salience after the war. Muhamed did not see the fact of being part of a mixed group as a challenge in itself, because that was something he remembered from his everyday life as a child. He remembered that just in 1992 and 1993, when he was still in the besieged Srebrenica, he did not have contacts with people from other ethnicities; but when he fled to Tuzla, and to Sarajevo later, contacts started again, in the neighbourhood and at school. In Muhamed's opinion, what could potentially be much more challenging than just getting together, was talking about the past. It seemed a risk not to know how others would relate to his experience of war and loss.

As described further above, in the case of Muhamed and Valentina, the involvement in the project Adopt Srebrenica occurred because of personal acquaintances who provided an initial basis of trust between people. The same happened in the case of Bekir who became part of Adopt in 2014. Muhamed told him that the Adopt group had been invited to travel to Italy, but he couldn't join: "Before that, [Muhamed] saw an interview I gave for the Federal Television for the 18th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. So, he told me to come" (Bek.,

2018). At the time, Bekir was already active in different local civil society organizations and had heard about Adopt Srebrenica from a friend, another Adopt member, who, like him, was active in the local branch of the social Democratic Party (SDP). Bekir did not have much information about it, except that it was about "some Italians" coming to town. However, Muhamed's personal invitation triggered Bekir's own decision to join. When I interviewed Bekir in 2018, he had already been a member of Adopt for seven years. Regarding the ways in which Adopt tried to attract new members, Bekir explained:

> "Because often the problem here is that people take many things for granted. We were all born in a circle where there is just one narrative. There is just one narrative for each side. So, when you know that there was a war but Muslims lie about the war, that they want to make us look bad, or, I don't know, the same on the other side, if we go like come on, let's talk about those things, their ideas will not change (…) you have to give example [through your work], and we do much more than just travelling somewhere (…) you cannot just pull everyone in, you have to see at what level they are. You cannot just bring in someone you want to change his way of thinking" (Bek., 2018).

Bekir remarked on the importance of finding sensitive ways of involving people in the discussion about the past questioning approaches that would not acknowledge the complexity of the context. According to him, stating the aims of the group too loudly would have pushed people away and, possibly, have the opposite effect of radicalizing opinions. New members were involved through a mechanism of co-optation based on careful consideration. Valentina described the growth of the group with this image: "like concentric circles after a pebble is thrown in the water" (Val., 2018). This image summarises the aspects highlighted so far, suggesting that the group developed following a horizontal trajectory of one-to-one relationships based on trust to gradually widen the network from the initial core. It is relevant in this respect to mention that for the first ten years of its existence (until 2016 when it was formally registered as an organization), Adopt was an informal group. In practice, this meant that the ALF-appointed coordinators in Italy would keep the relations with the Bosnian group and other partners on a personal basis and fundraise money for activities on an *ad hoc* basis. While this fact led to some of the most common shortfalls in relationships between international and local CSO partners that are typical of the 'reconciliation industry' (Wilson 2003) (such as unbalanced power relations and a sense of dependency from the Italian partners), it also favoured some aspects of the work on the ground. The informality meant a

low visibility in Srebrenica with the exception of the days of the IWM event during the summer, which attracted an international audience.

The caution in involving new members, combined with the informal character of the group, gave Adopt, for many years from its foundation, a low visibility on the ground. To some, as Bekir initially thought, if it was something solely related to the presence of internationals coming to Srebrenica only rarely, it was therefore not particularly effective in producing effective wide change on the ground. On the other hand, the advantage of such low visibility was that the engagement with sensitive topics could happen in a safe space out of the limelight.

In the next section I will show what happened when the group left Srebrenica in a series of short trips to Italy organised in collaboration with the Alexander Langer Foundation to speak at public events about their activities. The fact of being far from their town, despite in contexts with a higher public visibility, led to different dynamics that, as some of them describe, favoured the strengthening of interpersonal relations.

3.2.2 A multi-ethnic group outside of Bosnia

Besides the IWM, throughout the years, Adopt Srebrenica's members used to travel to Italy to define future activities with their partners and to talk at public events. I took part in these events, first as part of the audience and, later, as one of the promoters, sometimes facilitating and translating the discussion with the Italian audience. During the events, members of Adopt presented the everyday life in Srebrenica and the work of their group. For the reasons stated above, the trips were organized with the intention of always trying to maintain a proportional representation of Bosnian Serbs and Bosniac participants.

Valentina remembered the trips to Italy as occasions in which the members of Adopt were able to spend longer periods of time together and getting to know each other better. She recalled one episode in Bolzano, during a public meeting in 2013, where a member of the audience, who presented himself as Albanian, addressed the Bosniacs asking how they managed to live close to Serbs, who were, in his words, 'notoriously bad people': "First Nemanja said I will answer, but Muhamed said, 'no, no, I will'. And then he said, 'what do you know? Obviously you don't have Serb neighbours, we live together, and we are fine with it'" (Val., 2018). She felt that Muhamed, taking the word from his Serb friend, wanted to defend her and the other Serb members of Adopt. Being a Bosniac, who also lost his father during the genocide, gave more authority to his words, and that episode strengthened the relation of trust between them. A couple of years later, in another public meeting in Italy, she recalled another

similar episode in which a member of the audience asked a Bosniac member if he hated the Serbs because 'they' killed his father. He answered along the line that his father was a good man who had friends of different nationalities. If he hated Serbs now, he would have felt to betray the memory of his father, because he did not hate anyone.

On another occasion, during a public meeting in Bolzano, before I started working for the ALF, I witnessed an episode where, after a talk, an Italian journalist during an interview asked two members of Adopt to introduce themselves saying who was the Serb and who the Bosniac. Before answering, they exchanged a meaningful look and told him who was who but exchanging identities. While the Italian journalist was looking for the classical representation of the multi-ethnic group working for reconciliation, they used that narrative as a humorous occasion to strengthen a bond of complicity between them. This episode shows that, even when the 'reconciliatory framework' was activated, people acted freely to pursue their own aims.

According to Valentina, the main factor that allowed these kinds of interactions to occur was the fact that they were not in Srebrenica. In response to my question if she thought this would have been more difficult to do in Srebrenica she said: "It's not that it would be more difficult, we just don't do it here. When we go to Italy we talk at public meetings. Who would like to listen to me here, my opinions on the war? Or [name], or [name]? Here it has never happened to us. Never" (Val., 2018). Through these initiatives abroad, members of Adopt found a new audience that, contrary to their fellow citizens in Srebrenica, was curious, willing to hear their stories and their opinions and that created a platform where they could say certain things for the first time in front of each other and could express opinions more freely than in their own town.

The importance of engaging with an audience which provided legitimacy to their own lived experiences, is stressed also by Muhamed. He found that not only were the trips to Italy important in that sense, but also the organized trips of groups of Italians to Srebrenica created a space to listen to each other's personal stories that otherwise would have remained private. Part of the program offered to the internationals included a visit to the village of Osmače, on the mountains above Srebrenica, where Muhamed's family was from, including a visit to the ruins of the village school, destroyed during the war, where his father had been the headmaster. Muhamed used to bring his three-year-old son with him. For Muhamed, those visits, that took place many times throughout the years, were occasions, not just to give importance to his story

by honouring the memory of his father, but also to create a bond between his son and his grandfather.

During these initiatives throughout the years, the members of Adopt had the chance to "laugh and cry together" (Val., 2018) and develop emotional connections based on sharing personal stories and new experiences abroad: "When we talk about our destinies, we become closer, it makes us think" (Val., 2018). In the episode narrated by Bekir and in those told by Valentina before, change is described as the strengthening of a relationship with someone, for example, following the other's acceptance of historical facts that were previously ignored or considered fake or propaganda by the other side. For Valentina, her Bosniac friends had the authority, from their personal experience of suffering and loss, to free her, as an individual, from the burden of collective guilt without her having to disavow the ethnic side of her identity. At the same time, Valentina, being there and taking part in her friends' narration, testified her acknowledgement of the crime of genocide as a person and, also, as a Bosnian Serb.

Travels abroad also gave members of Adopt the chance to explore different contexts and compare their own experiences with other backgrounds that presented similar problems (i.e., Germany and Italy Nazi and fascist's legacy). For Arif, the best memories he cherished of the activities with Adopt were the trips to South Tyrol. The rich autonomous region of northern Italy is characterised by a mixed composition of German, Italian and Ladin speaking population, and by an institutional system based on plurilingualism and linguistic proportionalism. At the beginning of his journey with Adopt, he found it very interesting to "see how other places function" and was surprised to discover that, also in rich regions like South-Tyrol, people could be divided, there were separate schools, and people were hired according to a proportional system based on the declaration of belonging to one linguistic group or another:

> "In a way…maybe it's black humour, that after so many years, we Balkan people abandoned some of those things, but I see that others have that problem too. Not to mention other regions, Catalonia, Basque Countries…I can't understand how people in the era of globalization live those differences negatively, highlight them (…) instead of that human side" (Ari., 2018).

These encounters positioned Adopt's members differently not just in relation to one another, but also in relation to their audiences and to the wider international context. My interviewees, therefore, describe 'change' as widening participants' perspectives, tracing,

through trips abroad and inter-national meetings, parallels between political problems in Bosnia and in other countries: they could find those problems, sometimes presented as endemic of the Bosnian society, were not in fact specific features of their context, nor essential to their nature of 'Balkan people', but could equally be found in the rich and 'civilised' West as well. These opportunities gave them the chance to learn from other experiences and look at their own country from another perspective.

The ethnographic findings presented so far, told through the prism of personal reflections on the history of Adopt Srebrenica, provide examples of how this multi-ethnic group managed to treat difficult topics related to the past by alternating more or less visibility on the ground. Thanks mainly to its informal character, Adopt Srebrenica worked as a platform where people willing to discuss sensitive topics could opt in and out throughout the years, thereby finding the continuity that other projects with an 'expiry date' could not guarantee. Working with the same people for long periods of time helped to let emerge all sides of what dealing with sensitive topics in a multi-ethnic group could entail, favouring a process of "knitting, unravelling, texturing and tearing of the space between" the participants involved (Cockburn 1998 cited by Husanović p. 109). Such a process was far from being free from conflict and disagreements and the experience of the multi-ethnic group is not described as idyllic by my interviewees. Talking about the past in a context like Srebrenica meant putting themselves in 'uncomfortable situations' of engaging in what Cockburn (1998) called the 'identity hurt', e.g., dealing with the crimes committed by 'their' side. In my experience with Adopt Srebrenica, I witnessed discussions among the members that sometimes contributed to strengthen the bonds between individuals and their imagined ethnic community. For example, there were moments of frustration such as for some of the Bosnian Serb members, who sometimes felt their own experiences of suffering and those of 'their' side were treated as less relevant when compared to the scale of the crime of genocide. At the same time, the accounts above show that, while when talking about the past ethnic belonging is part of the picture, its relevance is contextual and not fixed.

Despite the liberal peace framework expected multi-ethnic encounters to be 'resolutive', in the case of Adopt, its intent was not that of solving the problem of 'divided narratives' once and for all. The interpersonal character of these activities emerges as relevant and explains the unpredictability as well as the messiness: there was no guarantee for success and outcomes were not always as intended. Its bridging character, in practice, meant finding a space where discussion and disagreements about difficult topics could be practised, as well as

an open and more realistic timeframe where this could take place. At the same time, while reconciliation tends towards "closure, harmony, consensus and union" (Schaap 2004, p.2), Adopt's actions tended towards the concept of 'political reconciliation', as defined by Schaap, with personal friendship and trust-building intended as an essential component: "friendship calls for more than tolerance; it entails a passionate and potentially agonistic encounter with others. It presupposes a willingness to engage in an incessant discourse in which difference and lack of consensus is understood not as an obstacle to communication but as a precondition for it" (Schaap 2004, p.2).

The main aim of Adopt, when it was founded, was to generate change in the local community. As I have shown above, in the group of Adopt change occurred at the micro level involving a relatively small number of people, if compared with other projects (as I will show in section 3.4.1). The main question emerging from the character of these face-to-face based encounters are of scale: how do individual-level changes 'trickle up' (Garson 2020) and contribute to the transformation of the society at large? To further explore this question, in the following I will analyse two initiatives that I witnessed during my fieldwork in Srebrenica in 2018: the Youth Peace Camp and the photo exhibition of Adopt Srebrenica "(U)mjesto života".

Before getting to the analysis of these initiatives, in order to better understand their possible shortfalls and ways to mitigate them, in the next section I will present in more depth the complex context in which CSOs operate in Srebrenica. In particular, the different social imageries connected to how reconciliatory discourses are interpreted and contested, with which CSOs have to deal with when trying to implement change on the ground.

3.3 Srebrenica: 'place of death' / 'place of life'

To understand the chances of success of civil society interventions in Srebrenica, I explored during my research how reconciliatory discourses circulate, how they are performed, reproduced, and contested. The following accounts collected during ethnography in Srebrenica in 2018 show that different interpretations of the term 'reconciliation' can contribute to shape different societal imagery. I will show that such imageries result into opposite stereotypical representations of Srebrenica either as 'place of death' or as 'place of life'. Such representations are connected to different interpretations of what reconciliation means for different people and, consequently, of different ideas of what kind of social normality needs to be preserved or reinstated by CSOs themselves.

3.3.1 'Reconciliation' versus 'coexistence'

One evening, a few days after my arrival in Srebrenica, I walked with a friend down to the school playground. That year, for the first time since the war, the Municipality reinstated the "Workers' Games", a practice popular during Socialist time. For several evenings throughout the month of May 2018, male and female teams comprised of employees of local institutions and firms, competed with each other in matches of football, volleyball, basketball, and tug of war. The event further inaugurated the recent refurbishment of the school's playground, renovated with colourfully marked pavements. Many I talked to were surprised about how many people were taking part in the games, playing, or sitting on the terraces, cheering and enjoying the warm evening breeze. It was quite unusual to see so many people together in Srebrenica, as its population is shrinking year by year. Therefore, the event was frequently mentioned also during conversations I heard in cafes, and came up also during my interviews, often used as a starting point for talking about something else.

During our interview at the Marlboro Rock Café', Malden, a journalist and activist, referred to the Games, following my question on his experience with reconciliatory projects. According to him, the high participation at the Workers' Games showed that people enjoyed getting together when the opportunity was offered:

> "Teams are [ethnically] mixed, and people play together. They have the same goal: to win a set, to dunk, to score. These are things that cost nothing. I mean, it doesn't cost much. You don't win a trophy, there is no money involved, there's nothing. People just come, spend time together, play. Here no one has mentioned reconciliation. Not at all…Here we need things to start in a different way. Things have to start from developing natural resources, open new workplaces. This is what we need. After 20 years it is ridiculous…" (Mla., 2018).

To some extent, the scene Mladen depicted of the Workers' Games might appear idyllic. It evokes a society where people work together despite their differences and give priority to the common good. In his explanation, he conjured up the normality longed for, the '*utopia*' contrasted with the many divisions and structural problems persisting still many years after the war. In contrast to this, the word 'reconciliation' sounded to him as an artificial concept which contrasts with the spontaneity of the scene he is describing. The term places the focus always on ethnic identities diverging from more impending issues that influence people's everyday

lives. Unemployment and lack of investments are the real 'problems' that should be dealt with, instead of always looking at Srebrenica through the same ethnic 'lenses'.

Mladen also introduced an element that connected his representation of the problem to the work of civil society organizations. People play together because they like it, according to Mladen. Here, the bridging of societal divisions is happening quasi naturally (i.e., voluntarily and without economic reward) – no CSO intervention is required. He was not the only one of my interviewees who mentioned money as a problematic factor in initiatives of the civil society sector aimed at promoting coexistence. In my experience, people describe their experience working with CSOs positively until more funds arrive drawing a clear demarcation between members, some of which become 'employees' while others remain 'volunteers'. The 'projectification' (Sampson 2002), which characterizes the whole CSO sector, made the survival of these organizations dependent on the satisfaction of their donors' criteria and problem definitions. As argued above (3.2.1), the reiteration of standard international representations of the problem in post-war Bosnia reduced 'reconciliation' to a 'performance' of multi-ethnicity enacted for obtaining economic reward. Moreover, the civil society sector benefited from a consistent flow of international funds which, however, according to my interviewees, failed in leaving any visible and long-lasting signs in a town which was in a condition of permanent economic depression.

A few days later, I went to watch the Workers Games with another friend. As we were walking down the road along the playground, she discreetly invited me to look at a man who was playing volleyball. He was wearing a t-shirt with Serb nationalist symbols. She told me that, in 2015, he was part of a group of Bosnian Serb parents who issued a petition to the local kindergarten protesting that the new teacher, a woman of Muslim faith, was wearing a *hijab*. The protesters wanted the teacher to be removed from her job. A local Orthodox priest supported the initiative suggesting that the protesters were afraid of this manifestation of a religious identity as this "would make some of the children feel excluded"[10], referring to Bosnian Serb children. The woman in question was Lejla, Muhamed's wife. I knew about the incident at the time, and I remembered that all staff at the Alexander Langer Foundation and I,

[10] http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/srebrenica-bojkot-vrtica-zbog-vaspitacice-koja-nosi-maramu Srebrenica: Bojkot vrtića zbog vaspitačice koja nosi maramu [Kindergarden boycott because of the teacher who wears a hijab], Al Jazeera Balkans, 30.06.2015, accessed 18.06.2020.

in Italy, followed its developments with trepidation. The episode, which made headlines on many news websites, was interpreted by those targeted as a legacy of the war past: "It is unbelievable that after 20 years it still happens that someone rejects you just because you are different" (Al Jazeera 2015). The idyllic picture evoked by Mladen thus must be juxtaposed to a society where ethnicity, religion and the past still often serve as the lenses through which social conflicts are shaped and interpreted.

Far from judging Mladen's words as *naif*, as some locals might suggest, or blind to the difficulties people face in their social lives in Srebrenica today, I interpret them as an effort to find something positive in a reality that, in his eyes, did not offer much hope for the future. After all his experience in the civil society sector and in his work in journalism, he had grown very pessimistic about the role of political institutions. According to him, these were more interested in maintaining the status quo rather than improving the lives of the citizens. This perceived lack of support from 'politics', with all the negative connotations that this term bears in the Bosnian context (Kolind 2007), posits the individual at the centre of the imaginative effort to envision a society in which he or she would like to live:

> "Most of all, I create that coexistence the way I want. Coexistence is not when, let's say, someone says 'good morning! How are you doing?'. Rather, when you see someone that needs help, an old lady – despite her nationality – carries something, and you go and help her. That is for me coexistence. For me it's an honour when someone invites me for Bajram, or for Catholic Christmas. These are things that for me are normal. And this there isn't, because people are divided, on a national basis. And this is the truth. And whether you try to be normal you are worth nothing even to those you are supposed to belong to. Because these things here are somehow seen as absurd". (Mla., 2018).

More than the word 'reconciliation', Mladen resorted to the word 'coexistence' to describe the society he wished for. Literally 'co-live', better translated as 'mutual life', *sužívot* "has traditionally fostered not just coexistence, but also a sense that life is only truly whole or complete when it includes ethno-religious others" (Funk 2013). It is not just about people being together physically, without violence, or tolerating differences. Rather, the term encapsulates social interactions on a deeper level. As Mladen mentioned, *sužívot* is commonly associated with mutual help, good neighbourhood relations and practices of hospitality. As a concept, it is often associated with the socialist period when it was 'legitimised ideologically' (Babić 2004, p.1) . In Mladen's words, behaving 'normally' here can be associated also to the

connotation of being a decent human being independent of ethnicity or faith, as mentioned above (see 3.1). Again, we find the distinction between what Mladen sees as something that should be 'normal', in the sense of commonly shared, and that instead is seen as 'absurd', as he said, a betrayal, a reason to be ostracised from someone's own group. From the Latin, *absurdus* = out of tune, dissonant - as the blueprint of a desirable society which does not dovetail with what the reality offers. Mladen's words of 'betrayal' and 'utopia' recall what Valentina and Muamer mentioned above when describing the situation in Srebrenica almost 20 years earlier. At the time of my interview with Mladen in 2018, the clash between what for some was 'normal' and for others 'absurd' took place in a situation where structural hurdles curtailed the ability of activists to create any meaningful, long-lasting change. The role of civil society organizations was, therefore, perceived as limited and out of touch with people's real needs, by activist respondents such as Mladen.

3.3.2 'No problem here' - Reconciliation as silencing and denial

The Workers' Games provided arguments also for very different agendas compared to Mladen's. They came up also during the interview with the Mayor of Srebrenica, Mladen Grujičić who referred to them to support his own take on representing Srebrenica's problems. Grujičić had been elected in October 2016 when he was in his mid-30s, and became Srebrenica's first Bosnian Serb Mayor since 1999. Previous laws stipulated that people not resident in Srebrenica could still vote in Srebrenica's local election if registered on the electoral rolls of 1991. This was allowed in order to rebalance the population changes resulting from the war which led to a disproportionate majority of Bosnian Serbs living in Srebrenica. In 2012, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Electoral Commission announced the decision to suspend this special regulation, and this was one of the reasons that had led to the election of Grujičić. He was supported by a coalition of Bosnian Serb nationalist parties, among them the ultranationalist Serb Radical Party of Vojislav Šešelj[11]. Grujičić's father had been killed at the beginning of the war and he had been president of the Association of families of Bosnian Serb fighters, a civil society organization that supports Bosnian Serb victims of the war. The Mayor's statements sparked controversies as he aligned with the positions of nationalist

[11] Vojislav Šešelj is the founder and president of the nationalist Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and from 1998 to 2000, he was the Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia. In 2018 he was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment for crimes against humanity by the ICTY. As

Bosnian Serbs regarding the Srebrenica genocide: in particular, the fact that the crime committed in July 1995 does not qualify as 'genocide' and that the number of Bosniac victims in the facts of July 1995[12] were 'inconsistent', supporting instead a nationalist argument that the number of Bosnian Serb and Bosniac victims in Srebrenica during the war were approximately the same.

During the interview, I was particularly interested to understand the Mayor's stance on the many CSO initiatives taking place in Srebrenica aimed at involving young people in dealing with the past. Some of these events involved groups of people coming from other parts of Bosnia. The small dimensions of Srebrenica made them a visible presence in town. I asked the Mayor if he considered these initiatives relevant in the present day:

> "No, they are not. I think there is nothing to reconcile. Everyone in Srebrenica lives normally, they live together in harmony, they receive guests, women get married, we have those examples [of multi-ethnic marriages]" (Gru., 2018).

Visiting each other's houses and inter-ethnic marriages are practices that Grujičić referred to in order to define life conducted by people in Srebrenica as 'normal'. While for others, these practices appeared to take place in lower numbers than before the war, as for example Mladen stated above, denoting a loss of normality, for the Mayor they were alive, plenty, and present. Grujičić presented to me the Workers Games as an event that brought together Bosniacs and Serbs in a casual way which, to him, demonstrated how people in Srebrenica live together and in peace; a success story confirming his vision of Srebrenica as a place where coexistence continues in a non-problematic way.

International organizations that came to Srebrenica in the past, the Mayor considered as not having contributed to establishing truth on the facts of war. This was because, according to him, they attached too much relevance to the crimes against the Bosniac population while ignoring those against the Bosnian Serbs. Moreover, he referred to the fact that many CSOs registered in Srebrenica throughout the years had not managed to leave any visible traces of

[12] According to the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia, (ICTY) as well as the International Commission of Missing Persons (ICMP), approximately 8.000 Bosniac men and boys were killed by the forces of the Army of the Republika Srpska, the VRS. "ICMP and the Srebrenica Genocide", 2020, https://www.icmp.int/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ICMP-srebrenica-leaflet-EN-web.pdf; "Srebrenica Genocide: No Room For Denial", 2018, https://www.icty.org/en/outreach/documentaries/srebrenica-genocide-no-room-for-denial [accessed on 15/05/2020].

change on the ground. Rather, he suggested that they kept Srebrenica's image connected to the past thereby preventing the town from moving towards the future. He stressed that the past should not be talked about to avoid problems between people. For example, when he referred to the relations between officials in the City Council, he stated:

> "[The issues on which we have more difficulties to agree upon] are the issues related to national belonging, the past, around which Bosniacs and Serbs will never agree upon. But we turn to real life, everyday life, present and future, because we cannot change the past, but the rest we can [change]. We mention the past as little as we can, it is not possible to forget it, but there is no purpose in talking about topics we cannot agree upon. Therefore, the result is that we have good relations, good collaboration, we have relaxed relations between the citizens. There are not those tensions anymore, always stressing which side had more victims, which less, who killed who". (Gru., 2018)

In his view, the best option was to silence the past to avoid conflicts as it would be impossible to find an agreement on it that would suit all sides. This pragmatic approach would, according to him, allow people to focus on the present, on the 'real life' and the real problems shared by the whole community. However, although he talked about silence about war events as a means to establish good relations, this stance is very different from that of ordinary people wishing to get on with their lives in the face of societal frictions. His positions on the facts on the July 1995 were well known and are regularly expressed publicly at occasion such as the annual commemorations. Therefore, the strategic silence which he conjures up does not exist, in practice, in this way. To the contrary, his views clash with the 'real life' of many. They offend real grievances over loss and grief suffered, enhanced by a constant denial of the causes of such sufferings at institutional level.

In opposition to any engagement with the discourse about the past, Grujičić stressed his intention to deal with the most pressing problems Srebrenica faced, in particular the economy, and highlighted his efforts in promoting a 'positive' image of the town, promoting its touristic and cultural attractions. For that reason, he put forward the nomination of Srebrenica as European capital of culture 2024 against Banja Luka, Mostar and Trebinje. In his view, this would be a way to 'use' (he added figurative inverted commas) the name of Srebrenica, which is usually associated with war and negative images, to unite both Serbs and Bosniacs. Similar as with many other of my interlocutors, he also referred to the commonly shared view that organizations in the civil society sector would engage in "money laundering" ("*pere pare*" in

Bosnian) in the sense that many organizations used the money they received from grants and donations for other purposes rather than those stated in their original application. The lack of transparency and controls over the use of monies makes it impossible to understand how much in funds were sent to Srebrenica and how these were used. The misuse of funds for the benefit of a few, rather than for the whole community, the Mayor identified as one of the main reasons why so many people left Srebrenica. In contrast, he praised young people who decided not to "abandon" Srebrenica and put effort into trying to do something positive for their town. As an example, he mentioned a project of restructuring the old building of the *Pivnica* (the old brewery) in the town centre, promoted by Muamer and his friend Miroslav, members of the rock band '*Afera'*. As these two men are a Bosniac and a Bosnian Serb, he used their initiative to demonstrate another successful example of coexistence in town.

In the case of the Mayor, the discourses of reconciliation and coexistence appears highjacked by nationalist politics to support negationist positions. The work of CSOs dealing with reconciliation is seen by him as disturbing the image of Srebrenica as a place where 'everything is fine'. According to him, the relaunch of a more 'positive' image of Srebrenica, disjointed from stereotypical representation of the town as a place of death, depends on partially silencing discussions about the past, while actually serving precise political objectives.

3.3.3 Framing and reframing identities within the reconciliation discourse

As I showed above (see 3.1), Muamer went through the long and difficult process of returning to live in Srebrenica in 2008. According to him, the reasons why people kept leaving Srebrenica in more recent years were not just related to the lack of jobs. He noticed that also many of those who managed to secure good job positions ended up leaving the town. To him, much of this was connected to the 'atmosphere', the 'air', people breath in Srebrenica – especially related to the war past which weighted heavily on people's everyday life. Some of my interlocutors talked about Srebrenica as a 'half-dead city' with a 'toxic' air, a 'bad energy' which people want to escape from. Muamer and his friend and colleague Miroslav wanted to "bring back joy" (Mua., 2018) to Srebrenica to change the image of the town and transform it from a 'symbol of death' to a 'symbol of life'.

For Muamer, 'bring back life' to Srebrenica meant to put more effort into his music career. With Miroslav and other friends, he funded a CSO called Srebrenica Wave and started a festival aimed at strengthening the music scene of the town. During our interview, he recalled

when they organized the first concert in Srebrenica in the ruins of the former Hotel Lovac. The Hotel used to be a popular touristic destination before the war and for Muamer a concert there symbolised "the right of young people to affirm their life against death" (Mua., 2018). A few years later, he and his friends started a project to build a music centre for organizing concerts and music training. The aim was to help revitalise the social life of the town, reminiscing the time before the war, when in the urban areas of Srebrenica around 10.000 people lived: "They used to go out, there were concerts, people had fun, they had something to do in their free time" (Mua., 2018). At the same time, the group also aimed at securing jobs for young people by developing a tourist attraction through collaborating with a craft brewery project. The Dutch organization PortAgora and the Municipality of Tilburg supported their initial efforts and the Municipality of Srebrenica secured two thirds of the funds required for the acquisition of the old *Pivnica* building. Since 2017, after a first round of renovation of the venue, they have hosted many concerts including local bands from Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, The Netherlands and Italy. When I spent time in Srebrenica during my fieldwork, I sometimes went to concerts there with some friends and enjoyed the lively atmosphere.

Even if Muamer and Miroslav's project does not directly deal with the past, it is still framed within the reconciliatory discourse. On their website, they describe their band as 'multi-ethnic': "By playing music together we are the best example that living together and interacting harmoniously is very well possible in both our town and country"[13]. Muamer suggested that, while, when he started his project, some local people used to say it was 'too soon to do things together' and he and his friends faced negative comments, to others the *Pivnica* project represents a 'success story' of interethnic collaboration. During an interview for Face TV in 2018, the presenter introduced Muamer and Miroslav as the protagonists of a 'story of coexistence (*suživot*)' from Srebrenica. One of his questions to Miroslav directly concerned the two friends' different ethnic backgrounds: "How do you see him, as a Bosniac?", he asked Miroslav. The latter answered: "I don't see anyone as a Bosniac or as a Serb, I look at him as my best friend who has the same interests as me and this is what bring us together". And Muamer concurred:

[13] Srebrenica Wave website https://srebrenicawave.org/sw-o-nama/, [accessed September 2021]

> "First of all [I see him] as a neighbour [*komšija*], our families are also best friends, there are not topics which we haven't talked about…we are not afraid of truth, we deal with it, it is a process and it needs to happen…The story is interesting, I am Muamer, and he is Miroslav. In 1995 I had to flee and, for 'my side' at the time, Srebrenica 'fell' while, for 'his side', Srebrenica was 'freed'. Whatever happened, we are there on the ground and we have to rise from the ashes"[14].

Miroslav defined the foundations of the relationship with his friend as shared interests and visions, dismissing the relevance any ethnic belonging over the importance of personal qualities. Muamer referred to the category of 'neighbour', which conjures up the values from 'before the war' that, as many of my activist respondents thought, should regain relevance again in the present. At the same time, ethnic belonging is recognised to be an issue, such as when talking about the past. Official narratives of the war, as 'aggression' or 'liberation', monopolise the discussion and silence personally 'difficult memories' (Correia 2018). These would bring more shades of grey to the black-and-white, Manichean identitarian matrix imposed by the nationalist narratives.

The TV presenter described Muamer's and Miroslav's story as a typical 'positive story' from Srebrenica which would bring hope for the future and satisfy the need of many to brighten the bleak image with which the town is usually presented by the media in terms of war and ethnonational conflict. At the same time, the two actors of the story are embedded in a socio-political context where ethnic identity keeps being brought to the fore. When Muamer told me about his project, the fact of being a couple of friends of different ethnic backgrounds is for them "completely normal, there is nothing extraordinary about that" (Mua., 2018). Theirs is a friendship built on shared interests, on the will to do something positive for their lives and their town but also on the decision to find their own way to navigate through their personal experiences of war. At the same time, they were also aware that people around them might read differently what for them was not noteworthy: it can be looked at in an antagonistic way from those who think it is not yet time for such collaborations. Or such collaboration and friendship can be presented as a success story to show that 'there is no problem here', as in the case of the

[14] Face TV, Miroslav i Muamer: Posljednji trzaj Srebrenice!, 14/04/2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPgw0DvzmjY&t=727s, [accessed 10/15/2020]

Mayor presented above. Alternatively, it can be presented as a success because it goes exactly against the grain of any official, divisive nationalist narratives. To someone else, their project could be seen as "interesting just because our names are Miroslav and Muamer and we do together what we do" (Mua., 2018). Even if that was not the main characteristic and intention of their project, such narrative can have the function of making the project 'more interesting', as Muamer says, to the eyes of international donors and of the local public. The two friends were well aware that their story was appealing and held an advantage in regard to decisions over funding compared to other projects which could not present themselves in the same way.

From the way in which people talk about the role of CSOs promoting reconciliatory projects, the main theme that the accounts from the last three sections have in common is the quest for 'normality' and the importance to make Srebrenica a 'place of life' where it is worth living. However, my interlocutors have different and sometimes conflicting ideas about how this can be achieved. In particular, the role CSO reconciliatory projects can play in this respect is perceived very differently. For some, dealing with the past keeps Srebrenica connected to an image of death and sorrow or goes against specific political interests. Projects that stress multiethnicity and interethnic coexistence can be seen as artificial compared to preferred more spontaneous interactions and individual acts towards reinstituting a previous idea of pre-war *suživot*. On the other hand, these projects, and the liberal rhetoric of 'reconciliation' attached to them, can contribute to give to the outside world an image of rebirth and even economic renewal, like in the case of the Pivnica project.

3.4 Peace projects in a 'superficial society'

In sections 3.2.1 I presented how CSOs adopt strategies that can produce change at the level of individuals and in one-to-one relations by adopting different levels of sensitivity. In this introduction I will briefly present some of the main flaws that CSO projects to deal with the past have, as emerged during my conversation with Irfanka Pašagić, the psychiatrist I introduced above for her involvement in the project Adopt Srebrenica, and director of the CSO Tuzlanska Amica. In the two final sections of this chapter, I will analyse two CSO initiatives I observed during my fieldwork to highlight their strategies to produce change also at the level of the wider society, while also trying to mitigate the flaws identified by Irfanka.

During my fieldwork I found that the need to represent Srebrenica as a 'place of life' was especially strong among younger generations. They appeared to be driven by an urge to

portray to me an image of Srebrenica as a place where 'things were fine'. People I knew superficially, probably assuming that, as a foreign researcher, I was going to be interested only in war related topics, wanted to take distance from painful narratives. Instead, they highlighted what they considered to be positive aspects of their lives in Srebrenica. I discussed this observation with Irfanka. I asked her why she thought many people wanted to portray Srebrenica as 'problem free':

> "Srebrenica is a clear example of a superficial society. That is, as long as things are kept on the surface, everything is great, wonderful, the same happened in Rwanda, in Uganda…Precisely because we try to keep things that hurt us far from our consciousness. And this can be seen in all kinds of meetings: when people spend time together, when people visit some nice place, everything is fine. But if you touch the trauma, what happened, then you see that nothing is fine. And there is constant danger of any initiative being interrupted by such a conversation, that must become normal (…). And those kids who say that in Srebrenica everything is great and wonderful, while the Serbs have never been to the Potočari Memorial Centre and the Bosniacs have never been to the *Spomen Soba* [the Bosnian Serb memorial]…, that is enough to say that something is definitely not fine". (Irf., 2018)

Irfanka mentioned memorials and places of burials that, in Srebrenica, are very visible presences in the everyday life of the people living in this small town. These places carry strong symbolic meanings, are ethnically connotated and are part of the geography of contested memories that characterise post-war Bosnia. She stressed the disruptive effects that evoking the past can hold still today. It can tear apart the superficial veil which covers up people's antagonisms and facilitates interactions across ethnic lines, exposing underlying suffering and uneasiness. In her experience as a psychiatrist, she had facilitated encounters between multi-ethnic groups of women living in different towns right after the war. Even at that time, she remembered, a level of interaction was possible when people engaged in superficial exchanges like having coffee together. Every time they touched more sensitive issues, however, the groups risked falling apart.

Despite the difficulties she experienced while working with traumatised people after the war, she thought that working with young people who had not experienced the war directly presented different challenges: "I think that at the beginning things were much easier than they are now. People of all nationalities quite easily acknowledged what happened in Srebrenica.

Negationist theories were much less strong than they are now" (Irf., 2018). For this she blamed a combination of factors, such as less pressure from the international community as well as the slow work of local courts, which left space to a growing heroization of war criminals. Moreover, she felt that 'toxic' nationalism is very much present in everyday life, marked by a growing strumentalization of the past in public discourse (also by Jović, 2020).

As a matter of fact, in recent years, the government of Republika Srpska, headed by Milorad Dodik, has been leading an openly revisionist line on the crimes of the 1990s. After my fieldwork, in August 2018, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska annulled the 'Report on Srebrenica' of 2004 (mentioned in section 3.2.1) which had admitted the crimes of the Serbian-Bosnian army drawing from the documentation at the ICTY. It called for instituting two new international commissions for the investigation of the events in Srebrenica and in Sarajevo during the war. In February 2019, Republika Srpska appointed members to these commissions with the aim of finding "relevant data and facts" that "all peoples will have to accept, because they will be aimed at truth and reconciliation" (as quoted in Sasso 2019). International experts and scholars condemned these initiatives as revisionist attempts and opposed them. They defined the two commissions as "part of a deliberate revision scheme of already established truth", in a "context of instrumental appropriation of history"[15].

As described further above, projects dealing with the past carried out by CSOs, often in the form of face-to-face encounters, were at the centre of reconciliatory interventions implemented in Bosnia after the war. These programs often include visits to places of memory, such those mentioned by Irfanka, as part of educational activities. However, Irfanka highlighted the main problems that these projects can have:

> "Many of these projects on reconciliation consist in three-day seminars, then everyone goes back to their family, to their community…you can't take a child for five days and tell him fairy tales and then he goes back to his town where his first neighbour is a [war] criminal and in the next house lives someone whose mother and father were killed, it's impossible". (Irf., 2018)

[15] 'Truth and Revisionism in Bosnia and Herzegovina' https://balkaninsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/RS_Comission_FINAL_II.pdf. See Rudic, F., 2019 Bosnian Serb War Commissions 'Seeking to Revise Truth': Academics, Balkan Insight, 21 February 2019. Date Accessed: September 2021 https://balkaninsight.com/2019/02/21/bosnian-serb-war-commissions-seeking-to-revise-truth-academics/

Irfanka's critique touches two aspects which, in her opinion, make many of these projects problematic. One is the length: she considers many of these projects to be too short to leave an impact. The second aspect, a direct consequence of the first, is what I will call the 'bubble effect'. Participants take part in a friendly and open-minded environment where they experience closeness with people with 'liberal' views who might be very different from who and what they know at home. While, as we have seen in the accounts of Mladen and Bekir at the beginning of this chapter, this can be considered positive because it gives participants a chance to glimpse into other perspectives and possibilities, the above suggests that this also could enhance their sense of isolation and frustration. Once they are back home, they might find it difficult to find someone willing to listen to their experiences and to what they have learnt, especially if they start questioning the dominant narrative of one side, within which they are embedded.

During my fieldwork, I conducted participant observation in one CSO initiative that relates to these issues raised by Irfanka. I am offering a description with the aim to expand the analysis identifying strategies which could mitigate the fallouts Irfanka highlighted.

3.4.1 The Peace Camp

For the last days of May 2018, Valentina invited me to participate as an observer in one project called *Kamp Mira* (Peace Camp), organized by CSO Sara and the Dutch organization PAX. The project was part of a series of initiatives organized in the framework of the Youth United in Peace (YUP), a network that connects organizations from five cities in Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia. YUP originated in 1994 from the Committee for Human Rights and Democracy of Cologne and organises summer camps and workshops regularly in different cities in the three countries where participants are from. The event I followed, entitled "In a common European Future", brought together around 25 youngsters between 18 and 25 years of age from Serbia, Croatia and from different towns in Bosnia to spend three days in Srebrenica, using it as a case study to reflect about monuments and memorialization processes in Former Yugoslavia.

The ethnographic description of this activity offers an example of a face-to-face initiative aimed at 'dealing with the past' by bringing together young people from different parts of Bosnia and other countries in the ex-Yugoslav region. While Adopt Srebrenica was a small group that met for a long period of time, the Peace Camp creates the possibility for a

bigger group of young people to spend a couple of days together to visit places of memory and discuss memorialization policies. This description presents how participants reacted differently to this project on the basis of their different conceptions of 'normality'. At the same time, it touches upon some of the main features of these initiatives, such as what the project organizers expect of participants and what strategies they put into place to reach their objectives.

The meetings took place in the big room on the top floor of Motel Alić, overlooking the centre of Srebrenica, with participants sitting around a long table. To start the introductory round, small groups gave short presentations about their hometowns to the others, highlighting some aspects they considered significant. The touristic beauties of Sombor (Serbia), the multicultural tradition of Tuzla (BiH), the divisions in the town of Gornji Vakuf-Uskopljie (BiH), where a policy of 'two schools under one roof' for Bosniac and Bosnian Croat students is still in place. The presenters from Srebrenica talked about the natural beauties of their town, including the renown thermal water of the Guber Spa. They also underlined the good relations enjoyed by Bosnian Serb and Bosniac youth. The theme of divisions in the town was attributed to the local politicians and not to the youth population. The negative connotation of politics were highlighted as the cause of prevalent ethnic divisions because of their manipulations and instrumentalizations of the past without reflecting people's everyday life.

After the round of introduction by the participants, Dion, the Dutch man representing the donor organization PAX, talked in English to the youngsters, with the help of a Bosnian partner who translated, and introduced the project for the side of the donor organization: "Many people come here to tell you how to achieve reconciliation. I don't like it a lot as a word, and it's not up to people from the outside to tell you, because for them it's much easier". He talked about the debate that took place in the Dutch town of Geffen, where the local Council wanted to unveil a monument listing the names of both Jewish Holocaust victims and German soldiers. He brought this example to show how, also in The Netherlands, controversies over the past are still present, even after 70 years, and why it is important to talk about 'sensitive' issues. He concluded: "When someone from the Netherlands comes and tells you how to reconcile, you should tell them: and what about Geffen?".

It was interesting to notice how the organizer was aware of the local weariness towards the term 'reconciliation' and openly questioned the concept in order to gain legitimacy in the eyes of his young audience. In this case, the comparison between Bosnia and The Netherlands worked again, as we saw above in section 3.2.2, as a way to place Bosnia in the international

scenario by internationalising its problems and diminishing its 'exceptionality', in the sense of 'abnormality'. Moreover, it had the objective to empower the young people present in their potentially unbalanced relationship with the international hosts of the event.

During the three days of the project, the group of youngsters visited the Potočari Memorial Centre, dedicated to the Bosniac victims of the genocide, and the museal area in the former battery factory used as UN compound during the war. The day after, they went to the Bonsian Serb *Spomen Soba* (Commemorative Room), two rooms located in a building on the main road leading to the centre of the town, dedicated to the Serbs who died in Srebrenica during the war. Later, they followed seminars led by Marko, a representative of the partner organization Youth Initiative for Human Rights, on the history of post-war monuments in the region. Participants were invited to discuss the distinctive characteristics of the two memorials, how victims were identified, how their stories were conveyed, how evidences of facts were presented by the tour guides and by the choices of materials and documents displayed.

During discussions in informal groups after the visits, participants noticed that memorials were separated on the basis of the ethnicity of the victims. They also noticed the conflicting versions of facts as evident when comparing the narratives of respective guides. One participant from Serbia was particularly struck by the fact that the guide at the Bosnian Serb *Spomen Soba* spent more time talking about how the numbers of the victims on the Bosniac side was fake rather than giving information about the people whose pictures were displayed on the walls of the memorial.

On the second day, the Mayor of Srebrenica paid a visit to greet the participants. In his brief and energetic speech, he welcomed them to Srebrenica and invited them not to be "too bothered about the past", to "leave it to historians", to think with their heads and not be misled by the media. Above all, he invited them to enjoy the beauties of Srebrenica. He reminded them of the festival 'Days of Srebrenica', taking place in those same days, offering concerts and sports events, including a boxing match on the following day at the school playground. Although his presence served to legitimise the program and was well received by the organizers, his message appeared to be in total contrast with the purpose of the initiative itself, conveying to me a feeling of two worlds encountering each other without communicating. While the Mayor did not oppose the realization of the project itself, maybe also because of the strong international support behind it, he bluntly downplayed its utility.

To conclude the workshop, following the visits and talks, participants were invited to design a monument that would express their ideas of how war victims should be commemorated. Their reflections included monuments without nationalist symbols, privileging universal images like a heart and a tear; the use of the word 'people' instead of 'victims' to focus on their individual rather than on numbers; and the need to dedicate an inclusive monument to all 'innocent' victims, meaning civilians, showing the need to unify them beyond ethnic belonging and stress common humanity.

During the three days of the event participants went through very emotionally intense moments. The visits to the memorials mobilised feelings of sadness and stress, but they could also relax during opportunities to socialize. Lunches and dinners were shared together in two of the town's restaurants and, in the evenings, smaller groups went for a drink at Café Marlboro, enjoying rock music, pool matches or the concert of popular Bosnian singer at the playground. In the final round of collecting impressions at the end of the three days, all participants were invited to say something about their experience and reflections. The most recurring theme was an appreciation of the chance to spend time together with old friends and make new ones. Others stressed the relationship of trust developed with the trainers, Valentina and Stana, who to some of them represented important points of reference as knowledgeable partners and facilitators, able to create a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere. Many stressed also the value the event had had for them in relation to the possibility of spending time with people who shared their views. One girl from Vukovar (Croatia), expressed her sadness for the end of the program because she saw it as a chance to spend time with people who "think alike", "people I don't have in my town". In the final round of farewells, just before everyone started heading back to their own respective towns, emotions were high, and participants exchanged hugs and promises to be in touch and to see each other soon. I observed that this experience, like the meetings described by Adopt members above, was an occasion where emotions played an important role in creating connections with other participants, developing a sense of commonality and empathy, bordering with catharsis.

According to Zike, an 18-year-old activist of the Gornji Vakuf/Uskopljie (BiH) youth centre, the main aim of these camps was to bring together young people from different towns in the region and spend time together (*družiti se*). The initiatives that the Youth Centre organizes in his town are equally aimed at creating occasions where children can enjoy time together "so that they can remember: I spent time with Ahmed or Muhamed or Lucio [Bosniac and Bosnian Croat names]". Ethnicity keeps being a factor to be considered when living in a

context highly divided like Gornji Vakuf/Uskopljie and interethnic initiatives aim to set a precedent, and make memories of the possibilities for people to enjoy time together across the ethnic lines. While for the younger generations, their understanding of the past is mediated by the stories of their local communities and ethnicised in their nationalist surroundings, Zike further highlighted the role which parents can have in discouraging their children from having interethnic relations:

> "I think that parents participate in this a lot. I am the first who grew up in that context, you know, and my same father told me: 'you can't, son! [not clear]'. Then, after I understood some things, [I said], why did you tell me with no reason that they would have hit me?!" (Zik., 2018).

This shows that the divisions may run also along intergenerational lines. Here, the 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy is that of parents versus a younger generation which did not experience the war directly (David 2019). Parents do play a part also during these programs as they are informed in advance about the activities their kids will be involved in and, in the case of underage kids, they are left free to decide to exempt them from some of the activities. For example, as Valentina recalled, during previous youth camps, many Serb parents from Srebrenica did not allow their children to visit the Potočari Memorial Centre with the rest of the group.

S., on the other hand, a 27-year-old event participant from Srebrenica, expressed weariness towards the initiative, during an informal conversation with the organizers. She thought initiatives such as this, where young people come together to talk about the past, risked continuing to give Srebrenica an image that is always connected to the war, overshadowing any positive image. She was particularly struck by listening to the presentation of the activists from Gornji Vakuf/Uskoplije about the ethnic divisions in town. She compared it to the situation in Srebrenica, which seemed to her much more positive as there are not as stark physical divisions and children are going to school together. She said that her best friend had always been a Muslim (she is a Bosnian Serb) and that "99% of people in Srebrenica don't have any problems with the other group" (S., 2018). Those few who do have problems, she added, are those who are "poisoned". Her comment recalls the desire previously identified from other respondents, including the Mayor, who aim to change Srebrenica image, one exclusively associated with war, genocide and political disputes over the past, at the expense of what also this respondent considered to be the 'positive' things happening in town: festivals and cultural

initiatives in general. Her statements highlight again how reconciliatory initiatives aimed at talking about the past and explicitly vouching for inter-ethnic contact, locally are often perceived in contrast with everyday experiences of 'normality' where people get together without having to 'stand under the reconciliation banner'.

The above description offers an example of a face-to-face initiative aimed at 'dealing with the past' by bringing together young people from different parts of Bosnia and other countries in the ex-Yugoslav region. While Adopt was a small group that met for a long period of time, the Peace Camp creates the possibility for a bigger group of young people to spend together a couple of days to visit places of memory and discuss about memorialization policies. Similarly, though, the focus, besides offering information about historical facts, seems to be about the creation of a microcosm of social interactions to develop empathy based on new friendships, relationships and emotionally-shared experiences. As in the case of the girl from Vukovar and Zike, such experiences differ drastically from what they are used to live where they come from. However, as showed in the word of S., not everybody received the initiative positively. CSOs attempt to change people's way of thinking regarding topics considered to be relevant by the organizers can actually conflict with the desire for 'normality' which implies the necessity to leave the past and ethnic identifications behind, like the case of S. shows.

Projects such as the one described here present also some of the features highlighted by Irfanka, they last only a few days and mark a separation between 'here' and 'there'. In the next section, I will show how the organizers try to address these problems and I will also discuss how these events are expected to impact the wider society beyond single individuals.

3.4.2 Mitigating the flaws

The workshops that took place during the Peace Camp were run by Marko, an activist from the organization Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR), funded in 2003. YIHR is a regional network of CSOs in Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb, Podgorica and Pristina. Its main aim, as stated on their website, is "to educate younger generations on the heritage of war promoting dialogue on the prospects for the democratic development of our societies"[16]. Like YU Peace Network, they also organize training programs aimed at dealing with the past. As described above, visiting the places where events took place and talk to witnesses is considered to be one

[16] Youth Initiative for Human Rights, About, https://www.yihr.rs/bhs/o-nama/, accessed September 2021

of the main elements that allows participants to empathise with the 'other side', change their views and understand how nationalist sides try to use history for their own purposes.

Observing the interactions between youngsters during the YU Peace Camp, I realized that some of them already knew each other from previous camps. For Marko, that is a defining characteristic of the program:

> "I think the success of this program is that it continues. You have the same people from the other programs and some new, so that's a good starting point. And then you can see a progress. Especially for the people that were earlier on these types of programs, they are pillars of the work (…) they are doing this peer-to-peer knowledge, maybe better than you as facilitator of the group, so that's a good point" (Mar., 2018).

Marko highlighted that continuity was one of the main factors that could reduce the shortcomings highlighted by Irfanka: the short length of the activities and the bubble effect. By continuity he meant not only the possibility for the program itself to continue throughout the years, but also the chance for young people to take part more than once. This could mitigate the bubble effect for participants because they know that they will have other chances to spend time with the people they met, with whom they share views on the world they live in and some powerful emotional experiences.

I challenged Marko about what happens after these programs are over. Do they have a societal impact that extends further beyond changes at the individual level and the creation of individual bonds between participants? Referring to the young people who took part in the Peace Camp he said:

> "They are a small group of people who think in this way. And they need to be aware of this, because I think their task is right now, our responsibility, to share this experience, not only among these people, but in their communities, that's the toughest thing they need to do" (Mar., 2018).

Through these initiatives participants have the chance to visit memorial sites and learn about war facts in a way that organizers consider to be more objective compared to those offered by the formal education system. According to Marko, participants can become themselves 'drivers of change' who could disseminate what they learnt in their contexts of origin. The awareness acquired during these initiatives, therefore, comes with the responsibility to spread the news far beyond the group of participants, involving the society they live in:

"The way is kind of recommendation to friends. (…) How to say, not directly 'want to be in', but it's something that is connected with the war or for example they are in some other political party, so they are interested in society, in social problems and they want to confront with someone. And if they want, it is really a good thing. I mean, they will always ask questions. In the last program of Youth Initiative, we had five or seven people who were always debating. They did not agree with the agenda of the program, especially about our mission. And they are not saying it directly, but you can see it through their reactions. And I think it's a good thing because in the conflict of thoughts, of opinions, then you have a process. If you have one majority way of thinking that is the problem, if you are not problematizing your position then we have a problem" (Mar., 2018)

Marko's words recall Bekir's descriptions of the process of involving new members of Adopt Srebrenica. Marko describes it too as a gradual process where people already with a certain degree of interest and vicinity to the topic addressed in the events can be invited to participate. However, expressing disagreement is encouraged as well as making up their own mind based on the facts that are provided by the organizers, as Zlatan, another activist of YIHR, and colleague of Marko, told me referring to a program organized for slightly older participants compared to the Peace Camp group:

"Yes, we try to offer a healthy discussion about tragic things of the past war, and we try to offer factually and to make intellectual discussion about the tragedies that happened in Bosnia, and right now the political atmosphere and generally the political system is unable to incorporate this education in primary or secondary [formal] education. (…) But what we are doing, we are trying to be as objective as possible. That's why [we] work [on] regional programs and we try to make a curriculum for the schools that is as objective as possible. We are not trying to make a form of relativization, we are just trying to get the facts out there and to offer young people to make a conclusion based on facts". (Zla., 2018)

Participants are invested with the responsibility to influence their wider societies by communicating what they learnt during the meetings and involving other people who already had an interest in activism or politics. That of the 'activist', as we have seen for Adopt Srebrenica, it is not a role that every participant in these initiatives, no matter how interested in the topics addressed, would necessarily embrace lightly. Moving outside the dominant

narrative framework of a nationalist side can be very hard and some might not feel comfortable becoming the perceived 'traitor'. This is especially true if we think about people who might find it hard to talk about the past in an explicit way, and who, as I showed, prefer to live in coexistence in their own personal sphere through individual practices rather than through loudly declared statements.

3.4.3 From the core multi-ethnic group to the wider society

In the previous section, Marko mentioned how one of the objectives of the Peace Camp project, as well as those promoted by his organization YIHR, was not only offering participants opportunities to discuss sensitive topics related to the past, but also producing actors of change that can extend what they gained from these projects to their own society. How does this take place in practice?

In this section, I will present one of the projects developed within the core group of Adopt Srebrenica with the aim to reach out to the wider society. While the group throughout the years, since 2005, saw a turnover of many members, those involved were taking part on a regular basis for long periods of time in meetings, interactions with the international partners and travels abroad. As we saw, this allowed the space and the time to process difficult discussions on sensitive topics and develop new ideas, as well as consolidate personal friendships.

In the course of these interactions, the Adopt group developed one of its main defining projects, the Adopt Srebrenica Research and Documentation Centre. The idea of the project started developing in 2011, when Muhamed, after a long search, found a recording of his father's voice giving a radio interview. It was the first time he could hear his father's voice after he died during the war. Thanks to former neighbours, he also managed to find about 80 family pictures that he thought were lost forever after his family left their village. The value of this material was even more inestimable since the remains of his father are still missing.

Besides the loss of lives and the destruction of infrastructures, the war in Bosnia was characterised by the annihilation of material culture. Religious buildings, libraries, archives, museums, monuments, historical monuments and bridges, libraries, and archives documenting the history of Bosnia had been systematically destroyed (Bakaršić 2002; Riedlmayer 2002; Supple 2005; 2007; Halilovich 2014). On a private level, people lost personal archives of family pictures which they had to leave behind when fleeing their homes in the midst of

violence and destruction. To many, like Muhamed, those pictures were the last physical testimony of the existence of people erased by the war. At the same time, they were also documents portraying the life in Srebrenica before the war: family scenes, town celebrations, school pupils with their teachers, everyday life of a thriving Yugoslav touristic town. When Muhamed shared his story within the Adopt group, his colleagues also realized how powerful the photographic testimonies could be to narrate their own stories, and the story of their town. Because of the events between 1992 and 1995, most of the research from already existing institutes focussed on those years, while the period before was usually overlooked. The group decided to keep collecting materials to establish a Documentation Centre which would focus on the history of Srebrenica before the war and become a channel to communicate with the wider public to start a dialogue about coexistence and the future of Srebrenica:

> "We came to the idea of using photos and audio materials, to talk about Srebrenica before the war, because we have generations who grew up without knowing anything, because they grew after the crime of genocide and Srebrenica is not how it used to be (…) Video, audio, and photo material can be very important for the generations who were born after the war and who do not have memory of Srebrenica. They grew up in a [ethno-]national community. We wish to tear apart this monotonous picture, preserve the memory of those who are not here anymore, and of the town". (Mua., 2018)

In 2015, with the support of the Alexander Langer Foundation and of Tuzlanska Amica, Adopt realized a photo exhibition where each member of the group chose one picture from their family, or from families that were close to them, and wrote a description of it. The work started within the activists' respective family circles, to make Adopt members familiarize with the process of collecting interviews and deal with potentially very sensitive topics in the process. The stories of the people depicted retraced the social and relational fabric of the town, the fate people encountered during the war, but also positive memories related to the past life in the town. The exhibition was presented at the International Week of Memory (IWM) in Tuzla that year and, since then, it was hanged in the dining room of the Hotel Misirlije in Srebrenica. Following this experience, the members of Adopt started collecting pictures from any citizens of Srebrenica. They scanned and archived the pictures with the aim to create an online archive depicting life in Srebrenica before the war.

Besides family pictures, Adopt's activists also started collecting objects that testified to the social and economic past of the town. During my stay in Srebrenica in 2018, I followed

Bekir and Valentina during their research around abandoned sites in and around Srebrenica. They collected materials that, after more than 25 years, were still laying between the rubbles of destroyed buildings. They went to factories, schools and hotels, today abandoned and invaded by vegetation. During my stay in Srebrenica, Bekir cleaned the Adopt office, a two-storey building close to the town centre, and arranged the shopping window, which overlooked the main road, with some of the objects they had collected – flask for thermal water from the Guber spa, old postcards, spare parts' boxes with 1980s designs, and so on. This small window exhibition served to create a connection with Srebrenica's citizens attracted by the novelty. People stopped by to have a chat and to share memories related to the objects. One elderly lady stopped to look at the flasks used for the thermal water when Srebrenica was a popular touristic thermal attraction. This reminded her of her husband who used to work at the Guber Thermal Baths. Bekir and Borko, another Adopt member, seized the opportunity to introduce her to the work of Adopt and the aim of the Documentation Centre of collecting family pictures and their related stories. Another time, a journalist came by to interview Bekir about the work of the centre and by looking at the workers' documents of one of the firms, she found a connection. Bekir recalls:

> "Earlier that journalist came and looked at the documents and she found a name that she knew. And she will call that person who probably will contact us, and we will invite her to talk and maybe she will have more information or more material to share" (Bek., 2018)

Throughout its history, the Adopt group always tried to involve people in the activities organized within the framework of the IWM. Nevertheless, I remember the frustration felt by the members when very few people outside the usual circle participated in workshops or conferences. The Documentation Centre constituted a different path to try to engage with the local population, especially those who otherwise would not have come to events organized in a more formal way. According to Valentina, the uniqueness of the Documentation Centre was a way to differentiate them from other organizations on the ground, to "show that we have something to say, we can show that we are different. Here, too many non-governmental organizations offer similar activities, projects, really, if you are not different it is difficult to start". (Val., 2018)

The collection of materials retrieved in abandoned buildings resulted in the photographic exhibition "(U)mjesto života" (which in Bosnian means 'place of life', but with

the ‘u’ means the opposite, ‘instead of life’). Interestingly, this title seems to recall the opposition I presented above between images of Srebrenica as ‘place of death’ and ‘place of life’ suggesting that, in fact, these realities coexist. The pictures represented the buildings that used to characterise the social and economic life of Srebrenica before the war. Krsto Stjepanović, an elderly resident of Srebrenica, who supported the project with his knowledge on the economic history of the town, said in a television interview:

> “I knew how life was before the 1990s and in 1999. When I came back, I was so disappointed that I was not happy to be back here. Srebrenica had been one of the most open towns in former Yugoslavia, here lived doctors, engineers, professors from Macedonia to Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, 8.500 people worked here, the whole municipality had 36.000 inhabitants, 6.500 here in the urban area. Today there is no job, people left, there are no more than 1000 people living in the urban area” (BHT1 2020).

The place chosen to host the final exhibition was the ruin of the Hotel Lovac, the same place where Muamer organized his band’s concert as mentioned previously. Once a place of holidays for the highest cadres of Socialist Yugoslavia, today the building of Hotel Lovac is abandoned, and its walls are covered in graffiti. For its position on a hill overlooking the town, the former hotel is visible from the centre of Srebrenica. Its pointed roof and blackened walls stand out as a landmark. While neglected, it has become an informal place for young people to gather. The debris and garbage laying on the floor required the activists and other volunteers to invest long hours of cleaning to prepare it for hanging the pictures. The exhibition was organized also in conjunction with the visit of the Italian partners from the Alexander Langer Foundation who spent a few days in town. Very few people from the town attended but, by coincidence, a group of visitors from another group of Youth Initiative for Human Right (the same organization that collaborated with Valentina in organizing the peace Camp), including participants from all former Yugoslav regions, was visiting Srebrenica and went to the Lovac to observe the town from above. Intrigued by the pictures they went to have a look. Bekir introduced the exhibition to them:

> “[Whether] we wanted it or not, factories were places where people used to go together to make a living. And while making a living they also found the way from one to the other. What has changed now is that people in Bosnia, and in the region as well, are divided by nation, by religion. At the time that did not matter (...) This is part of the former industrial landscape of Srebrenica. We tried to present different components of

society like the construction company Radna, that had a huge building at the entrance of Potočari and used to sell concrete. The firm Feros, that used to be part of the Yugoslav giant UNIS, they used to sell car components. Then the sector of tourism, Srebrenica has huge natural resources like mines and waters rich in minerals that nowadays, for lack of political will are not exploited (...) Then the education sector, like the school of Osam, half has been renovated, half is still destroyed. Before the war, 7000 children used to go to schools all around the Srebrenica municipality. Today, in this school that used to have 1000 pupils, there are just six. This place [Hotel Lovac] used to be very popular among people in Srebrenica and tourists. It was a hotel and a restaurant, it's called Lovac, funded by the hunting association. People used to come here to have fun, and now you see how it looks, you see what a war is, what it does. Instead of coming here to the restaurant for coffee, we walk in ruins." (Bek., 2018)

An underpinning idea of the exhibition was to show the past of the town as characterised by good relations and a thriving economy, a relevant theme also mentioned above by my other respondents. The exhibition aimed at tracing a bridge between that 'lost normality' and today's reality, where those buildings are empty and silent spaces, mirroring the decay of the social and economic life and relations of the town. The Documentation Centre, more in general, attempts to create an archive as a site to reassert 'erased' identities (Halilovich 2014), as a collective representation of a lost community, while at the same time addressing everyday struggles which everyone living in Srebrenica today has to deal with and can relate to.

An initiative such as the exhibition has the potential of being effective in speaking to the wider community who might not wish to engage in other events formats such as conferences or workshops. However, in this specific case the exhibition did not attract a wide public, apart from the organizers, a few locals, the Italian partners and the YIHR group that was there by chance, for a combination of factors including little advertisement. In this respect, the exhibition was presented as a pilot project that, according to Bekir, could develop into a research project that would juxtapose the pictures of the destroyed buildings with the stories of the people who used to spend time in them before the war. Involving people in the research process and in the creation of a new exhibition, he thought, would be a way to wider the impact.

3.5 Conclusions

During my fieldwork in Srebrenica, I explored how the experiences of CSOs' initiatives aimed at bridging post-war divisions are narrated. The analysis focussed on the contrast and interaction between wider (global, national or international) discourses produced around the intervention paradigm of reconciliation and CSO beneficiaries' experiences of divisions as well as CSO practices. I explored how such interaction impacts CSO's chances of success in 'bringing people together' beyond existing societal divisions, and the ways in which CSOs identify solutions to achieve their goals.

The accounts collected shed light on how people define the change which they hope or expect from these CSOs' work and what strategies they considered more effective to achieve it. From the fieldwork it also emerged that the ways in which reconciliatory interventions are perceived by people and considered as positive or not, is connected with stereotypical representations of Srebrenica. Participants of CSO initiatives needed to preserve or discard such representations, depending on their idea of normality.

As my fieldwork demonstrates, CSOs promoting projects that work on dealing with the past in Srebrenica, operate in a very complex environment: the past remains a highly sensitive topic, still a taboo in the formal education system, and constantly at the centre of a divisive political debate. In face of precarious economic and social conditions, people advocate for their need for normality. This concept emerged as particularly relevant in response to the contextual upheavals experienced in the immediate afterwar period and remain relevant with the passing of time. However, what people consider 'normal' varies: for some it is a status quo that needs to be preserved, for others 'normality' is something lost that they long to retrieve.

During my fieldwork the concept of normality emerged in the form of opposing imageries. People referred to stereotypical representations of Srebrenica as either a 'place of death', connected to the past war and to the present situation of a stagnant economic and political reality, or as a 'place of life', where people get along and things are fine. To some, discussing the past prevents society from moving forward and keeps promoting an image of Srebrenica solely linked to war and suffering while hiding positive aspects of the life there. Some respondents expressed their frustration when initiatives, as well as relationships between people, were valued and labelled 'successful' only if framed within the reconciliation discourse. This term was used solely in reference to interethnic interactions: I showed this in

the case of Muamer's and Miroslav's project and in the case of S., who felt her interethnic friendship was not sufficiently valued because it was developed outside of CSOs initiatives.

CSOs' initiatives observed in this chapter aim at creating microcosms of social interactions based on social relationship-building as their main component. I showed that many projects declare themselves 'multi-ethnic' to satisfy donors, because framing initiatives employing the reconciliatory discourse tend to be more successful in getting international attention and, sometimes, more funds. Confirming previous research on the topic (see 2.3.1), to some these projects contribute to crystalizing people's identities along ethnic lines and 'creating' problems by bringing ethnicity to the fore, a discourse of 'ethnicisation' contrasted with non-ethnicised relations that people consider 'normal'. I also showed one example of how right-wing actors aim to represent Srebrenica as 'problem free' in order to silence confrontations about the past and make their own vision prevail.

Moreover, these CSO initiatives have been criticised, as research shows, because they tend to counterbalance any ethnic identification with a feeling of commonality based on emotional "solidarities based on pure humanity" (David 2020, p.212). There is a risk that this inter-personal solidarity is destined to fade after the project is over, without leaving any trace of change in wider society. The encounters that result from these initiatives are considered "just rare temporal moments in which distant subjects elevate themselves from their socio-political and historical contexts, remembering for a second that we all breath the same air" (David 2020, p.212). Furthermore, these high-sounding objectives sound even more unreachable if CSOs' projects last only a couple of days, as highlighted by some of my interviewees.

However, I presented some aspects that the interviewees considered allowed some of these initiatives to succeed within limits. In their attempt to produce change at the individual and at the wider level, CSOs need to take the above-mentioned problems into account.

First, I showed how CSO staff highlighted the importance to combine different levels of sensitivity when engaging people in the initiatives, modulating 'volumes' and degrees of visibility on the ground. The initiative of Adopt Srebrenica, born 10 years after the end of the war, answered the need of some of talking about 'problems' more explicitly, proposing initiatives that invited participants to acknowledging other side's stories and interpretations of war events. I showed how members' involvement in a process based on trust and sensitivity combined with low visibility on the ground can allow involvement of participants in the

discussion of sensitive and taboo topics, while going abroad gave participants more freedom to talk, having an audience willing to listen to otherwise overlooked personal stories.

Secondly, continuity is considered a crucial aspect. The Peace Camp aimed at involving young people in initiatives to develop critical thinking to reflect on the memorialization processes and question nationalist narratives of memory and war. Similar to Adopt Srebrenica, this initiative showed that encouraging the participation of the same people more than once or for longer periods of time can serve multiple objectives. First, to reduce the so-called 'bubble effect': on the one hand, reducing the expectation placed on these initiatives as 'resolutive' and, on the other, offering people more time and opportunities to develop relationships and ideas for shared projects.

The case of Adopt also showed how continuity of work with the same small group of people allowed the development of a project that could potentially impact wider society in Srebrenica. Combining the collection and archiving of family pictures and artistic initiatives, exemplified by the photo exhibition described, the home-grown project of the Research and Documentation Centre resorts to the pre-war past to initiate reflections upon the structural economic factors that need to be addressed to make Srebrenica a place where life is worth living for everyone.

In the words of my interviewees, calling for a 'common humanity' was considered important in the immediate aftermath of the war at a moment when 'bringing people together' seemed 'making the impossible' possible (Husanovic 2020). More than talking about problems, the priority seemed that of bringing people together on the basis of common basic needs and address the most pressing and traumatic consequences of the war in people's everyday life. Participants who took part in those initiatives at that time identified positive outcomes also in one-off experiences, making sense of them retrospectively. They considered as positive the possibility to visit new places, enjoy their time with their peers, get information they would not have had the chance to access otherwise, widen their horizons, without paying too much attention to the underpinning objectives of these projects connected to notions of reconciliation.

Moreover, my research demonstrates that, although initiatives such as those which I observed during my fieldwork are also grounded in the 'common human nature' of participants, they also attempt to raise awareness that ethnic identities can be modulated according to context. These projects have the aim of building 'civil friendships', where participants become

friends in the sense of 'adversaries' engaged in "often agonistic discourse about the world we share in common" (Schaap 2004, p.4). At the same time, I showed how people, within these initiatives, constantly renegotiate their positionality in relation to each other, to their country and, beyond their national borders, with the rest of the world, resorting to different aspects of their identities to achieve specific purposes. As I showed, people can appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade, or transform categories organizing society, even when these are imposed on them (Brubaker 2002), giving relevance to varied degrees to their ethnic belonging in line with their personal or political aims: sometimes stressing ethnic belonging can be relevant to discuss individual versus collective responsibilities, at other times categories can be subverted, for example making fun of a journalist in search for an uplifting story (see p. 115).

I showed how CSOs can succeed, within limits, in producing change deemed positive by participants. In their attempt to produce change at the individual and at the wider level of society, they may implement strategies that take into account how intervention paradigms are perceived and interpreted locally and how this translates into different notions of normality.

The main themes that emerged throughout this chapter - how change is described; what strategies CSOs adopt to involving people; how stereotypical representations of places linked to notions of normality - also emerged in the fieldwork in Dorset, as will be presented in the next chapter.

4 ‘Bringing people together’ in Dorset – the aftermath of the Brexit referendum

During my ethnographic fieldwork in Dorset, conducted from February to September 2019, I explored, just as in Bosnia, how experiences of bridging divisions are narrated, with a focus on the interaction between wider discourses produced by intervention paradigms, people’s experiences of divisions and CSO practices. While, in Bosnia, I referred to ‘reconciliation’ as the main intervention paradigm that people associate with CSOs initiatives, in the UK I identified ‘community cohesion’ as the paradigm that guides CSOs’ work.

Different to Bosnia, where the CSOs I observed were funded as a consequence of the war, the CSOs I examined in Dorset were funded long before Brexit. Dorset Race Equality Council (DREC) for example, was funded in 1999 to fight racism and support minority groups living in Dorset. In section 4.1.1 I will introduce how Dorset is also not free, like Bosnia, from stereotypical representations and what impact these have. The chapter will start with a focus of the ‘idyllic Dorset’ imagery, represented as predominantly white and therefore ‘problem free’ in terms of issues relating to diversity and migration. CSOs devoted to promoting positive race relations had worked for years to debunk such stereotypical representation and bring to the fore the experiences of minority groups living in Dorset, to promote their rights and fight their marginalisation and isolation. The Brexit referendum brought these issues to the fore more blatantly and unmasked a complex social reality.

In particular, in section 4.1.2, I will present ‘community cohesion’ as a trope which recurs in discourses associated with statutory agencies and CSOs responding to the divisions following the Brexit referendum. The Brexit referendum was defined as an event that disrupted ‘community cohesion’. My CSO-respondents perceived their task as that of restoring it.

In the subsequent sections I will look at how people described the ways in which community cohesion has been affected by the Brexit referendum and how CSOs on the ground reacted in the immediate aftermath: first, in section 4.1.3, I look at how people working in CSOs, as well as EU citizens, talk about their perception of the change of socio-political climate in Dorset and the forming of societal divisions. Following this, in section 4.1.4, I look at the rise in hate crime in Dorset and DREC’s related initiatives.

Then, in section 4.2, I will present the experiences of EU citizens living in Dorset in some detail, looking at how they experienced their categorization as ‘other’ and how Brexit

impacted their life possibilities. The concept of normality borrowed from the Bosnian context was also found to apply in the case of the UK: research respondents feared that Brexit would entail the end of the multicultural Dorset they were used to.

In the second part of the chapter (4.3) I will focus on ethnographically describing the practices of CSOs in Dorset whose activities are aimed at bringing people together in the newly shaped post-Brexit referendum context.

In particular, I will present two CSO initiatives The first, called 'Multicultural meet-ups', organized by DREC, aimed at facilitating the creation of groups of people from minority backgrounds in different towns in Dorset to fight isolation and stimulate grassroot activism. The second initiative, called 'Home', took place in the framework of the Emerging Art Fringe Festival and was born out of the organizer's interest for the new condition of estrangement experienced by EU citizens after the referendum.

These CSO initiatives in Dorset, although not focussed on 'dealing with the past' as in Bosnia, can be defined as 'community projects' that similarly, as with Bosnia, aim at bringing diverse people together. They aim at creating microsocial groups, put value on inter-group interactions, and aim at stimulating reflections among the wider public on sensitive issues at stake such as, in the Dorset case, a sense of belonging, inclusivity, and minorities' rights in British society.

The analysis of these initiatives, in the light of findings based on interpreting 'community cohesion' as an intervention paradigm just as with the Bosnian case study, brought to the fore similar themes. These refer to, for example, CSO actors' expectations for change, and how these stood in contrast with the actual effects of their intervention activities on the ground; the strategies adopted to achieve change.

4.1 From 'no problem here' to the Brexit 'change of climate'

4.1.1 Diversity and the Dorset idyll

Dorset is a coastal, rural county in the South-West of England characterised by many small villages and one major urban area in the South-East, with the conurbation of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. For its beautiful beaches and countryside, Dorset is one of the most popular British tourist destinations. Moreover, mild weather and low crime rate

make it a preferred destination for a high proportion of people aged 65 and older[17]. When I moved to Dorset in September 2017, I soon learnt that 'idyllic Dorset' was one of the main tropes associated with the county: a place of quietness and leisure, advertised as such in tourist brochures. The first image of Dorset I encountered matched with this representation. On the day of my arrival from Italy, defying my prejudices of the British weather, Bournemouth welcomed me with glorious blue skies and high temperatures. On my first walk on the crowded beach near my new place in Alum Chine, I immediately experienced the feeling of being in a popular holiday destination.

The crowds were also motivated by the fact that that same day was the first day of one of Dorset's main attractions, the renowned Air Festival that every year attracts thousands of visitors from all over the country. The beaches and the cliffs were packed with people following the appearance of rumbling planes leaving coloured trails in the sky. Besides spectacular aerial shows, from First World War plane models to the iconic Red Arrows, the manifestation was presented as a festive 'family event' with a full display of army vehicles and spectacularized military exercises. Children were climbing on tanks parked on the beach and were invited to simulate shooting with real size machine-guns. For somebody engaged with victims' war memory in Bosnia, these displays, both visually and auditory, felt not celebratory but slightly intimidating.

As I had just arrived in the UK to research the divisions in post-Brexit referendum Dorset, I could not help wondering what this display of symbols of British militarism and national pride meant for a county, in which all of districts favoured the campaign to leave the European Union. As I have shown above (see 2.1.4), one aspect of the Brexit referendum campaign was the nostalgia for the imperial past and brought to the fore discussions about national identity, racism and immigration. British military air shows, as Rech (2015) noticed, are "a legitimation of the nation state, are designed as a celebration of military strength and reproduce imaginaries of the world as backdrop to threat, host to difference and stage to war" (Rech 2015, p.541). They are means of placing the "citizen within the political world of the

[17] Out of 375,000 residents, 28% of are aged 65 and older (compared to 18% in England and Wales). https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/your-council/about-your-council/dorset-council-plan/understanding-dorset.aspx#:~:text=Dorset%20(Council%20area)%20has%20a,and%20relatively%20low%20birth%20rates .

state' (MacDonald 2006, 57) and of inculcating senses of the borders, boundaries, differences and dangers integral to modern geopolitical imaginations" (Rech 2015, p.537). What were the new 'borders, boundaries, differences and dangers' that the Brexit referendum made emerge in the specific context of Dorset? How did social tensions manifest in a place that is usually associated with leisure and simple and peaceful scenes of coastal and rural life? Whose pride and prowess was asserted vis-à-vis what enemy or 'other', outside or within?

In the literature on 'race relations' in the UK, seaside and rural environments have been overlooked for a long time as these areas of England have been traditionally represented as free from issues of race and immigration, 'problems' that are typically associated to more urbanised environments: "Archetypical leisure space of happiness, fun, play and escapism, the English seaside is perceived and represented widely as a benign, neutral, monolithic social space", and "the relative absence of 'visible' minority ethnic groups, combined with dominant constructions of whiteness as a deracialised, invisible, and unnamed subjectivity, has rendered the English seaside seemingly irrelevant as a place for studying race" (Burdsey 2016, p.10). Similar reasons delayed academic interest in the study of race in rural areas: "In part, this neglect of the rural may be attributable to the enduring appeal of idyllic, cliched representations of the countryside which, as Neal (2002: 443) suggests, evoke desirable imagery such as 'rolling green fields, winding lanes, cream teas, chocolate box villages' and these have been central to the production of romanticised constructions portraying rural England as a 'white landscape', to coin Agyeman's (1989) description" (Chakraborti 2010, p.502).

While I initially understood 'idyllic Dorset' as a touristic slogan to promote natural beauties, I soon realised that that expression carried also a social and political dimension. The term 'idyll', therefore, referred also to areas in England with low levels of diversity, associated with nostalgic ideals of 'authentic' English identity (Jones 2013), more specifically Englishness, and idealised 'whiteness' (Williams 1973). Compared to other areas of the UK, Dorset presents lower levels of diversity: in 2011 4.5% of Dorset's population classed themselves as being from a black and minority ethnic (BME) group, compared to the proportion nationally, 19.5% (Dorset Council 2011c). Nevertheless, residents from a minority ethnic background increased from the 2001 census where they represented only 3.2% of the population. Representing rural and coastal areas as places traditionally associated with being 'quintessentially English' (Dorset Race Equality Council 2011) meaning non-diverse and hence 'non-problematic', overlooked the presence of small minority ethnic population, their experiences of racism and discrimination, and risked preventing their needs to be met by

service providers. Three pieces of research conducted in Dorset between the beginning of the 1990s to 2011 show how CSOs in the area tried to challenge the idea that 'race' was a non-issue for Dorset.

In 1992, the Commission of Racial Equality (CRE) with the support of Bristol Race Equality Council (BREC) undertook some research on racism in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset. As the majority of research at the time concentrated on metropolitan areas where most of Britain's ethnic minorities live, this study wanted to explore the experiences of people from various ethnic communities living in rural areas. The final report, "Keep them in Birmingham" , aimed at questioning the assumption that 'there is no problem here' (Jay 1992, foreword), giving a picture of racial prejudice and discrimination directed against ethnic minority residents in the selected counties.

Ten years later, in 2003, the Dorset Race Equality Council commissioned research from the University of Chichester entitled "Racism and the Dorset Idyll". A report to explore the experiences of Black and minority ethnic people in Dorset, Bournemouth, and Poole to inform local agencies serving the needs of minority ethnic groups. This was "not because 'there is widespread evidence of stark injustice, but because the assumption that 'there is no problem' may be too easy made where populations are small and 'communities' hard to identify" (Gaine and Lamley 2003, p.6).

In 2011, the South West Dorset Multicultural Network (SWDMN) in partnership with West Dorset District Council, commissioned to Dorset Race Equality Council a research to explore the experiences of BME people living in Dorset, both British and with a migration background, including experiences of hate crime, access to services and involvement with the police. The report "This is our home too", conducted five focus groups in West Dorset towns of Dorchester, Bridport and Sherborne. Anne Marie Vincent, at the time Chair of the South West Dorset Multicultural Network (SWDMN) wrote:

> "It is even more significant in these recessionary times that we become more aware of the issues facing many of our few BME communities in and around idyllic Dorset (…) Maintaining good race relations is important for Dorset as it enables black and minority ethnic communities to continue to make a valuable and positive contribution to the economy, welfare, culture and life of the local area" (Dorset Race Equality Council 2011, p.2).

This research, like the previous cited above, challenged the image of the 'idyllic Dorset' as unproblematic, since the 'picture-postcard' depiction of the area effectively silenced the experiences of discrimination and economic deprivation of non-white, marginalised population groups. In the following sections I will look at the ways in which the consequences of the Brexit referendum once again debunked this stereotypical representation, bringing to the fore new and old problems related to the field of race relations. I will start by showing how CSOs and local institutions used the trope of 'community cohesion' to define the problems raised after the referendum and the ways they adopted to address them.

4.1.2 Brexit and the disruption of 'community cohesion'

During my fieldwork in Dorset between March and September 2019, I noticed the widespread use of the expression 'community/social cohesion' by CSO staff to describe the impact the Brexit referendum had on society:

> "It [the referendum] has divided our society and divided people and sort of escalated the tension in the community and made community cohesion more difficult really. And I think some people feel uncomfortable now in this country who didn't feel uncomfortable before and I think that's a terrible thing. I don't know, Theresa May, when she was at the Home Office, brought in this, what did they call it, this sort of lack of tolerance approach to…zero tolerance to people who are migrants (…), yes, the hostile environment…I think we were getting more progressively tolerant of diversity in our society and because of the debate around Brexit and the way that's all come to the fore and been used we now seem to be going in the opposite direction and becoming less tolerant of diversity…" (Tin., 2019)

Tina, who worked for DREC as a community developer since 2017, felt the country 'moved more to the right' and, at international level, was gaining a reputation of an 'anti-immigrant' country versus a previous image of 'open' and 'liberal'. Debunking the loss of the 'tolerant Britishness' myth I mentioned in section 2.1.4, she linked the change to structural issues in the wider context of the latest immigration policies. In particular, she mentioned the 'hostile environment' and the impact this could have on a part of the population newly categorised as different or 'other'.

Nathalie Sherring, current chief officer at DREC, referred to the impact on social cohesion and the role of CSOs in this new scenario of divisions:

> "I think what, unfortunately, what happened with Brexit and, subsequently, in the atmosphere that has been created, is an atmosphere of fear, and it's an atmosphere of division for power really, so I don't think, obviously I don't want to be political but I don't think people in power are interested in social cohesion because they do everything to divide the society (…) on the one hand they want us to create social cohesion". (NAT)

In both Nathalie's and Tina's words, the referendum represented a 'watershed moment', a 'rupture' between a pre-referendum period characterised by a tolerant and open society, and a post-referendum of fear and divisions, that politicians contributed to ignite and continued to foment. At the same time, CSO staff feel the government expect them to solve the 'problems' and go back to the previous state of things. The role of CSOs in reinstating community cohesion was also highlighted in the immediate aftermath of the referendum by the Charity Aid Foundation (CAF) that considered that Brexit "contributed to change in a very short time the way in which people perceived their communities and society as whole" (Low 2016). Research conducted by CAF on the implications for charities presented Brexit as 'a challenge and an opportunity':

> "For many, charities offer an outlet for channelling a renewed appetite for making a difference. This presents a real opportunity to involve growing numbers of people in supporting the work of our charities. But there will be challenges, too. The referendum revealed divisions in society that will not heal overnight. People see a role for charities in working to bridge those divides (…) This is why we are calling on local and central government to commission charities to monitor levels of community cohesion, and threat, and to use the proposed British bill of rights to protect the freedom of charities to speak on behalf of their beneficiaries" (Low 2016)

At the annual conference of the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) the chief executive of the Mayor's Fund for London remarked that Brexit offered an opportunity to boost social integration and community cohesion, especially "for those left behind in our society to reconnect with society and politics" (Patten 2016), and CSOs were those who should be at the centre of this process being "pathfinders, innovators and canaries in the cage [sic]. We know the local context, the patterns of deprivation, the things that work and, crucially, those that don't" (Patten 2016).

In section 2.3.2 I showed that, since 2001, 'community cohesion' became a policy implemented at the national level by the Labour Govenrment. It was intended to replace

multiculturalism with communitarian approaches to 'bring people together' based on the development of shared values. Community cohesion policies ended officially in 2010 when the Conservative-Liberal Democrat national coalition government took power. Despite this, the expression 'community cohesion' remained embedded in discussions about multiculturalism at the level of national and local governments and civil society.

In March 2018 the Government published the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper as part of a "renewed focus on community cohesion" (LGA 2019, p.5) aiming at "providing the means to build stronger, more united communities across England". The Paper was a response to the 29% rise in hate crimes in 2016/2017, due also to the Brexit referendum, and to the Casey Review, published in December 2016, that highlighted the obstacles to integration which many parts of society still faced. It specifically pointed to a "worrying number of communities, divided along race, faith or socio-economic lines" (Green Paper 2018, p.10). The Paper indicated among its aims:

> "This is what true integration looks like – communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Communities where many religions, cultures and opinions are celebrated, underpinned by a shared set of British values that champion tolerance, freedom and equality of opportunity. A society in which everyone is a potential friend" (Green Paper 2018, p.10).

The Green Papers were followed by a Community Cohesion Guidance for Local Governments presenting best-practices as "councils and councillors have a hugely important role in promoting community cohesion" (LGA 2019, p.6):

> "Cohesion is a strategic and cross-cutting issue that requires input from the whole council. While community cohesion may be led by one service area or policy function, all service areas have a role to play in supporting it. Regulatory and environmental services and community safety teams can help ensure communities live by accepted standards of behaviour and address the nuisance factors that so often cause tensions; cultural services provide opportunities to bring communities together; while education and children's services, housing and economic development are all clearly vital to creating the sense of security, aspiration, opportunity and social mobility that is fundamental to integrated and cohesive communities." (LGA 2019, p.32)

As for the implementation at the local level, Dorset Council also started a discussion on how to include community cohesion in its agenda in 2019. Following the publication of the Green Papers, Dorset Council started a discussion about forming a 'Community Cohesion Group'. As reported by Susan, who worked for Dorset Council, the initiative was taken by the Council's 'Brexit planning group'. This group focussed mainly on the practical impact Brexit could have on businesses. However, councillors within the group raised concerns that Dorset Council, besides engaging with a number of community groups via various routes, did not have a coordinated service approach on community cohesion. According to the councillors, a community cohesion group could have dealt with the worries in preparing for what Brexit might cause in society. In particular, the issues identified as potential 'risks to community cohesion' were: a polarisation of the political debate; anxieties around a potential increase of hate crime; and the role of social media and fake-news in undermining community relations. Dorset Council convened two meetings on the topic in 2019, but it did not follow up with any concrete action plan.

Community cohesion' in the UK entered the realm of national and local policies which, in turn, shaped different definitions of this concept with time. Compared to the beginning of the 2000s, though, community cohesion seems to have progressively acquired a looser definition and, like reconciliation, means different things to different people depending on their vision of what 'cohesive communities' should look like. CSOs are actors that, besides being influenced by the discursive environment in which they are positioned, specifically by policy definition at different levels of government, play a role in contributing to shaping these visions and proposing ways to achieve the expressed aims. Throughout this chapter, I will show what community cohesion means for the CSOs I observed and how they implemented it through their activities on the ground.

Both Tina and Nathalie, in the quotes reported above, acknowledged their role as a charity in the process of 're-making' community cohesion. While they did not specify what 'community cohesion' meant in practice, they defined it by referring to 'what it was not' on the basis of the experiences they observed in their work on the ground, in the specific climate of the post-Brexit referendum: division, lack of tolerance, tension, fear, 'feeling uncomfortable about being here'. In the next sections, I will explore these experiences more in depth, presenting the different lines of divisions emerging in Dorset after the Brexit referendum as they were described by my interviewees, including both members of CSO staff and EU citizens.

4.1.2 Visible and audible signs of division

When I started my PhD in September 2017, more than one year after the results of the referendum on the United Kingdom's European Union membership in June 2016, the shock it had caused in the public opinion was still fresh. There were no conversations I witnessed, in Dorset and elsewhere in the UK, where mentioning Brexit would not expose passionate emotions. Many of my respondents agreed on saying that the Brexit referendum determined a 'change of climate', noticeable in the emergence of new lines of division that marked people's familiar landscape in both visible and audible ways.

Ebi has lived in the UK for over 30 years and is originally from Gambia. We met in 2018 at DREC when he was working there as a community developer. After that experience he started a new job at the Citizens Advice Bureau, as project manager for a Home Office funded project on hate crime. He suggested that the tenor of the Leave campaign and the final result of the Brexit referendum made some feel more comfortable to express their views and make them more explicit. This emerges in what Ebi said regarding the changes which occurred in the Bournemouth area, where he lives, and where Brexit was won with a majority of 54.9%[18]:

> "You can see where people are having certain courage because it was...legitimize system [sic], so that they can feel, like, yes I can say this now, or I can fly my flag. Because there are certain flags in the UK, when people are flying them outside their houses people tend to think that this…nationalist or very strong nationalist. I'm not saying right wing but maybe towards over-the-top nationalist. I remember during the referendum time you would go around the place and you see some people that put a British or English flag, suddenly they got it out on their window trying to make some kind of statement: ok, we are taking our country back" (Ebi, 2019).

[18] EU referendum, local results, BBC https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results/local/b , accessed on September 2021

In Ebi's experience, the 'British flag' – the Union Jack, and the 'English flag' – the Cross of St. George, became ubiquitously visible on the roads of Bournemouth and, due to the timing of their exposure, acquired a very specific meaning in his eyes. Through them, Ebi perceived that people were expressing their national belonging, their political views, a clear affirmation of their right of precedence over a specific territory, their 'autochtony', as suggested in section 2.1.4, where discourses of national belonging formation are paired with the need to exclude on the basis of the belief that 'we were here first' (Cassidy et al. 2018).

My respondents described how physical signs, such as posters and stickers, proliferated across the streets of Dorset, either anonymously spread around town or proudly exhibited by people in their front yards, cars, or shops. A popular bar in Boscombe (Bournemouth), in the area where I lived while conducting my fieldwork, kept the sign 'Vote Leave' very visible on its window for all the years following the referendum, and it remained there also after it permanently shut down in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the signs and symbols exposed were not only pro-Brexit, but also of the opposite side. I remember noticing EU flags hanging from the windows, and a 'You are welcome here' sticker, directed at EU citizens living in the UK, placed at a bus stop. One day I spotted an EU flag sticker on a road sign in the middle of a roundabout, pointing at Alum Chine beach. The small European flag was stuck on top of the stylized sandcastle tower symbol used to indicate beaches and piers. To me, an EU citizen living in post-Brexit referendum Dorset, that represented an attempt to communicate the presence of a stronghold resisting a majority Leave constituency. In the highly polarised post-Brexit scenario, these signs redefined the geographies of belonging, connecting political views with space in a way that before was not as manifest (Roberts 2020). Moreover, by advertising the belonging to a particular 'tribe' (of Leavers or Remainers), they also conveyed rejection or acceptance towards the perceived 'Other'.

The triumphalist flag-waving which had accompanied the victory of the Leave campaign, contrasted with the views of those who, in contrast, felt defeated by the results of the referendum. People transferred their feelings on the wider social and physical environment where they lived. This appears clearly in the words of JJ, a Polish man who I interviewed in Boscombe, together with his mother Maggie:

> "To be honest, the day after the referendum, because I had day off, it was Friday, when I just come out you could hear in Boscombe, you could feel that atmosphere, I just go to that shop up there, that off licence shop, and

> people's faces, people's eyes were horrible, everyone was scared, everyone was very sad, and that sadness you could feel, you could feel, you could see it. It's hard to describe, but I'm really sure you know what I mean, that you can feel it. And not just one, two people, everyone. Wherever you go you see sadness." (JJ, 2019)

JJ described a sense of fear and sadness as something visible and noticeable in his neighbourhood. He attributed these feelings not only to him as a Polish citizen, but also to the rest of the people around him, attributing a collective dimension to that experience. Like JJ, many of my respondents spoke about how the referendum had an impact of their emotions, thus confirming the 'affective impact' of Brexit which has been documented by other authors (Lulle et al. 2018; Yates and MacRury 2021). After the outcome of the Brexit referendum, my respondents were swamped by a mixture of unsettling feelings. S. who is originally from Greece, moved to Dorset a few years before the referendum after living many years in different, more cosmopolitan, parts of the UK. This is how she described her state of mind in the aftermath of the referendum:

> "Frustration to begin with. Well, first disbelief. I think some friends, people I know, it took about three months to believe that…denial to set in, then hope that it will not…[inaudible] astonish…these were the feelings really…Complete disbelief…start processing and three months to finally accept that it's happening. And then resignation too…that's happened." (S., 2019).

As for JJ, S. presented her experience as a collective experience that transcended the individual level. From what she said we do not know if she was referring specifically to EU citizens from other countries or British nationals who shared her same political views and were also shocked by the result. She highlighted how the sense of shock over the victory of the Leave campaign did not occur just around the date of the referendum but was protracted in time. For many, Brexit was not just an event difficult to accept, but something that needed time to be processed because it has been perceived as out of the realm of possibilities. It represented more than just a change of climate, but a shift in what some thought was possible, a new reality they never thought they would see materialize, marking the beginning of a phase of transition towards an uncertain future. The time needed for people to process that their normality has

changed is, incidentally, a phenomenon which was vividly described by Maček who conducted fieldwork in besieged Sarajevo in 1994 (Maček 2007).

Together with visible changes in their landscape, my respondents also identified changes in volume as some people felt entitled to express their opinions more loudly. Always according to S.:

> "…being non-British, as an external person, culturally different, you may see perhaps that the general population is not very emotional. I think around those weeks it was a very different story. All of a sudden, people were speaking up, they raised voices, there was more emotion running around the place. And that's not the norm. (…) I think still the conversation, obviously not as strong as the first few weeks but every time there's like a major event things bubble up, conversations happen (…) very strong conversations which is not the norm really in the UK to be honest, unless you are discussing…men discussing football or whatever, you know, it's not the norm as such. So, it's generating a lot, it's stirring the pot big time." (S., 2019)

She assumed that being 'non-British' myself we could similarly position ourselves in relation to the generally 'less emotional' way of dealing with life she considered proper of the British people. She highlighted how the polarization in the Brexit debate made people react in an unusual way, expressing their views more passionately. These unusually loud reactions happened especially around the referendum's date, but she observed that these continued also later, at occasion of the emergence of news or events related to Brexit subsequent to the referendum. She observed that also her own behaviour had changed:

> "But really, I'm frustrated with people that do have children and grandkids and I do ask them, do you have kids, and they say yes, and I go well, never mind then! [laughs]. And normally I wouldn't discuss anything, but Brexit is the only thing that has made me, that made my blood boil a little bit and then I will make that comment and say well, maybe you haven't thought it through then, yeah." (S., 2019)

While previously S. would have not engaged in discussions over political topics, after the Brexit referendum she became more vocal. In contrast, the sensitivity of the topic made others become more careful in expressing their views openly. This is confirmed by Nondas and Eva:

> "There's that sense of division, that atmosphere, that negative atmosphere and that fear atmosphere, that you can't trust your neighbour, that you can't have a conversation with other people and that you've got to be careful about what you are saying and all those things which is really unhelpful to the whole community, not just Europeans or Muslims, but to the whole community" (Non., 2019).

> "…like in our case, we are quite lucky 'cause I've never been sort of abused, I never had like direct, really, situation when people had said that they don't want me here or they don't like me because of (…) or like Brexit is a good thing said straight in my face although I do know people who vote Brexit [laughs] and they are…they know I know, so we have strange things sometimes…" (Eva, 2019).

What Nondas and Eva noticed was confirmed by my own observations. I noticed that Brexit was treated as a taboo topic and often people referred to Brexit using euphemistic expressions. For example, I went to a public Police consultation meeting at the end of February 2019, aimed at informing local communities about the ways in which Dorset Police was dealing with hate crime and, in particular, with a possible surge in cases in view of the supposed Brexit date of 29th of March. Superintendent Jared Parkin took the word and said: "Ok, I am going to be the first one to mention the 'B-word' today". Another time, a British woman in her 20s I talked to on a Saturday morning while she was campaigning at the weekly stall of Dorset for Europe in the centre of Bournemouth, told me that talking about the 'B-word' could be 'tricky'. Finding out on what side people are can make you look at them differently and prevent the development of relationships of trust. In 2016, the word 'Brexit' was named 'word of the year' by the dictionary publisher Collins for its huge popularity in public political discourse[19]. At the

[19] The dictionary publisher Collins named 'Brexit' word of the year in 2016. Its usage was reported to have surged by more than 3,400 per cent before, during and after the referendum on EU membership: "'Brexit' is arguably politics's most important contribution to the English language in over 40 years, since the Watergate scandal gave commentators and comedians the suffix '-gate' to make any incident or scandal infinitely more compelling". https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/03/brexit-named-word-of-the-year-ahead-of-trumpism-and-hygge, accessed September 2021.

level of everyday life, on the other hand, it entered the realm of taboo topics, becoming something unspeakable because it was dividing people and making them feel uncomfortable.

In this section, I showed how the Brexit referendum determined a change of climate described through the proliferation of visible and audible symbols that characterised a redefinition of geographies of belonging (Anderson and Wilson 2018). At the same time, because of the sensitivity of the topic, if on some occasions people raised their voices and expressed their opinions more vocally, in others, interactions were kept 'civil' by recurring to 'low volumes' or meaningful silences.

In the next section, I will look at the spike in hate crimes and hate incidents in Dorset after the Brexit referendum. This will serve as a backdrop to describe how CSOs in Dorset reacted to the spike in the immediate aftermath of the referendum and in the post-referendum period.

4.1.3 The spike of hate crimes in Dorset

In this environment of emerging symbols and changing volumes, the most extreme manifestation of the divide were the episodes of hate crimes and hate incidents that saw a sharp increase in the weeks around the referendum (Seidler 2018). Across the UK, the Home Office reported a 42% increase in episodes of hate crime compared to the same period in 2015 (Burnett 2017). Dorset recorded an increase as well, compared to the previous year. According to data provided by Dorset Police, between May and August 2016, the number of religious and racially motivated hate crimes rose to 188, compared to 125 in the same period of 2015[20].

According to Superintendent Jared Parkin, however, the increase in Dorset was quite low if compared to other parts of the country:

> "I think they've seen it in other parts of the country, and I think the demographic is a big part to play in whether you do see or don't see any change in hate crime. And I also think it depends what communities you've got to do with Brexit. Obviously if

[20] From data given me by Dorset Police in 2019. The number slightly decreased to 171 in 2017. Hate crimes numbers tend to constantly increase throughout the years, mainly due to more people reporting and growing ability of the Police to deal with them.

you're a visible minority community then I would argue you're more likely to be abused if I'm honest. If you're non-visible, so if you're a white, Eastern-European person until you begin to converse with people, nobody knows [you are] any different. And a lot of our diverse communities are not visible, they're non-visible communities, so therefore that could be a potential hypothesis as to why we didn't see a rise in Brexit…" (Jar., 2019).

As Jared highlighted, the highest proportion of Dorset's ethnically-diverse population are classified as 'White Other', 41% (Dorset Council 2011). This classification includes people who identify as white but who do not have UK national identity (English, Welsh Scottish, Northern Irish and British). He depicted Dorset as a mainly 'white' county, with a low proportion of 'visible' minorities. Nevertheless, the language and the accent, as it happens for Eastern European migrants, make the invisible visible and work as a marker of difference (Hopkins 2004).

During our interview, Jared pointed out that Police data do not include all the episodes that occur since some people might decide not to report at all or they might report to other organizations that work as third-party reporting centres. Dorset Police collaborates with 22 of such civil society organizations covering all protected characteristics. Among them, DREC covers hate crimes concerning race and ethnicity and, through its work, it encourages people to report and provides support through one-on-one case work. In the weeks around the referendum, DREC's staff recorded a wave of 'intense reporting' of hate crimes and hate incidents, as Nathalie, DREC Chief Officer said:

"We had lots of informal reports from various community members and from neighbours, so not necessarily from the people affected directly but also neighbours saying that they had seen something happening or they have heard somebody being insulted. That [the referendum] was, I can't really remember, it must have been a Thursday, (…) but it was the day after, from the day after for about two weeks we had an increase amount of informal feedback coming from both people who have been affected and people who had been witness. So, I remember that what we did is that we sent an email around all the voluntary organizations through Bournemouth CVS [Council for Voluntary Service] to let them know, we were starting to experience a high level of reports, if they could send a message to all their community

members that, if anybody was witnessing or experiencing any kind of abuse because of Brexit to come to us. So that increased as well, that worked well, and people did come to us". (Nat., 2019)

As a community developer at the time of the referendum Ebi, recalled the immediate impact the referendum had on the community:

> "When the referendum happened then the incidents went up (…) There were also hate crimes and hate incidents, the vandalism or people being attacked, I think in Boscombe, at least hours after, within 72 hours after the results, there were three hate crime incidents in the Boscombe precinct when some people came and hit someone who they identified from Eastern and Central Europe, with the words 'now we can get rid of all of you lot' and then start to push that person, 'this is what we are gonna do, we are going to push you all out of the country' (…) It gave some people the licence to step upon saying whatever they felt they can say, and things around 'can't wait for 29th of March so we can get rid of you, so you can go to some other place'…we had reports of some people who were getting more discriminated at work, and more obviously than before. So, people who were silent in terms of prejudice were beginning to be a bit more loudly heard. This has definitely been a difference before and after." (Ebi, 2019)

Ebi described how some people felt empowered by the result of the referendum to raise their voices and express hatred towards perceived 'Others'. From his words, the date of the 29th of March 2019, the original 'Brexit day', later postponed, was identified as a sort of 'liberation day' as if Brexit would have meant a sudden expulsion of all those considered 'not deserving' to stay in the UK. Those belonging to this group of 'others' were not just EU citizens. As reported by Nathalie:

> "But T. has experienced – she's not black but because she wears the hijab – she's picked on, isn't she? But that's nothing to do with Brexit. But somehow Brexit has still legitimised and is still continuing to legitimise racism against Muslims and against black people. (…) When she went to school the following morning of the election. A guy told her that now he had the right to send her back to her country" (Nat. 2020).

According to Ebi, while for 'non-visible' minorities things got worse with the referendum, for those belonging to 'visible' minorities' things remained the same:

> "…it is covered because you wouldn't say they are directly linked in terms of Brexit. It seems like a European issue, not, let's say, an African Caribbean or Pakistani issue, or even a Muslim issue, or Jewish". (Ebi, 2019)

For those who do not belong to the category 'white British' or who display visible signs of religious identities perceived as 'other' from the majority, hate incidents around the Brexit referendum were inscribed within an already existent experience of discrimination. In the decision to stay or not in the European Union, anti-multiculturalist sentiments (Goodwin and Heath 2016) as well as Islamophobia were drivers for many who voted to leave the EU. In this, Muslims were perceived as 'different', a symbolic threat to the British way of living (Swami et al. 2018). Questioning of migrants' rights and belonging did not originate with Brexit, nor did racism towards Muslims or minorities in general but, as these testimonies show, Brexit legitimised and brought to the surface a system of discrimination already in place. As Peter, one of the founders of DREC, pointed out, "Brexit should be placed in a context of ongoing and longstanding processes of 'othering' of some parts of the population and it allowed it to gain respectability" (Pet, 2019). The criteria of inclusion and exclusion were reshuffled, spanning from more visible differences to new category of people whose difference before was considered to be apparently 'less visible' and, therefore, less of a threat. At the same time, for some white migrant communities, such as Eastern Europeans, were "nominally racialised as white yet subject to exclusionary attacks" (Botterill and Burrell 2019, p.37). For them Brexit "brought into sharp focus the racialised boundaries of the European migration regime" (Botterill and Hancock 2019, p.6).

In the days after the referendum's result, on the 27th of June 2016, DREC released a statement encouraging people who suffered or witnessed any form of racism or discrimination to report it to Dorset Police or approach DREC for advice and support:

> "As a nation the work begins now: bridging the 'leave/remain' divides that have fragmented our societies on both a local and national level. (…) We call upon all members of the community to be mindful of the thousands of EU citizens currently resident in Dorset, who may not have had the opportunity to vote, but are nevertheless impacted by the result of the referendum (...) We have also been approached by individuals who feel targeted by some referendum campaign materials and perceive

increased hostility from certain members of the community as they go about their daily lives" (DREC Facebook page).

This quote reflects the experiences reported above as it highlights three different levels of division: the divide at the national level between Leavers and Remainers, the condition of EU citizens representing a specific category particularly affected by the referendum, and the experience of manifest hostility that negatively impacted the everyday lives of all those members of the society singled out as 'different'. On the 3rd of July, a woman from Bournemouth, Poppy-Jay Palmer, whose Thai father was verbally abused after the referendum, teamed up with DREC to organize a peaceful anti-racist protest in the centre of Bournemouth. Hundreds of people took part. Adnan Chaudry, chief officer of DREC at the time, said to the local newspaper:

"We're trying to show Bournemouth is a welcoming town to everybody, including migrants who've made it their home. We want to send out a really, really positive message that they are welcome here, and I think having this peaceful rally and handing out roses is a wonderful gesture of friendship. Thankfully, the majority of people in Bournemouth reject that racism and verbal abuse. What the Brexit has done, is it has emboldened many people who were racist, and they feel they've got the green light now to verbally abuse people and tell them to go back to where they came from. Those are the kinds of incidents that have been reported to us. Getting a few hundred people here in the square sends out a positive message. And to those people who promote hate, this shows we are Bournemouth, not them" (Grassby 2016).

In collaboration with Bournemouth and Poole Council, DREC also organized a series of so-called 'reassurance meetings' where people were invited to come to interact with DREC's staff and members of the Council. As Eva remembered during our interview, the aim of these meetings was to communicate to people that Bournemouth was a 'multicultural' town where they were 'wanted' and 'safe'.

Despite the growth of incidents reported to DREC and the perception by local charities of growing tensions in the community, the actual number of cases of hate crime DREC dealt with directly, that is people who decided to take action against perpetrators, did not increase substantially. They dealt directly with just a couple of cases, therefore not resulting in a proportionate increase in the one-on-one case workload. According to Nathalie, this was motivated mainly by the fact that, as typical in cases of hate crime, people generally tend not

to report or did not want to follow up with the police for fear of reprisals or for lack of trust in getting satisfaction from the police (Paterson 2018). What did change was that DREC started recording informal reports they were receiving from contacts with members of the community:

> "When we had a conversation where somebody said oh, this happened to me, but I don't want you to do anything, we never put it anywhere, but now we record it. We've got a spreadsheet where we record the basic info that we get. Sometimes is not a lot but it helps us as well to have a kind of idea of all the informal stuff that is happening in communities" (Nat, 2019).

Moreover, Nathalie pointed out that, besides providing a push for systematising their work, the spike of hate crime around the referendum strengthened DREC's relations with specific communities and made them tighten some of their partner collaborations. One example is the Prejudice Free Dorset (PFD) initiative, a network of about 20 among charities, statutory agencies and institutes that included DREC, Dorset Police, Citizens Advice BCP, AFC Bournemouth, Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service, Kushti Bok (Dorset's Gypsies and Travellers Association), Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group, Bournemouth University, and others. Through its initial years, PFD activities had stalled. However, according to Superintendent Jared Parkin, PFD chair at the time, the Brexit referendum triggered a restart of the network and an attempt at systematizing the collection of hate crime data among the Police and third-party reporting centres involved. The main activities which the committee worked on during the course of 2019 was the organization of the inaugural conference "No place for hate", which took place at the Bournemouth International Centre on the 15th of October 2019. Its general aim was to: "Celebrate diversity, listen to personal experiences, and work together towards finding solutions for a prejudice-free community" (Prejudice Free Dorset 2019). The conference focused on the experiences of people to understand what it means to be on the receiving end of a hate crime chain and on the importance to report incidents. The event was attended by about 400 people, including staff from the emergency services, local authorities and members of the community and it involved organizations representing all protected characteristics.

In this section I described what the disruption in community cohesion that followed the Brexit referendum meant in practice: the 'change of climate' where discrimination became seen as legitimate leading to hate crimes and incidents directed at all minorities categorized as 'not deserving' of remaining in the UK. I looked at how DREC staff reacted to the spike in hate

crime in the period immediately after the referendum, relaunching collaborations and improving their recording system. In the immediate aftermath, they put in place measures to 'reassure' people that the inclusive 'us' prevailed against the racist 'them' and stressed a representation of Dorset as 'welcoming' and 'multicultural'.

In the next sections, I will focus on one category in particular, that of EU citizens living in the UK. They were the group most affected by the consequences of Brexit: not only because of episodes of discrimination that many of them suffered, but also because EU citizens were part of an EU country but, through the referendum, were divided out as 'other'. The changes in the rights regime that followed the referendum affected their life possibilities in very concrete ways: first their chance to remain in the UK. Through the exploration of their experiences will emerge elements that will allow an understanding of how CSO's initiatives observed respond to the needs of people in the specific context of post-Brexit referendum Dorset.

4.2 The experiences of EU citizens in Dorset

For EU citizens, hate crimes constituted just one aspect of how Brexit impacted on their lives. Compared to other categories, for whom the referendum entailed a worsening of pre-existing discrimination, EU citizens experienced changes that affected not only their sense of belonging but their rights regime too[21]. Initial analyses of the referendum discussed the shock of Brexit (Remigi 2017; Lulle et al. 2018) as a rupture to the continuity of EU citizens' everyday lives (Botterill and Hancock 2019). I explored how their 'normality', a concept which emerged from my analysis of the Bosnian context, was affected, as many perceived that what they took for granted was being taken away. Moreover, I will show how these changes made them become a new target group of both Home Office policies and CSO's support initiatives.

The interviews reported here were collected between May and August 2019: after the postponement of Brexit from the 29th of March to the 31st of October, and in the period of the roll out of the EU settlement scheme, when my respondents were dealing with growing anxiety and uncertainty over their future. The first part of this section looks at how EU citizens

[21] The number of EU citizens living in Dorset is traceable through the Open Electoral Register. According to data provided for me by Dorset Council in October 2020, the number of EU citizens living in the Dorset County area (therefore excluding BCP Council) is 3.152. The number does not include EU citizens living in Dorset who opted out of the Open Register.

renegotiated their identities and how they perceived the changes of their position in relation to the 'majority' population. The second part looks at how the combination of contested belonging and uncertainties around future rights influenced many to rethink practical life decisions, such as, for example, staying in the UK or going back to their countries of origin. The last part shows the first reactions during the first phase of the EU Settlement Scheme roll out and its destabilizing effects.

4.2.1 Feeling unwelcome and second-class citizens

While the majority of my respondents did not directly experience episodes of hate crime or hate incidents, they all expressed concern about how their identity and position in relation to the UK was changing. For many that translated into feeling 'unwelcome':

> "I think it was…the feelings were quite strong after the referendum. Now everything calmed down, you know, so…We just felt unwelcomed at some point, yeah let's say. But it calmed down, I don't feel that way anymore and so yeah, so we'll see what their, you know, and we leave European Union or whatever is going, you know, this atmosphere will come back or whether, you know, it will stay this way. But I think directly after referendum, you know, that feeling was quite strong, so yeah." (Agn., 2019)

> "It's probably gonna be worse, when they are gonna check every single person…is gonna be probably even worse than it is at the moment. It's all that, that you've got to...and it makes you feel different, it makes you feel different, it makes you feel unwelcome, so there's that unfriendly atmosphere and so…" (Nat., 2019)

The first aspect that emerges from these accounts is how feeling 'unwelcome' is contextual and changes depending on the external circumstances. Agnjeska, originally from Poland, felt it very strong right after the referendum and, even if at the time of the interview, in mid-2019, she did not feel it anymore, she did not exclude that future developments might make that negative 'atmosphere' rise again. In Nathalie's view, things could worsen if future measures were applied, such as more travel checks, that would mark EU citizens as different. In both accounts, feeling 'unwelcome' fluctuated in response to changing feelings of uncertainty which characterised the post-Brexit referendum period, during which people were

going through different emotional states of anxiety, anger and fear while trying to understand how things were going to change in practice.

The second aspect is that the term 'welcome' in itself suggests a power relation of dependency between a 'majority' that welcomes and a 'minority' that needs to be welcomed in order to be granted permission to come in and to stay. As I showed in section 2.3.2, in the relation between immigrant and host, hospitality is never granted in absolute terms (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000). It is a relation "constituted by pacts, exchanges and expectations that delimit those who are welcome" (Chan 2010, p.41). In the post-Brexit climate, with the growing uncertainty and fear of the hostile environment, it was becoming clear that, as hospitality was made possible, it could also be revoked.

Such majority/minority power relation had been unknown to many EU citizens living in the UK prior to the referendum. This is shown in Nathalie's words:

> "The reason why I came to England was because it was so easy to change life and to have opportunities and there was no problem. Whatever I wanted to do was possible because nobody checked whether I was French, Polish, Italian, Spanish, that didn't matter at all. I was accepted, because obviously my level of English was good originally, that helped (…) Now, every time I am going to do something official, I am going to need to justify that I am not a UK national". (Nat., 2019)

After the referendum, she acquired a position of being a member of a minority she did not see herself part of before, which means that she will need to justify her presence to the majority. When she moved to the UK, her good level of English helped her to be 'accepted' and her nationality did not matter. The same goes with Christine, also from France. She has lived in the UK for 25 years and at the time of our interview was working for DREC. She acknowledged that her nationality was an asset, and she has always felt welcome compared to other European nationalities:

> "It was immigration and now it's much bigger. (…) Without any consideration of anything, whether they were refugees or migrants or whether they were Europeans, non-Europeans, everybody in the same, in the same box as far as they're concerned. And, um, personally I have never experienced, for myself, any negative discrimination because I'm French. It's been the reverse. It's always been a positive reaction. Sometimes it's simply

all, yeah like, you know, travelling, this, that sort of chit chat thing, but in general from my point of view I always felt welcome. But I, I'm not sure that is the case with Central and Eastern Europe – people from Central and Eastern Europe". (Chr., 2019)

According to Christine, the distinction between first- and second-class EU immigrants, does not apply anymore as now everyone is put 'in the same box'. Previous literature has challenged the idea that migrants from Europe, being white and legal, were considered somewhat all the same and 'invisible' (Engbersen and Snel 2013). As mentioned above, Eastern European's position after the Brexit vote were racialised and subject to exclusionary behaviours even if white (Botterill and Burrell 2019). This was not necessarily the case for other EU nationals who, within the hierarchised context of EU migration and mobility, had not been stigmatised and targeted as much by the British media and politicians. Nevertheless, with the referendum, both Nathalie and Christine experienced losing the privileged status provided by their whiteness coupled with their more 'desirable' national identity, and they were made feel less deserving than the majority.

Nondas, originally from Greece, has lived in the UK for over thirty years and works as a counsellor in the NHS. He said he has always identified himself primarily as 'European' but, since the Brexit referendum, he felt that some layer of his identity had been stripped away, and that now he is being forced to choose between being either Greek or British. Therefore, the referendum brought to the fore his national belonging in opposition to the supranational one, similarly to what happened with the dissolution of Yugoslavia where national identities gained prominence over the supranational Yugoslav one (see 2.2.1). He acquired British citizenship years ago, but he said that because of his name and his accent, he could still be identified as not originally from the UK. After 2016, he noticed a growing hostility towards foreigners, especially when observing his clients:

"To be honest in my consultant room people they see me as a foreigner. I had a lot of times, you know, they say: I don't like foreigners, no disrespect to you, kind of things but I don't like foreigners. So, mm, [Laughs] I'm a foreigner because obviously from my name and the way I talk they know that I'm foreigner. I personally, from my colleagues, I don't have any problem but most of them, all of them, are counsellors or psychotherapists or generally they are open-minded people. But I saw the difference in my clients. Things,

as I said, you know: 'I don't like foreigners, no disrespect to you'. It's only I started hearing that after the 2016, before it was okay" (Non., 2019).

He marked a change in interpersonal relations, not with his 'open-minded' colleagues but with his clients who complained more about foreigners than before. Something similar happened to Kathy, originally from Poland, an advocacy worker for local charities who said that she did not notice any changes in relations on her workplace. She thought this was because her colleagues were people working for the third sector and, therefore, "have their mind set up" (Kat, 2019), meaning that they are not conservative and open to diversity. On the contrary, her husband, also Polish, had a different experience, having to face some negative comments as he was working in factories with people that she considered less educated and more 'narrow-minded', here apparently making a class distinction as a basis of more or less occurrences of discrimination.

For Ewa, also from Poland, the referendum brought her back to when she moved to the UK ten years before and made her feel 'foreign' again:

"Initially just right after the referendum for a few days I felt very weird, I felt as if I had just arrived in here. I felt more foreign definitely, definitely foreign. I felt so weird just walking the streets to be honest. Fortunately, I find myself being lucky that I haven't experienced any hate kind of thing, any negative experiences, no. Yeah, fingers crossed. [Laughs] But the thought that I might experience it it's quite, you know, it's not right that it can be subject to, you know, some sort of hatred or some, yeah, discrimination, yeah it's not right, it's not right". (Ewa, 2019)

Hearing about the news of increasing number of hate crimes around the UK made some people feel a pervasive sense of uncertainty and insecurity and fear of incurring in the 'hostile environment as an everyday life possibility (Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019). At the same time, Ewa highlighted her positive experience of living in Bournemouth:

"So, yeah, I think Bournemouth area is so…I think it's good for multi-cultural communities and it's not too discriminatory because there are many, many other nationalities staying here, so I think people got used to it and people appreciating it quite a lot so...". (Ewa, 2019)

Ewa actively collaborates with the Polish Centre and other citizen organizations in Dorset such as the Love of World Festival, that promotes teaching of foreign languages, and the Dorset Ethnic Minority Award. Through these and other activities she entered in contact with a diverse population that, in her eyes, made Bournemouth a vibrant and lively multicultural community. Despite Dorset's lower level of diversity, compared to other areas of the country, as highlighted above by Jarred, she defined it a 'welcoming' place where people are used to difference and appreciate it. While Brexit referendum made her feel foreign again, she experienced also positive reactions from people she met:

> "Even, well from the English people for example, what I heard, what I have experienced personally – not in the media, 'cos the media's a totally different story – personally is that they, many of them say if they, for example, they don't know me, they just learn from where I'm from, they just say: 'Oh we love Europeans, you know, you still stay here, you're doing a great job, you're welcome to here'. So, I actually experience more positive things rather than negative in terms, yeah…appreciate. And no, yeah, [the Brexit referendum] hasn't affected in my relations with other people much". (Ewa, 2019)

On the basis of her positive experiences of personal interactions she gave a picture of Dorset as a multicultural place, 'used' to diversity that generally made her feel 'welcome'. In her words, English people are represented as the 'majority' with the power to determine who has the right to be welcomed and who does not.

Fatima, from Portugal, who works as a cleaner in Bournemouth University buildings, has been living in the UK for 30 years and has had different jobs, also in the hospitality sector, first in London, where she moved in with some relatives to learn English, and then in Bournemouth, where she moved to in 1992. She remembered Bournemouth was much 'quieter' back then, with many less foreigners – most arriving in the last 10 years. Unlike Ewa, she recalled that her experiences as a migrant were not always positive. On several occasions during her life in the UK, she remembered episodes when she was told to 'speak English' in public instead of her native language or when she felt discriminated against in the workplace because of her origins. Despite this, she didn't want to define herself as 'foreigner':

> "Well, I'm more like, I don't feel like a foreigner. I feel their own people because I've been here for so long, you forget to…And then when I

> have to go to Portugal I say 'Come on' (in English). You start, when you go restaurants or you start doing stuff in English, oh say: 'I'm sorry'. And then they'll say: 'Ah, I say sorry'. But I'm saying in English, yeah. Oh my god. And then I do stuff, say stuff. I'm with my son, because he doesn't speak the language". (Fat., 2019)

She considered the UK as part of her identity and identified the English language as something deeply embedded into her personal way of being. When she goes back to Portugal, she often gets confused as English comes to her naturally, as if it was her first language. Moreover, she acts as a bridge between two cultures because her son does not speak Portuguese. In opposition to the external processes of categorization as 'different' from the 'autochthonous' majority, she reclaims her belonging to the UK in a cosmopolitan key. Her identity of being a Portuguese migrant coexists with that of the country of adoption. Fatima's description of her identity recalls the way S. described hers in the aftermath of the referendum. S. thought Brexit traced a distinction between Leavers and Remainers, as she called them respectively, 'somewheres' and 'nowheres'. The former, she explained, are those who associate themselves to a specific geographic area and would not consider living anywhere else, people who connect their sense of belonging to birth rights. The latter are not particularly tied down to one place and see themselves as 'global' citizens (Tully 2014). She considered herself part of the second group.

Through the way they described the interactions with their environment, the majority of my respondents, expressed ideas similar to those that emerged in the work of Botterill and Hancock (2019), who conducted research in Scotland. People "positioned themselves as cosmopolitan, global citizens navigating the boundaries of national, regional, and local belonging", and perceived the vote for Brexit, "and the discourse surrounding it, as a counterpoint to their aspirations to the idea of a multicultural UK and to the possibility of themselves embodying multiple national and cultural identities" (p.19). They grounded their feeling of being 'at home' (Vieten et al. 2006) in the UK in 'local sites of belonging' such as the English language, groups of friends, colleagues with the same views, encounters with strangers that made them feel welcome, multicultural events. All this contributes to what Askins (2016) called 'emotional citizenry', the sense of being part of one place beyond formal and legal constructions.

When my respondents compared Dorset with other areas of the UK, they usually described it as less diverse and more traditional, especially in rural areas but, at the same time, they presented it as 'normal' to enjoy a very diverse relational landscape. Some of them, when they talked to me about their experience of migrating to the UK, said that they initially relied on the support and company of compatriots. After a while, they took the conscious decision not to close themselves up in the 'cultural bubble' of their country of origin in order to get to know the UK better and widen their relations including a pool of both local and international contacts. The majority of the people I interviewed living in Bournemouth enjoy multicultural environments and the presence of a diverse population with which they interact. After the referendum, as the next section will show, some valued particularly the relations with other EU citizens as it helped them navigating the uncertainty by exchanging information and dealing with the new common sense of 'displacement' that Brexit provoked.

Most of the experiences presented above show how the Brexit referendum made them feel, many for the first time, unwelcome and foreign. They perceived a change in some of their everyday interactions and a growing fear of incurring hostile attacks. The uncertainty related to changes in the 'hospitality regime', made S. wonder: "So how can [Dorset] go back to not being diverse? I don't know" (S., 2019). Could the multicultural social fabric of society that for many constituted their normality, be 'undone'? This worry recalls the situation in Bosnia right after the war when the social fabric people were used to and previously took for granted was 'undone' by the war and nationalist politics.

The following section explores how the external conditions outlined above had a practical impact on people's life choices.

4.2.2 The changing rights regime - Going or staying?

Besides feeling unwelcome, most EU citizens feared the impact Brexit could have on their rights to remain in the UK, as emerges from the following extracts. In relation to the tense post-Brexit referendum atmosphere, Fatima said that she felt her position in the society worsened:

> "In the beginning, especially in London, when you, after the Brexit, English will start to behave like we are second citizen (…) We are persons, we are a family, we come here for to work, have a better life for ourselves. We're not, we're not taking the jobs on anybody. I had my job that I, I applied for it, they liked my stuff, they give me the job (…) And when you hear this

stuff, you can't open your mouth around English because you get uh scared or if you talk about the Brexit they start throwing words at you, all kinds" (Fat., 2019).

She felt downgraded to the state of a 'second class' citizen, to the point that she felt almost dehumanised and in need to reaffirm the legitimacy of her needs as a person. Even more, she stressed that her presence in the UK was grounded in her legal right to be and work in the UK. Similarly, Agnjeska felt her right to stay questioned:

"Yeah, and even, you know, discussions we are having in the office 'cause, yeah, there is another Polish guy in the office and, yeah, we have quite vivid discussions. Results of referendum was a disappointment and I felt very disappointed with some people, and it was funny when you were having conversation with them to discover their views. (…) 'Cause like, well I know we are good friends, you know, we are working together, they have nothing against me but still I'm thinking stuff like: 'Okay, so you know, so you voted, you know, you wanted Brexit, so it means you don't want me in your country for some reason.' So obviously I know that my rights, you know, I would be still able to stay here, but yeah, that's the impression I'm getting, you know, personal reasons, yeah". (Agn., 2019)

"But now it's just back to normal, you know, there was just, yeah, I just felt weird for a few days and then things went back to normal. But in general, I think it's just normal for me to be here, it's okay, it's my right I, you know, we all have rights to live wherever we want and if we do it legally obviously, so I think, you know, it's just natural for me to walk down the street and feel safe". (Ewa, 2019)

From the words of Ewa and Agnjeska emerges the contrast between the feeling to be pushed away by the country they chose to live in and the right to stay they firmly insist to be entitled to. As research showed, the politics of citizenship is negotiated day to day by migrants alongside informal and formal legal mechanisms (Ehrkamp and Leitner 2006). As showed above, considering themselves part of the UK is part of their normality, or 'natural', as Ewa puts it, lays its roots in the local sites of belonging we mentioned that shape emotional citizenry. However, is not just about feeling wanted or not; it is also about having to reconsider the possibility to staying in the UK from a legal point of view.

My respondents feared the practical impact that changes in the rights regime could have in their everyday life. One of the first consequences of this uncertainty was that many EU citizens started leaving the UK to go back to their countries of origin while others started considering it an option for the future, as Agnieska said:

> "We don't know how it's going to affect us so…so definitely started considering our options, whether we want to stay here or whether we are going to come back to Poland. We never wanted to go back to Poland but now this option is on the table, so depending on how things will be going here, you know, we're still, you know, happy to sell the house and move back to Poland if it will be better solution for us. And the same voice I can hear from also friends. They never thought about going back to Poland but they say: 'Well if the circumstances will change here if our life won't be as good as it is now, you know, we're happy to come back to Poland'" (Agn., 2019)

Before the referendum, she would have never considered going back to Poland and, even today, she would like her four-year-old who does not have a Polish passport, to grow up in the UK. But if they 'won't be happy with how things will turn out in the UK', they will consider moving back. She and her husband, also Polish, have been living in the UK for 19 years, of which 15 years in Dorset, and consider themselves quite settled and happy in Bournemouth. There are two factors that she stressed as determinant to guide their decision: the possibility of remaining, maintaining the same level of life from an economic point of view; and the 'atmosphere', 'how people will react' when the final decision on Brexit will be taken.

For Kathy, Brexit is affecting the relational landscape she and her family are used to as many of their friends are going back to Poland:

> "But I'm worried, because I'm losing loads of friends and that obviously is connection for us and that builds up another anxiety in families about what to do, what not to do. So overall, it's not very good. And like affecting, actually affecting my children (…) in Vincent's school, in his class is eleven children speaking eleven different languages. So overall with school is 63 nationalities. So that build up children's anxiety as well, because they don't know what will happen, they don't know what they lose. They slowly start to losing friends, because their families going back to their own countries. (Kat., 2019)

She perceived a growing anxiety in the community and in families around her because of the possibility of some family members going back while others remain to work in the UK. Her husband works in international manufacture and his sector is seeing many changes and facing uncertainties:

> "Loads of people are leaving and, you know, going back to their own countries which again, impacting on us because they're our friends and then is building up the anxiety in families about what shall we do. And I found out in even with myself that my husband, for example, he has always talked around going back to Poland, so Brexit actually makes him even more being focussed on to going back and then when he hears how our friends who have been living here for 20 years are going back that's build up this, you know, question do we actually want to stay here, do we actually want to stay here or shall we go back?" (Kat., 2019)

While her husband could imagine going back to Poland, it was not the same for her. She loves her job, and she could not imagine herself doing the same thing in Poland where the charity sector is not as developed. Therefore, going back is something they are considering but she is aware of the difficulties that moving back to Poland would entail at this point in her life now that she is older, has children and more responsibilities. Eva's family is experiencing a similar situation. She thought about the changes her children would need to face if they had to go back to Poland and adapt to a new reality:

> "So yeah, so you never know. We did ask once Julia, Julia didn't want to do it, she started crying. I think in their head, it's something so big, if we say moving there, because they don't have any friends apart from family. So, for them it would be something really strange, but, saying that, for the last year and a half so many friends of hers moved back to Poland or is moving now after this year, that I think she wouldn't take it that hard...? Knowing that I could refer to someone like, you know, Philip has just moved, or your best friend Eliza is moving back to Poland…" (Eva, 2019)

She could imagine recreating some of her family's network in Poland as many of her children's friends have already moved back. For others like Ewa, the result of the referendum did not make her question her staying in the UK. Working as a translator of legal documents between Poland and the UK, she is uncertain of the impact Brexit will have on the economy,

therefore she started looking for ways to diversify her income and securing her presence in the country, maybe applying for citizenship:

> "So, instead of thinking of going back, I'm thinking of actually doing a citizenship here, which I haven't taken into consideration before. I thought that I wouldn't need it and so I didn't think I would ever do a citizenship, a British citizenship. But now I think it will make things easier basically, legally and, you know, possibly borders and everything. I think in the long run this will definitely be something that I will need". (Ewa, 2019)

Ewa's reflections mirror those of many EU citizens whose opinion on applying for the UK citizenship changed in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, as a response of political indecisiveness and uncertainty around their confidence in their lives and futures in the UK (Lulle et al. 2018).

Eva, who works at DREC, is worried that there will be less chances to travel to Poland also because of a possible rise of the prices of flights and that will make more difficult to visit her family. She also mentioned the fact that they will need to queue in different lines at the airport thus referring to a shift in the change of identity from 'insider' to 'outsider'. Moreover, she is worried of the economic downfalls that she might face:

> "For instance, for myself the biggest problem I had was like things which for some people might not be, some people might say 'oh its stupid', 'that shouldn't be important', but it is. Like our re-mortgage, instead of having it for two years we took it for three years cause we thought, by that time, it's all gonna be done, and who will know, should we stay, should we go. While now, they changed the date and they postponed everything so it's still really unclear, isn't it? So, I may end up by the end of the third year still being in the situation where it's not clear so will still have to lose literally money…" (Eva, 2019)

Some of my respondents, despite the worsening political climate, presented Poland as a growing economy where they could see themselves starting afresh. While some people considered the option of going back as viable, others did not take it in consideration, also for practical reasons. For example, Maggie, originally from Poland, has lived in Bournemouth for the past 16 years and worked as a cleaner for most of her life in the UK. Today, she does not work because she needs to take care of her sick husband. For her, going back to Poland is out

of question as she could not rely on the same level of health care her husband enjoys here in the UK. As highlighted by Kathy during our interview, many elderly people she met through her work were planning to return to their country, but the referendum made them rethink their plans to keep benefiting from the NHS. They did not only decide to remain in the UK, but also to bring over other family members in anticipation of the end of free movement and increasing travel restrictions. When thinking about previous migration trajectories attributed to Polish citizens in the UK, the changes brought by Brexit led to a shift in strategy. The legal certainties afforded by EU citizenship allowed them to deliberately maintain a more open-ended approach towards settlement. The referendum disrupted this certainty, compelling them to make "more concrete plans about their future" (McGhee et al. 2017, p.2118).

4.2.3 The EU Settlement Scheme

In relation to the changes in the rights regime, on the 30th of March 2019, following the public testing phase, the government launched the EU Settlement Scheme. With the exception of Irish citizens, all EU, EEA, and Swiss citizens, and family members who wanted to stay in the UK after Brexit had to apply to gain new immigration status, or else they would lose their right to stay in the country. The deadline to apply was scheduled by the end of the six-month grace period, which was set to follow the transition period ending on 31 December 2020. As I conducted my interviews between February and September 2019, I registered my respondents' reactions in this initial phase of the programme and also what it meant for DREC's work.

As I showed in the previous section, Fatima, despite firmly grounding her belonging to the UK in her self-defined multinational identity, feared Brexit could affect her right to remain in the UK. In particular she feared the uncertainty regarding the outcome of the application for the EU Settlement Scheme:

> "If I have, when I go to apply for the residence, residency, after 25 years they're going to throw me back? (…) I don't have anything in Portugal; I don't have life in Portugal. My family, I [could] work with my Mom but she hasn't got the restaurant anymore. She's retired, the restaurant was sold. (…) I'm 60 years old and where I'm going to find a job, like? Here, doing cleaning I can do anything. I can clean anything, just give me a job. As long as I have two feet and two hands and can stand on my feet, that's fine" (Fat., 2019)

What if applying for the Settlement Scheme would result in her being denied the right to stay and being forcefully deported? In case she had her right to stay denied, contrary to other of my respondents who considered going back a feasible option, even if difficult, Fatima did not consider going back to Portugal a viable possibility. There, she couldn't rely on a network of familial support, and her age and work skills would not make her competitive in the job market, even more so in a country with as little job opportunities as in Portugal. In reshaping life plans, identity is not the only factor playing a role. People have to deal with very practical aspects like job opportunities and health and social care play a crucial role in making people feel more or less confident in the possibility to reconsider their life choices.

In 2016, the Vote Leave campaign promised to EU citizens that: "there will be no change for EU citizens already lawfully resident in the UK. These EU citizens will automatically be granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK and will be treated no less favourably than they are at present" (Gove et al. 2016). Contrary to this initial intention, the EUSS did not consist in a simple registration to maintain the current rights, but in an application, that, as such, could be turned down. Despite being described by Amber Rudd as "as easy as getting an LK Bennett loyalty card", the programme entailed risks (The Migration Observatory 2018). If rejected, EU citizens could become unemployed, at risk of exploitation, and unable to access basic services such as the NHS. People were required to apply using specific phone models, providing evidence if required, and then wait for a decision. The process was far from being 'automatic' as promised by Leave campaigners and politicians (Bulat 2018). Moreover, civic organizations warned since the beginning of the programme of the risks of the EUSS: was the campaign going to be able to reach everyone who needed to apply? What about more vulnerable citizens? Would less tech-savvy be penalised?

EU citizens feared the possibility of incurring adverse responses in the hostile environment measures if they didn't register for the settlement scheme by the deadline set by the Home Office on the 30th of June 2021. In order to support EU citizens to apply for the EUSS, at the beginning of 2019 the Home Office allocated 9 million pounds for the third sector to raise awareness about the scheme. Through this call, DREC, and other 57 organisations around the UK, were awarded funds to spread the word about the EUSS in the community and support especially vulnerable people in the application process. In collaboration with Citizens Advice, DREC hired Christine as a community development officer.

The project relating to the EU settlement scheme funded by a Home Office grant was welcomed by DREC staff as an opportunity and perceived as a burden at the same time. On the one hand, it gave the team the possibility to apply for more funding, partnering up with Citizens Advice, and gain a new member of staff. Christine's work on raising awareness about the EUSS with vulnerable EU citizens was also taken as an opportunity to reach out to more people and inform them about the existence of DREC, its activities and support services. On the other hand, the EUSS was perceived as a burden since Brexit was seen by the staff as a generator of 'new problems' for charities. In fact, it created a new group of 'beneficiaries' that would have added to the already full workloads of the community workers and burdened their limited time and resources. This recalls Nathalie's words reported at the beginning of this chapter about the contrast felt by CSO staff of having to 'remedy' the shortfalls of a government which, while calling for more community cohesion, was implementing policies (such as the hostile environment) steering society in the opposite direction.

As demonstrated and described above, Brexit gave rise to issues and uncertainties that affected a larger group of migrants, including people who have been getting on well with their lives in Dorset as Europeans in a European country now forced to apply for their right to continue their residence as declared non-nationals. DREC found it had to deal with an increase in enquiries concerning legal rights. As noted by Guma and Dafydd Jones (2019), this new population added to the existing workload of CSOs "at a particularly challenging time: an austerity context with many organisations facing ongoing difficulties to keep their services and programmes running. The emergence of these 'new problems' clearly demonstrates the disruption caused by Brexit vis-à-vis rights and entitlements associated with EU citizenship" (p.7).

In mid-July 2019, I walked with Christine around Boscombe on her first round to discover the area. We entered a Romanian grocery store, and she introduced herself to the man at the counter. He was a big muscular man, smiley and assertive. Around him a girl was tiding up the shelves. When Christine asked him if he had already applied for the EUSS he said in a theatrical way: "I am never going to do it. Because they are going to beg us to stay!". He said that many people had already left, especially in the NHS sector and, because 'they' (the UK government) were worried of losing workforce, 'they' would have backtracked with the scheme. He repeated it miming the scene, going down on his knees and joining his hands in prayer. As of 31 July 2019, almost one million EU citizens and their families from across the

UK had already applied to the EU Settlement Scheme (Home Office 2019)[22]. Extreme as the reaction of the Romanian man was, many people I talked to were still waiting to apply, postponing the decision to see what was going to happen. Moreover, Fatima's words above show how the EUSS, as a way to secure legal status for EU citizens, at that point in 2019 was still perceived as not providing enough security. It was linked to the uncertainty surrounding the whole Brexit process. Others were still wondering if Brexit was really going to happen, after all. Like Eva said:

> "But I've got still quite few friends that just are saying they will not register until Brexit happens. I do try to explain them that… I mean… I'm trying to convince them to the thing which I'm not really convinced myself and I haven't done it [laughs], so I haven't registered myself. I know that even if they will cancel the whole Brexit, I reckon they will keep that settlement scheme status because it went too far and so many people registered that they are gonna keep it as a form…" (Eva, 2019)

Christine herself applied for the EUSS and after 25 years living in the UK, she got the result of 'pre-settled status'. Her statement is worth reporting at length:

> "Part of me wanted to celebrate. Certainly, some of my friends said: 'Oh congratulations'. And then I thought: 'This is, this is silly. There's nothing to celebrate. It's sad.' You know it's, I was relieved, for sure, but at the same time it felt: 'What a hassle'. And really it took six weeks from time I started to when I got the reply and during that time there was so much uncertainty. And so much, if I look at the range of emotions, when I got this screen saying: 'You're eligible for Pre-Settle Status' and it got stuck there because the system got stuck. Don't ask me why, but it did, for several days, couldn't go anywhere. I felt betrayed. You know, I felt I'd worked in this country most, well a lot of my professional life, went back to University here

[22] The total number of applications concluded as of 31 July 2019 was 951,700. Of these, were granted settled status and 36% were granted pre-settled status. Home Office, EU Settlement Scheme Statistics, July 2019. Experimental statistics, 15 August 2019. Accessed September 2021. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/825277/eu-settlement-scheme-statistics-july-2019.pdf

> went, you know, contributed, worked in the economic, worked for bringing tours, bringing European funding into whatever project here. (…) And these emotions were very deeply, they were deep emotions. They were like, I haven't got roots here anymore, I don't want to be in this country anymore. I mean I, seriously, I had an agent value my flat. (…) I mean, obviously my older parents would want me to be close by, but it's not simple to go back to your home country when you've been here so long and all your friends and social base is here, although I've got contacts over there and friends over there but, you know, it's still where I've lived. So, it's not an easy thing. It's like being uprooted again. (…) And of all my time, even after Brexit announcement three years ago and, you know, I never considered moving, but during the six weeks and particularly when I got the pre-settled status thing and blocked there, I said: 'This is it. This country, you know, I'm done with it'. And I was supported with my French friends. I wasn't supported by my English friends (…) I mean they're very good friends, very close - they were seeing it, they couldn't understand why I was reacting so much. They couldn't, they couldn't grasp and the second one: 'It will pass, it will work out', and, you know, the usual. But they couldn't grasp where it was coming from, deep down. And my expat friends could because they, you know, it's something that we felt deep down there. That sense of betrayal, I'm not the only one to have felt that." (Chr., 2019)

Christine's words echoed the feelings of many other EU citizens who perceived the EUSS would have sanctioned their identity reconfiguration for good by putting them 'on record as outsiders' in the country they chose as their 'home' (Bueltmann 2020). Moreover, Christine's anxiety was heightened by the initial result of her application, that resulted in 'pre-settled' instead of 'settled' status, that she felt was somehow further demoting her status in the UK. Even if, later, she managed to prove her right to get the settled status, the experience of applying raised all sorts of feelings of betrayal, exclusion, distrust towards the state and fear of seeing her whole life overturned.

In these sections I showed the impact the Brexit referendum had on the redefinition of EU citizens' sense of normality as part of the wider disruption of community cohesion as

described by my interviewees. I showed that people went through processes of identity reconfiguration and feared that the change in the citizens' rights regime would impact on their future chances of remaining in the UK. While the referendum seemed putting 'everyone in the same box', it also revealed the heterogeneity within this newly-differentiated group of citizens: differences in terms of class and relational networks to rely on in the country of origin, determining different strategies to cope with these changes. From conceiving their presence in the UK as 'natural', as a given, many started feeling 'unwelcome' and 'foreign'. Many experienced a reconfiguration of their relationship with the UK as a state but also within their relational circles, with colleagues and friends. Moreover, many of my interviewees started experiencing a change in their relational networks with friends and acquaintances starting to go back to their countries of origins. This led some to wonder if the Dorset they were used to, that they represented as multicultural and diverse, could be 'undone'.

As we saw, the Brexit referendum added work for CSOs that, like DREC, were given by the state the specific role to assure EU citizens would not fall through the cracks of the new immigration system. However, the EUSS as a provision that should secure the status of EU citizens, proved to have also a destabilising effect. Firstly, because its initial phase of roll out took place in a political situation in constant evolution and not everybody realised immediately the necessity to secure their status, but also because people felt the EUSS marked them as different, as it finally institutionalised their new condition of 'outsiders'.

My fieldwork in the UK ended in mid-January 2020, before 'Brexit day' on the 31st of January 2020. In the period that followed, some of the fears expressed by my interviewees in these chapters materialised. Despite EU citizens being given time to apply for the EUSS by the end of June 2021, the charity The3Million reported that many faced discriminations while looking for jobs or renting a house as they were asked for a proof of status before that date (The3Million 2020). After the 1st of July 2021, EU passports were no longer accepted as proof of access to any rights in the UK. Those who missed the deadline had no rights to work, rent or access vital services including health care. The lack of a physical proof of status is forcing EU citizens to rely upon a digital-only status that has proved not to be reliable according to reports of technical and accessibility issues. Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic started in February 2020 and added more chaos as many people were forced to spend more time out of the UK and this affected their chances to apply for settled status (The3Million 2021).

In the first part of this chapter, I identified 'community cohesion' as the intervention paradigm that drives the action of CSOs in Dorset, compared to 'reconciliation' in Bosnia. I described how CSOs, like DREC, reacted in the immediate aftermath of the referendum and I identified the main elements that characterise the change of 'normality' experienced by EU citizens. Even if the scale of violence does not compare, parallels with Bosnia can be traced in the ways in which people experienced changes in their normality. The change of citizenship regime and new categorizations in response to political and economic pressures, also relate to societal divisions, taboos and silences. People describe how the diverse social fabric they were used was 'undone' by the war. In Bosnia, incomparably more than in the UK, people faced traumatic experiences and events that radically changed their life possibilities. Like in the UK though, many people expressed feelings of alienation, uncertainty over the future and nostalgia of the lost past sense of coexistence and belonging.

As I did for the Bosnian case, in the following section I will analyse the practical initiatives adopted by CSOs in Dorset. The two projects presented below, one by DREC and one developed in the framework of the Emerging Art Fringe Festival, were born out of the growing need felt by CSOs to address the consequences of the Brexit referendum on relations between people.

4.3. Civil society organizations' interventions

4.3.1 'Community projects' to improve coexistence

As I showed at the beginning of this chapter, CSO staff I interviewed defined Brexit as a phenomenon that disrupted 'community cohesion' and created a divided and less tolerant environment, with people experiencing growing uncertainty, tensions, and fear for their future. I showed how DREC reacted in the immediate aftermath of the Brexit referendum to the 'new problems' raised by Brexit: public declarations against racism, 'reassurance meetings' to make people feel 'welcome', one-on-one case work to support people who directly suffered hate crimes, strengthening collaborations with previous partners and later taking part in the EUSS. In the previous sections I explored how the concept of changing social normality observed in the Bosnian context could apply to the post-Brexit referendum context. Despite the differences, I showed how, in the years after the referendum, the people interviewed underlined how the uncertainty and the changes Brexit generated deeply affected people's lives, especially those of EU citizens living in the UK.

During my period as a volunteer with DREC, observing the initiatives developed on the ground, I noticed that a significant part of their activities were devoted to the organization of 'community projects', in the words of the organizers, aimed at 'bringing people together'. Just as in the work of CSOs observed in Bosnia, the community projects I participated in Dorset during my observations have a bridging character, as their main aim is to change people's ways of thinking about the 'other' categorised as different and build inter-cultural friendships. The first event of this kind I attended in Dorset was one organized by DREC in October 2017, right at the beginning of my PhD project. It was the closing event of "Celebrate Dorset", a project funded by Big Lottery Fund that consisted of a series of 'multicultural lunches' in locations across Dorset where people brought food from their countries of origin and shared it with all participants. The events lasted throughout 2017 and, as described in the final report, the main aim was to "provide opportunities for diverse groups and individuals to meet and to build friendships" (Dickinson et al. 2017). At the event, organized in a big hall of one of the university buildings at Talbot Campus, about 60 people were sitting at long tables in a festive atmosphere chatting, and enjoying the food from countries around Africa, Asia, South America, and Europe, as well as exhibitions of traditional clothes, dance, and music. After this, I attended other events, organized both by DREC and other organizations with similar aims like the South-West Dorset Multicultural Network, Citizens Advice Bureau and It's All About Culture.

When I asked about the main objective of these projects, my respondents from DREC and those involved in other organizations, referred to them in a similar way:

> "Have them come together and share food and stories, yeah, and realize what they have in common and what they have to celebrate what's different really. And how we value their contribution" (Tin., 2019)

These events recall the reconciliatory initiatives organized in Srebrenica at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s which Valentina, Željana and Bekir described. These initiatives aimed at bringing people together in social moments of interaction, overcoming ethnic differences on the basis of common characteristics and needs (i.e., young people, women). The same shared humanity trope is also mentioned by Nathalie:

> "It depends, but it's very much about promoting diversity and celebrating diversity. When its, for example, when we attend a Gypsy Roma and traveller history month event it is about promoting the gypsy culture and raising awareness about what

we can do for the gypsy culture so that's the reason why we…other events like multicultural lunches for example, that we've organized, and the multicultural meetups that we are currently organizing across Dorset, the aim is to bring the different cultures together for them to share their culture with each other, for them to talk about their culture and to talk to each other and to realize that they are all the same" (Nat., 2019)

Focussing on the 'common human nature', comes also from the words of Mona who collaborated with DREC. She is a DREC trustee and the current chair of the 'Southwest Dorset Multicultural Network' (SWDMN). This charity was founded in 2007 and it organizes three main events every year mainly in the Dorchester area: 'Black History Month' in October, 'Roma Gypsy Traveller History Month' in June and the 'Holocaust Memorial Day' in January. These are also regular multi-faith events where people share food from different traditions:

"It [SWDMN] was formed initially, and still is, to bring all people together from different backgrounds, from different religions, from different nationalities. (…) The stereotype which people may hold against foreigners because, as I said, the basic line that we are all human, we are all share our humanity (…) I think organisations like ours and like DREC it is these such organisations are important to reduce the conflict between different groups but also it is important to stop radical people of getting stronger because we are against violence, we are against any radicalisations, obviously. As I said, we all need to work together to be productive to the local and we need all to work together in peace. Yeah, any extremist hasn't got a place in our society. And by the way when the problem in New Zealand, in Christchurch, happened a few months ago, and after that it happened again somewhere else. I mean this kind of extremism and violence…we absolutely stand up against all form of violence. And having different organisations and groups like ours will help to bring people together, to show the positive side of our humanity and that being positive and productive as a society it helps everybody". (Mon., 2019)

For Ewa, a volunteer in different charities in Bournemouth, originally from Poland, bringing people together can contribute to improve knowledge of different cultures and change people's opinion about 'others':

"It brings people together, so that's the main thing. You know it brings people together, it gives, me and other people chance to meet other people with other cultures and respect, appreciate each other, so that's the main, main thing about it, people

basically. And getting to know other cultures, it's very fascinating to learn about the other cultures, their food, their traditions, language obviously, yeah so, it's very interesting, gives me joy, gives me reward and, yeah, otherwise I wouldn't be doing that (…) And I hope that these sort of events will make people think positively about other nations, nationalities and cultures (…) When you have fun it's much more easier to get along with each other, to get to know each other, you know, while having fun rather than just, I don't know, any other way". (Ewa, 2019)

Eva's point of view recalls some of the initiatives described by my respondents in Bosnia. Bekir described them as activities 'without a lot of philosophy' (Bek. 2018), meaning offering occasions to have fun without dealing directly about sensitive and conflicting topics. Besides the need of fighting stereotypes and humanising the 'other', Jane added to her interpretation of community cohesion the dimension of time. To my question on what it meant to her to be a community developer, she answered:

"It is a really general role, isn't it? I suppose is like a facilitator of community projects really. It's about helping to create or recreate community. I think this society that we live in generally has disintegrated a lot of those community bonds that used to be based around trade really, people used to know their neighbours, they used to go to the local market to trade and I think the way…our society is structured in this globalised world where we get everything from the supermarket, you know, I think that the traditional sources of community attraction have been lost and I suppose as a community worker you're trying to help retain some of those relationships and rebuild some of those relationships. There's a risk because, I think to do community development work properly you have to make sure that you are really guided by the people and they take ownership of the projects, so you are just kind of getting the ball rolling, initiating, supporting, but you are not 'doing'. And sometimes you find yourself in the position you are doing [laughs], you are doing instead" (Jan., 2019)

In her words, community cohesion recalls one interpretation of the concept of reconciliation I mentioned in relation to the Bosnian context, where the past was indicated as a lost and idealised condition to go back to (Jansen 2015). To Jane, promoting community cohesion means re-building relations, going back to a previous condition, a sort of lost 'golden age'. In the words of my respondents, change is described as making people see the 'positive sides' of the 'other' by arising positive emotions of 'joy' and 'fun', recuperating values from

an imaginary society that belongs to a romanticised past. These reassuring emotions are not only directed to people who take part but seem to play an important role also for the organizers. The feeling of 'reward' for contributing to positive change is a reason for keep organizing these events. When I talked to Mike, volunteer for the charity 'It's All About Culture' (AIAAC) he mentioned the 'lovely atmosphere' these events generate for those who take part and those who organize them, the 'buzz', as he put it, 'feeling part of something', of a group of 'likeminded people'.

However, some of my interviewees in Dorset were conscious that the sense of commonality emerging during these events was connected to the fact that they usually attracted people who already think alike, instead of encouraging conflicting views. As I showed in section 3.4.1, my respondents in Bosnia described similar transcendence experiences during reconciliatory events. The emotional response to these social moments was a fundamental component of these initiatives, coupled with the pleasure of finding people with whom to share similar worldviews. However, the main difference with what was observed in the case of the formation of the core group of Adopt Srebrenica, is that the main aim of Adopt was not only to facilitate multicultural encounters, but to open discussions about very sensitive and taboo topics related to the Bosnian war. Involving people who already shared similar ideas was a way to facilitate such challenging process.

When Jane was telling me about her experience of working as a community developer at DREC, she raised the problem of the low participation of new people to community events. She described her work in a participatory art project where she helped realize the film 'Ghost Gypsy' with the Dorset Gypsy and traveller community:

> "When I first started working there [at DREC] was the fact that we put on these community events but there's always the same people. Same people went to everything. In a way, you know, sometimes we keep the funders happy because they can see some diverse faces and it ticks the box for them, but it wasn't meaningful, whereas that project [Ghost Gypsy], there were people involved that I don't think, certainly have never been engaged with us before and I think they haven't engaged with a lot of services at all too, like it was the first contact". (Jan., 2019)

She considered the project successful because they managed to reach new participants while other events ended up 'not being meaningful' because they always eattracted the same people, leading to a sense of frustration because they seemed made just to satisfy the donor

rather than have a real effect on the community. The feeling that some community events end up 'preaching to the converted' was shared also by Peter, one of the funders of DREC back in the 1990s, who stated that these events are often attended by 'enthusiasts', people "who already have that appreciation and understanding of diversity" (Peter, 2019). Therefore, these events seem to have more of a 'bonding' effect, involving people who already think alike, rather than being able to 'bridge' divisions.

4.3.2 Multicultural meet-ups

During the period of my fieldwork in Dorset, between May and August 2019, the main project DREC was implementing was the 'Multicultural Meet Ups' as its main project, born as a follow-up of the previous 'Celebrate Dorset' mentioned above; the idea behind the Multicultural meetups was to promote events that would gather people from diverse backgrounds. Instead of being one-off events, like in the case of 'Celebrate Dorset', the aim was to facilitate the creation of small groups of people all around Dorset that would keep meeting and, with time, organize their own activities based on their needs and desires to scale up and involve a wider population.

In order to attract participants from minority groups, DREC staff deliberately chose not to advertise the events simply as 'multicultural events', but to specify characteristics of the potential participants other than white British. The text DREC posted on Facebook to advertise the events was carefully worded: "Are you a person of colour living in [name of the town]? Do you come from a different country? Do you speak a different language?" (DREC Facebook page, 2019).

The towns chosen to implement the activities were Weymouth, Bridport, Swanage, Sturminster Newton and Sherborne. The reason to organise activities around Dorset among DREC's service priorities 2017-2020 was to move out of the most populated urban centres where most activities were usually concentrated. This was motivated by a marked increase in migrant and refugee populations in rural areas. In some of the selected towns DREC already had contacts as they had worked in those areas in the past. In others, contacts had to be built from scratch and DREC staff saw this as a way to start exploring and developing new partnerships. As quoted in the project objectives, the necessity to work in the selected areas across Dorset, with a growing diverse population, was dictated also by the context created by Brexit: "The future is so uncertain and the potential impact so great, that our services have

never been so vital specially to deal with the fall-out and impact of Brexit"[23]. The project was promoted by Dorset Council, but they had no funds at their disposal and limited working hours.

Similar to the established multicultural lunches, the meetups revolved initially around food. For the organizers, food was used as a 'prop', an object that "helps bringing people together", because "as a human necessity it provides a shared understanding" (Dickinson et al. 2017, p.8). I decided to follow the development of this project because, not being one-off events, I supposed I would have had the chance to enter in contact with different people around Dorset and interact with them at more than one single occasion. However, this plan worked out only partially because of the limitations of the project that I will explain later, and because of an accident that prevented me from carrying on my fieldwork between September and December 2019.

Multicultural meetup in Weymouth

On the 28th of May 2019, I took the train with Eva (DREC staff) and her two children to Weymouth, a seaside town of about 53.000 inhabitants, 60km from Bournemouth. Eva built the event on the basis of an initiative already running in Weymouth, a World Cafe organized by Peter, a British ex-vicar. Right after the Brexit referendum, Peter and his wife had invited people of different origins living in Weymouth to meet in a church venue every Thursday to share food from different countries. As Eva said:

> "I was quite lucky in Weymouth, 'cause last year I have approached a group called World Café, and that was Peter. He got in touch with me saying that once the information about Brexit happened a couple of years ago now, two years ago now, he and his wife, they opened like a World Café meetings inside their church and they just said everyone's welcome, we like you, we want you to stay, we don't want you to go, you know, Brexit is just something someone just created so don't worry. So, they wanted to start that, but they were struggling with getting different, especially Eastern Europeans to those meetings. So, they had already a lady from Iran who I know she is coming

[23] DREC working document shared with me by Nathalie Sherring, DREC Chief Officer.

> on a regular basis, they had a couple of people from Chinese community. So, when I went to see them, they had around 10 people already being engaged but they were lacking those ones who they were targeting, so they were targeting Eastern Europeans. So, I sort of used my own charity which is Dorset Polish Centre to advertise their coffee and also our work". (Eva)

Because Eva runs the Dorset Polish Centre, she was contacted by Peter to help him make Eastern Europeans aware of the World Café and invite them to participate. The previous collaboration with Peter allowed her to build on that experience and she organized the first meetup during one event of the World Café. The first meeting I attended was the second and subsequent one. It took place in a playground area in a park. Hoping that the weather would hold, we set a picnic table with the delicious food brought by those who attended, and children had a chance to play on swings and slides while parents were socialising. The participants were mainly from Poland and China. There were two Chinese students and others working in a Chinese restaurant. They all spoke little English except for a lady who came with her British husband. The presence of Chinese people was seen by the organizer as a quite extraordinary event as the Chinese community was considered to be one of the 'hard to reach communities' that was usually difficult to involve in these kinds of events. Other participants included four women from Poland with their children.

> "But the whole thing needs to start something with them, engage the communities, people from different backgrounds to get together, know each other, and then hopefully get something nice from it. Because especially in the places like Weymouth[24] where there is a quite big number of different people with different ethnic backgrounds, there is that lack of cohesion, maybe we can say like that (…) it proves that you can do something nice, it doesn't have to be expensive, it doesn't have to be with big WOW, it's just getting everyone together, yeah…" (Eva, 2019)

The lack of cohesion in the local society was further explained as a sense of isolation experienced by people from diverse communities, as well as the lack of occasions to get

[24] Weymouth has a 4.9% of BME population and 2.2% whose main language is not English (Dorset Council 2011b)

together. The World Café itself, on which the meetup was built, was initially thought also to "break the isolation", as Eva told me. Besides having a chance to 'get people together' and meet new people, the aim of the DREC's meetups was also to encourage people to express their needs through a bottom-up approach. The idea was to leave the initiative to the participants, to leave it open to people to decide what they might be interested in doing without imposing directions. DREC's role was that of giving an occasion to explore 'delicately', as Eva said, what people's needs were and then support, mainly through signposting, networking and facilitating the development of other initiatives which people would initiate independently. In the case of Weymouth, Eva organized other events during the Summer, but they did not succeed in becoming autonomously led by participants as initially planned.

Multicultural meet-up in Bridport

I went to Bridport three times, between May and August 2019. I used to go by car with Jane, her two children and her mother crossing the beautiful Dorset countryside. Located 80 km from Bournemouth, in East Dorset, on the Jurassic Coast, Bridport has about 14.000 inhabitants of which 3.5% are BME population and 1.1% of people whose main language is not English (Dorset Council 2011a). Despite its small size, Bridport was usually described by my respondents as characterised by a very dynamic cultural life and an active voluntary sector. When talking about Bridport, many referred to it as the 'Notting Hill by the sea', because many people who used to live in London moved there and brought their skills in fundraising and organizing community initiatives. Besides making Bridport a lively place with a lot of initiatives for the local community, Jane saw this also as a limitation:

> "The problem here is that, when we try to have events that are about bringing people together from different backgrounds, and we get the same … sort of left-wing middle class white people who are interested in multicultural events, who sort of dominate because there aren't actually many people that are from other cultures in attendance. I think that's the problem so that's why, with this specific project, I was quite careful with the wording on the leaflet about who we wanted to attend, who we were inviting. Cause you could just say multicultural meet up, but then, somewhere, like Bridport, that isn't that diverse ethnically, like there is a risk that you'd get all white British people coming along". (Jan., 2019)

For the meetups, the Bridport Council offered DREC the free use of the Salt House on the beautiful Bridport port. Originally used by Victorian fishermen to store salt, it became, with time. a museum and a community centre for exhibitions and gatherings. The participants to the first meeting were B., a woman of Caribbean origins with her one-year-old daughter from a racially mixed marriage: I., a British woman of Asian heritage, member of the South West Dorset Multicultural Network; a white British man from the Chaplain Garden and member of the small LGBT group in Bridport, H.; a white British woman and her husband C., originally from Nigeria, and their two-year-old son, who used to live in London and had recently moved to Bridport; T., an American lady of African and Caribbean heritage and her little dog. In her introduction, Jane explained to the group that the aim of the initiative was that of scheduling a meeting there once a month to 'test the waters' and get to know people, their needs and desires. As in Weymouth, the aim was to create an 'informal group' that would keep organizing 'social events' autonomously from DREC. Because of the composition of the group, comprising of many young parents with children, they talked about the possibility of organizing activities for multicultural families.

During the first meeting, the mayor and the mayoress came to show their support to the initiative. Their presence was perceived positively by Jane and linked to the current post-Brexit referendum climate:

> "I think there's more an awareness in some circles for the need of Dorset Race Equality Council to be there to support people if they have problems, to do more work that's around promoting community cohesion because it is evidently a problem, isn't there, so I think in that way it's impacted…So, like in Bridport, with this event, Bridport town council were: oh great! Really glad you're coming to Bridport, to be looking at these issues, really supportive. I mean obviously they didn't say, you know, 'because of Brexit', but I do feel like there's sort of underlying tensions that Brexit exposed are part of the reasons why they appreciate the need for us to work in the area. Is not, you know, it's not spoken…obviously we have to be careful, you know, to remain apolitical as an organization, it's not something you do really discuss openly, you know, we need to work with everyone regardless of which … they voted" (Jan., 2019)

The Mayor of Bridport seemed to align politically with the aims of the initiative, contrary to the detachment manifested by the Mayor of Srebrenica in his welcome speech at the Youth Camp introductory meeting (see 3.3.2).

One month later, on the 21st of July, Jane and the group met again at the salt house. The group that met on the first day had already started actively proposing what kind of activities they wished to organize in the following meetups, and they suggested a Caribbean-themed event. In the end, the two women with Caribbean background who proposed the event's theme could not come. Those present were more or less the same people who came the time before. H. and C. cooked wonderful jerk chicken with rice and a spicy sauce, and we fried some plantain on the spot. New participants were a couple from Germany in their 40s with three daughters. They had lived in the UK for 26 years and just moved to Bridport for work after many years spent in Bristol.

The third and last meeting I attended in Bridport took place on the 26th of August. This time the theme was 'West-African'. The same people from the previous occasions were present, plus an elderly white British lady and M., a white British woman with a child who H. met at the mums' group. H. and C. brought *moin moin*, a steamed bean pudding with eggs and fried rice while Jane made a vegan stew.

The atmosphere during all the events was very cheerful, informal, and sometimes chaotic. The diverse provenience of the participants was clear by the fact that parents often spoke their mother tongue to their children. For the characteristics of people who attended, these events ended up being mainly family oriented. For the presence of small children, it was sometimes difficult for me to engage in conversations as parents were easily distracted by having to supervise their toddlers. Nevertheless, during the time spent at the tables eating, they exchanged ideas about the aims of these kind of events. C., of Nigerian origins, liked the fact that these events were, as he said, "red tape free", meaning that participants were left free to envision what to do without being directed by the organizers. Moreover, for him and his wife H., white British, these events were an opportunity to meet other mixed families. They thought that for their child, growing up in an almost completely white social environment as Bridport, it would have been very important to hang out with other children who "looked like him". At the same time, C., stressed that they were also an occasion to meet "likeminded people", who "share interests more than ethnic background". "Making new friends" was also the reason the couple from Germany came to these events. The majority of participants in Bridport's

MCMUPs, moved to Dorset from more multicultural areas in the UK and were eager to recreate a multicultural social milieu for them and their children. These meetings recreated a micro version of a desired reality where diversity, intended as mixed racial backgrounds, constituted the norm rather than the exception. Other factors also came into play beyond ethnicity, like age and political background, as well as the shared difficulties for young families to meet new people.

4.3.3 The 'Home' project - Changing representations - Revealing difference

The second initiative I will present took place on the 6th of May 2019 in the framework of the Emerging Art Fringe Festival in Boscombe, one of the most multicultural areas of Bournemouth. One of the aims of the Festival was to give visibility to the different cultures present in Dorset and supporting communities to promote these. I observed one initiative in the festival's program, entitled 'Home', organised by Gwen. I met Gwen, during my first period of participant observation at DREC, when she was working there as a community developer. She worked at DREC for about one year to organise events such as gatherings for families, offering art activities for toddlers and parents who were experiencing isolation.

In April 2019, months after she left DREC, she contacted me to ask me for an interview for her new project. She was looking for people who were not from the UK to talk about what 'home' meant to them and their 'journey' to Bournemouth. The idea for this project, as she said, came to her talking to DREC staff about the experiences EU citizens had in the post-Brexit referendum phase with hate incidents and hate crime: "And yet you've got all these people who've lived in this country for a really long time and this is very much their home so, when they are being told to go home, what does that actually mean?" (Gwe., 2019). She started thinking about what home meant to her, being from Cornwall and having lived in London for ten years and then in Bournemouth for four. She decided to direct this question to the general public by developing an interactive art project that would last for three days in the framework of the Emerging Art Fringe Festival 2019.

She positioned in the middle of Boscombe pedestrian high street a huge planisphere where passers-by could put a pin on the country they were from. The other side of the planisphere was painted with chalkboard paint, and people could write with different colour chalks what 'home' meant to them. A kid wrote 'My Lego'; someone else 'home is…where I lay my turban', recalling English singer Paul Young's song 'Wherever I lay my hat (that's my

home)'. Next to it, she staged an open-air living room with indoor furniture: a carpet, a bookshelf with books and a lamp, a coffee table and a couple of armchairs where people could sit and listen, from two old-style telephones connected to mp3 players, the voices of the people she interviewed. The stories featured different experiences of migration: a man from Mexico who came to the UK for love and faced the difficulties of having to adapt to a much lesser qualified job compared to that he was doing back home because of the language barrier; a Venezuelan man for whom talking about his home was painful because of the impossibility to return as he could face arrest for political reasons. Among these stories there was also mine. Compared to others, I was in a position of greater security and privilege: my 'old home', Italy, was closer geographically and going back there did not represent a threat for my safety. For me, moving to the UK was not a forced choice but an occasion of professional growth. Nevertheless, I could not avoid talking about how I felt about my status as a previously privileged migrant whose status was being slowly eroded by Brexit.

Gwen told me that she found that, while she was collecting the experiences of people from EU countries, Brexit came up during the conversations as a factor playing a significant role in redefining people's definition of 'home':

> "With most of them, yeah. There were people who, one woman said that it's acted a bit of a catalyst for thinking about whether to move back or not. So, it could be that they would eventually come to the idea of going back home, but because of Brexit, because of the uncertainty, and because of a general feeling of unwelcome, that came up many times, they've just begun to discuss it more and more. One of the things I hadn't thought about is the change…even if Brexit doesn't affect the actual family living here, in terms of staying and working, they said that what would have affected them was that their family can't visit so easily and how that was a factor that they were considering when deciding to move back, which is something you don't think about, you often think about just the people here and now and how it's affecting them, but actually even though they are 'safe', in inverted commas, and can stay, it could be that they decide to go back because that, just the easy toing and froing between family and friends won't happen so much and they would feel more isolated here. So, generally speaking, there was a sense of isolation and not feeling welcome, that was making them consider moving back". (Gwe., 2019)

As I showed in the previous chapter, the possibility of the end of the freedom of movement impacted people's relational environment greatly. Many saw their friends moving back and considered the problems arising from not being able to meet family members and friends living abroad as easily as before. The possibility to maintain significant others close is one of the factors at play when people choose one place as 'home', for fear of an increasing sense of isolation.

During the sunny bank holiday weekend of the festival, Gwen counted that about 850 people interacted with the installation on the Boscombe high street, giving a picture of the various geographic provenience of the people present in Bournemouth:

> "Everyone else who came from different countries was able to put in a pin and people came from 81 different countries, so just in 3 days, walking past me on the high street between 10 and 4, people from 81 different countries. I think there's only a 198 in the world so that's quite incredible in terms of really showing the diversity of the area and the fact that everyone who has come and has made, whether temporarily or has made this, had made Bournemouth their home". (Gwe., 2019)

In Gwen's words, she thought that was "probably a good subject to ask the general public as a way to unifying people and promoting community cohesion because in the end, everyone, all over the world, just want a home" (Gwe., 2019). The initiative had the aim of 'unifying people' and 'promoting community cohesion' on the basis that the need for a home as a symbol of security, comfort and familiarity was something that could be shared by everybody. In her words, the aim of the project was "bringing people together to making them understand each other more" and "make people feel part of something bigger, part of a community" by "shifting people's opinions" and "making them think differently".

> "I know that DREC do a lot with food as a common language, gathering lots of people together to bring food, share food and eat together, you can begin to bond and talk over food and art is another, and music is another, and it's finding those common languages to bring people together and realize that actually everyone is, not the same, because everyone is different, but it's sort of celebrating those differences". (Gwe., 2019)

According to her, the artistic approach of the initiative favoured the interaction of many different people with the installation in a non-confrontational way. She noticed that people

engaged a lot with the board and the planisphere because it was quick and immediate, while not as much with the phones transmitting the recorded interviews, maybe not willing to commit to something that would have required a longer stop. The 'Home' project lasted only the time of the Festival, even if Gwen acknowledged the potential of "getting personal stories out there" to demystify stereotypes about migrants and make them humans instead of "faceless beings". She reckoned one possibility would be to transfer the interviews into podcasts and make them available online.

In this case, art was as a 'non-confrontational' way to 'gently' invite people to think about the experience of building a home by giving to it a humanising and unifying character. Moreover, focussing on commonalities helped to address a very diverse audience walking on the high street on a bank holiday and avoid direct confrontation on potentially very sensitive topics such as Brexit or immigration more in general. Gwen's event brought the presence of the diverse population living in Dorset to the fore, rendering it visible with a physical trace on the planisphere. In a context like that of Dorset, these initiatives seem to serve the purpose to change the image of the county from a mainly white part of the UK to the image of a multicultural community. The invisibility of diversity in Dorset represents the specific feature of a county that is characterised by a very low percentage of diverse population compared to other areas in the UK.

This initiative recalls the photography exhibition organized by Adopt Srebrenica and described in section 3.4.3. In that case the aim was to involve a wider population and similarly, make them think about the topics of coexistence and belonging using images of abandoned places in the area to reflect upon the end of the economic and social life of Srebrenica as it was before the war. Contrary to the Dorset example, the exhibition in Srebrenica, while it also represented an attempt to use art to share stories in an evocative and sensitive way and generate a wider attention, did not gain as much of an audience, for contingent reasons including little advertisement as mentioned above.

In the next section I will further analyse the MCMU and the Home projects and I will explore how change is described in terms of expectations and actual results of the initiatives implemented.

4.4 Talking about change

In Dorset, the artistic installation of 'Home' and the 'Multicultural meet-ups' were both intended to promote 'community cohesion' by 'bringing people together' adopting a non-confrontational and bottom-up approach. Both initiatives took place with Brexit in the background. The 'Home' project, even if developed from a private citizen within a festival, was inspired by the work of DREC dealing with the problems faced by EU citizens in the post-referendum climate. The multicultural meetups, organized by DREC, built on other initiatives born because of the referendum and upon a sense of urgency given by the divisions of Brexit in a greater need of the work of CSOs in the aftermath of the referendum.

The two initiatives are very different kinds of interventions with different objectives and directed to different audiences. The main difference is that the 'Home' project was thought to take place within a precise timeframe, and it was directed to the wider public - anybody walking by on Boscombe high street. While inviting people to reflect about their idea of 'home', the initiative created an outdoor living room where everybody could leave a trace of their passage showing the variety of the local population against the idea of a 'non-diverse Dorset'. It aimed at stimulating empathy on the basis of 'home' as a common human need. However, its character of festival initiative did not allow for deeper discussions on the issues that could have arisen, such as belonging, displacement, racism and so on.

On the other hand, the MCMUs was directed only to 'minorities'. It was supposed to last throughout the whole year and further develop in the long run autonomously from DREC into activities that could potentially involve a wider public. This would have required some propensity to independent initiative and activism among the participants who could have become themselves 'actors of change' in their community, assuring sustainability to the project. MCMUs had the aim of giving to people with similar characteristics, in particular that of being 'different' from the majority, the chance to meet, socialize, fight isolation and invisibility.

In the case of MCMUs, however, the discontinuity of the participation in some of the meetings I observed makes it difficult to think that there could have been enough time for participants to tighten relations (or to overcome potential disagreements or prejudices). On a few occasions, DREC's staff and I were the only people present. For example, in Swanage, despite the efforts of Tina distributing flyers and engaging with local media in the period preceding the event to reach potentially interested people, the initiative did not take off. On the

day of one of the meetings Tina, her husband and I set a table on the grass overlooking the docks with some sandwiches, a quiche and DREC's banner, but no one came. Other times the participation was intermittent like, for example, in Sherborne. On the 14th of July, I went to Sherborne for the first time with Jane, her two children and her mother. The meeting took place in a community meeting room usually used by old people living in the surrounding houses, offered by Sherborne Council. That was the third time Jane had organised a meeting there but with no success. On that day, thanks to the collaboration of the South-West Dorset Multicultural Network, some participants came: a man and a family of four, refugees from Syria, accompanied by British volunteers, and an Italian girl. One month later, we returned to Sherborne where Jane advertised a cream tea. We spent a couple of hours there waiting, but no one came. Bridport, on the other hand, was the most successful of the MCMUs and people bonded based on common interests already strongly rooted in their experience of mixed families coming from more multicultural parts of the UK. The result was the birth of a small group of people that started actively to propose themed meetings. While they initially wanted to bring forward the result obtained and organize events that would have involved a wider public, unfortunately, the beginning of the winter and, later on, the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, curbed the process.

The organization of the MCMUs was very challenging for DREC staff. First, the towns chosen were far away from Bournemouth and required long drives across Dorset to reach them. Relying just on the four staff members, some of whom part-time, was hard. This, together with the lack of funds for travel, made it difficult to be present on the ground before the events and build up relations with other possible partners who could spread the word in the community. As we have seen, the ability of the staff to build on previous events on the ground proved essential to find participants. A small percentage of people came because they saw the event on Facebook or through word of mouth.

DREC staff was aware of the limits of their project, especially the logistics, nevertheless they were overall happy with the results the MCMUs brought:

> "So yeah, so I think it hasn't really been as positive as we hoped it would be. But it has definitely made an impact in the communities and developed a lot of partnerships because obviously they [the staff] have worked a lot in creating a lot of contacts and things like that. Which is very, very positive because the whole point was to break isolation and to understand more what is happening in the communities and stuff like

that. But to develop relationships it takes you a good year, if not more. So therefore, you're right at the end of your project and you've only developed relationships, you haven't done anything yet. So, but it is really difficult, the funders are very, very short-sighted and that is an issue and that is a dilemma" (Nat).

Creating new contacts on the ground is considered a success because it helps to inform people about DREC's existence and support services. Community events and case work are described by DREC staff as complementary activities as the former provides ways to advertise their services on the ground, build trust with local communities and get in touch directly with people who might have suffered from hate crimes or other kinds of discrimination: "I think the two go together because we build the trust of the community to come to us for support when something goes wrong" (Tin., 2019).

At the same time, Nathalie's account sheds light on how change is intended by the staff and how they negotiate between expectations and results. They identified much of the limits in the difficulties to strategize their work because of a lack of core funding. Moreover, relying on funding opportunities, which vary in terms of topic and targets, they sometimes fear the "risk of becoming funder led" (Jan., 2019) and just "ticking donors' boxes" (Jan., 2019), rather than effectively meeting the needs of the community:

"I think sometimes we are not strategic enough when planning our work, so this is what we want to achieve, and this is how we are gonna get there. I think sometimes we are a bit too reactive, oh we've got money for this project and now we are focusing on that. (…) We could lose our funding and I think we need to just try and plant as many seeds as we can in many places so that that legacy of the work that we've done at the very least…". (Jan., 2019)

Being "a bit too reactive" in Jane's words is a critique to the difficulty of not being able to strategize and propose actions in a more 'pro-active' way. In Nathalie's words, on the other hand, being 'responsive' to people's needs and to current circumstances is a positive characteristic of their work:

"We're guided by the community needs, so we support the vulnerable people, so, yeah. But it is looking at, you know, those government initiatives that are going to have an impact on members of our communities and how can we support and limit that impact. So, you know, so we, at the moment, we're supporting Europeans but when Brexit

finishes, I'm sure there will be something else and, you know, and previously we've done the Windrush and we've raised awareness about the Windrush generation and things like that, so. So yeah, we're responsive to the current agenda. And to the community needs and if people come to us with issues and we look and it can be an individual issue that we deal with, but it can become a pattern." (Nat., 2019)

While working in close contact with the community allows CSOs such as DREC to see the effects of their work and provides a sense of reward; on the other hand, it is sometimes counterbalanced by the frustration of working on the micro level, on a one-to-one basis, without the feeling of having an impact on a bigger scale for reasons of structural limitations:

"But it's nice to see a difference, that you can make a difference, that you make someone, even if it's one person, it's nice to see that someone, or me, could help her. And I think this is, I think this is what we are talking about, it doesn't have to be big in numbers, but if we help someone or if that person felt he has been helped, it's enough for one person to be happy rather than have a hundred, yeah. It's quite rewarding". (Eva., 2019)

"I prefer working in this organization because it is much more direct working with the beneficiaries of the charity through events, education, or through individuals. It's easier to kind of see the results. (…) There is, it's difficult for DREC because DREC has this role in the community of celebrating diversity and educating people and then also has the role of individual casework and again the individual casework is good, and we could actually derive more from it by collecting info for policy if we could get more people through and we could feed in … public policy in a non-political way. In a non-political party way, but in a policy way. But we are squeezed from all levels at the moment because of funding and things. (Tin., 2019)

The lack of funding, according to DREC staff is also connected to the idea that certain services are not that necessary in Dorset because the county is not very diverse and, therefore, there is not a 'problem' that needs to be addressed. Therefore, bringing diversity to the surface is a necessity, not just to make it visible to the general public, but also to statutory agencies that formulate policies and allocate funding, because "if you don't see diversity in your community then you don't think diversity exists" (Sus, 2019).

4.5 Conclusions

From the Bosnian experience emerged the relevance of applying an analytical focus on the ways in which specific politics of representations and paradigms of intervention as well as the involved people's concrete experiences with societal divisions, interrelate and impact on CSOs' chances of success in bridging societal divisions. In my preliminary observation of the UK context, CSOs aimed at 'bringing people together' to restore 'community cohesion', here imagined as a social formation disrupted by the Brexit referendum. Therefore, during my fieldwork I explored what this disruption meant in practice and how 'community cohesion' as a policy refracted in the ways in which CSOs staff and EU citizens living in Dorset talked about the problems that emerged after the referendum.

As I showed, for DREC, the Brexit referendum opened up a period that DREC staff defined in terms of both challenges and opportunities: on the one hand, staff perceived their workload as having increased due to having to deal with 'new problems'. These were explained as resulting from the development of the government's hostile environment policies, such as the condition of EU citizens as a newly-constituted category of beneficiaries. On the other hand, they felt that their work now was considered 'more useful' by local institutions. They thought that the government was funding them to reduce the shortcomings of its own discriminatory policies.

I described how DREC's immediate reactions after the referendum aimed at dealing with the changes in the socio-political climate and the rise in episodes of hate crime. They supported individual hate crime victims, promoted public protests, and organised 'reassurance meetings' to make people, categorised by the referendum campaign as different from the majority, feel welcome and safe. I showed how the referendum constituted a watershed in EU citizens' experiences of normality: they started feeling 'unwelcome', 'foreign' and had to rethink their life in the UK in the light of the changes in the rights regime. Moreover, they feared that their cherished experience of Dorset as 'multicultural' and 'diverse' could be undermined by the consequences of Brexit. For example, DREC became one of the actors supporting EU citizens in the application process for the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). I also showed how the initial period of the EUSS implementation, rather than reassuring EU citizens, caused more uncertainty, adding to the estrangement experienced by EU citizens.

The CSO initiatives I observed in Dorset consisted in convivial events where people categorised as different from the majority were encouraged to interact in festive settings. These

events aimed at constructing the image of Dorset as 'multicultural' and 'diverse', and coexistence between different groups was depicted as 'positive', in the hope to both celebrate and normalise diversity. This was in continuation of the organisation's pre-Brexit activities aimed at counteracting the representation of 'Idyllic Dorset' as a non-diverse county, therefore 'problem free' in terms of racism and discrimination. As in the past, also post-referendum initiatives served the purpose to urge statutory agencies to pay more attention to, and fund, projects relating to 'diversity'. Moreover, such activism also seemed to answer the need expressed by many EU citizens who were afraid Brexit could change the Dorset they were used to, making it become less multicultural.

In this situation, the concept of community cohesion regained value according to the accounts of CSO staff presented above, as a way to help to 'create or recreate community' by 'humanising the other', a mission reminiscent of some of the Bosnian initiatives described in the previous chapter. However, while the 'common humanity' trope is present also in Bosnia, within this finding a telling difference emerged. For Bosnia I showed how the CSOs promoting such initiatives there actively looked for ways to stimulate discussions over sensitive and potentially highly conflicting issues underpinning societal divisions. In contrast, in Dorset, the recourse to 'common humanity' seems to avert engagement with more complex structural issues underpinning societal divisions, such as racial discrimination or socio-economic marginalization. DREC staff highlighted, in particular, their difficulty in engaging parts of the population who are not already interested in the topics of diversity and multicultural encounters. Their events, as the staff acknowledged, are usually attended by people who are already sensitive to the topic of 'diversity', while reaching out beyond 'preaching to the converted', to a wider public, proved much more difficult.

The CSO initiatives I observed in Dorset followed pre-existing patterns of CSO action and overlapped with pre-existing problems present on the ground before Brexit. At the same time, they were born out of a sense of urgency to promote community cohesion after the Brexit referendum. The initiatives observed included sensitive, grassroot activities that supported an image of Dorset as multicultural and diverse while encouraging participants' reflections on topics relevant in post-referendum Britain such as sense of belonging and experiences of migration. In the case of Multicultural Meetups, these initiatives aimed at promoting networking and activism among minority community members. The ability to trigger change at grass roots level, however, was felt to be limited. CSO staff identified scarce resources as the main reason that prevented them from being more present on the ground and guarantee any

continuity of their work with community members. They also thought that the same reason impeded their ability to develop ‘pro-active’ strategies more often rather than responding mostly ‘reactively’ only. In result, CSO staff were found to rescale their objectives from high-sounding purposes to smaller objectives, as revealed through discourses describing change expectations as ‘planting a seed’ and ‘act as a spark’.

5 Final Discussion – What did we learn from Bosnia?

This study reversed the usual point of view, which looks to the 'West' for the solutions to be exported to the 'East', thereby offering new insights to analyse intervention practices in the UK. It unveiled similarities and reduced the distance between two contexts that have been traditionally represented as 'worlds apart'. This concluding section clarifies the main contributions to knowledge of this thesis and what 'learning from Bosnia' in the context of this study means, with a view of identifying paths towards future research.

This project was initially supposed to investigate the transferability of innovative tools to deal with divisions in the UK, learning from the Bosnian experience. However, as explained in the introduction to my thesis, I took a different route from the original call, and I constructed my research by making the two contexts I studied communicate on a theoretical level as a precursor to understanding the impact of discourse on practice. My project 'inverted the gaze' by becoming an epistemological exercise of exploring and comparing how similar problems are framed differently in one context and in another, questioning the 'taken for granted' internalisation and normalisation of different gazes on comparable phenomena.

The first contribution to knowledge of this study consists, therefore, in the demonstration of the comparability of two contexts that are traditionally viewed through different epistemological gazes. Taking the experience of Bosnia with post-war international intervention as the baseline study to learn from, I presented a conceptual framework composed of four parts, aimed at justifying the comparison (Chapter 2). In the first part I analysed intervention discourses on a meta-level, presenting how different politics of representations of the two contexts under analysis might obscure their similarities. I showed that social realities in Bosnia and in the UK are framed differently because of the ways in which geo-political hierarchies of power aim to symbolically differentiate them. A focus on the structural factors that determine divisions show that both the representation of Bosnia as 'Europe's powder keg' and the myth of 'tolerant Britishness' hide similar structural processes where virulent nationalism modifies criteria of exclusion and inclusion, categorizing a part of the population as 'others' and assigning them a lower status through changes in the citizen rights regimes.

In the second part of the conceptual framework, I showed that both contexts were marked by comparable socio-political processes of re-defining the categories of belonging to the national polity, a process which in either case resulted in similar human experiences of losing what previously was considered the social normality. In Bosnia, it was the war which marked a clear divide between the pre and post war period involving trauma, material loss, and nostalgia for the past. In the UK, it was the Brexit referendum which not only served as a watershed moment for EU citizens living in the UK, now feeling 'unwelcome' and denigrated to 'second class citizens'. It also brought to the fore, more blatantly, pre-existing forms of structural racism.

In the third part, I presented fieldwork observations discovering that comparable, yet differently named paradigms of intervention, both aimed at bridging the societal divisions, can be found in either contexts. While 'reconciliation' was identified as the guiding discursive paradigm typically applied to Bosnia, 'community cohesion' emerged as the main one guiding CSOs' work in Dorset. While called differently, I showed that these paradigms are not so different in terms of their objectives. Both concepts aim at 'bringing people together' by disciplining and orienting behaviours (as the Foucauldian-inspired analysis applied suggested) pointing to the creation of an 'ideal' community that serve specific aims.

In the fourth part, I demonstrated how civil society organizations (CSOs), both in Bosnia and in the UK, constitute one of the main conduits through which the above-mentioned solutions to bridge divisions are implemented on the ground.

The second main contribution to knowledge lies in my empirical findings. The above-mentioned theoretical findings offered lenses through which to explore how CSO initiatives are practically implemented on the ground. In line with my research question, during my fieldwork in Srebrenica I explored how participants and CSO staff made sense of CSO initiatives and what they thought worked in relation to post-war interventions. I designed my fieldwork in Srebrenica to explore how CSOs staff, as well as their so-called 'beneficiaries', define societal divisions and make sense of initiatives intended to 'bring people together' in Srebrenica since the end of the war until today. The fieldwork in Dorset explored how CSOs approached societal divisions emerging from the Brexit referendum. Based on learning from the Bosnian experience – specifically on the gap between CSOs' stated intervention aims (as encapsulated in universalising, often externally demanded and imposed, guiding paradigms) and people's local, everyday experiences of the social divisions targeted - this research explored the chances of success of CSOs initiatives in practice also in Dorset.

Observing the work of CSOs in Srebrenica and in Dorset, I stumbled across considerable similarities in their characteristics, strategies, and limitations.

First of all, I observed that both in Bosnia and in the UK in the post-referendum scenario, CSO initiatives try to involve participants by adopting different degrees of sensitivity to deal with the identified problems specific for each context. My fieldwork in Bosnia revealed a complex scenario where CSOs can succeed within limits and produce change deemed positive by the people involved. In the case studies explored in Bosnia, CSO staff combine different strategies, such as different levels of sensitivity and degrees of visibility on the ground to involve people in dealing with the most difficult topics at stake. Moreover, the projects observed in Srebrenica try to guarantee continuity of their initiatives and engage the same people for longer periods of time to reduce the 'bubble effect', strengthen relations between participants and giving a chance for other projects to develop building on previous learning.

While, in the case of Srebrenica, CSOs deal with a context where war-related discourses are still pervasive at the level of the whole society, I demonstrated that in Dorset the opposite dynamic is at play. Even before the referendum, CSOs in Dorset worked to contrast taken-for-granted images of the 'idyllic Dorset' as mainly 'white' and, therefore, 'problem free' in terms of minority isolation and discrimination. In face of the changes of the socio-political climate associated with the situation post-Brexit referendum, these initiatives aimed at revealing and reproducing on a small scale the multicultural composition of Dorset that for many, including EU citizens living in Dorset, were a cherished part of their everyday life experience which they felt as having become endangered by Brexit. In Dorset, the observed CSO-initiatives initiated bottom-up processes to develop ideas from small groups aimed at eventually reaching wider society, using culinary events as a way to attract a wider participation. These initiatives responded to the needs of those who felt unwelcomed and threatened in face of the post-referendum spike in hate crime and a general uncertainty over their status. Especially EU citizens felt that their sense of normality was deeply impacted upon. Moreover, CSO activists also felt that making multiculturalism visible was a way to remind Dorset local government authorities of the diverse social reality of their county while, at the same time, fighting the isolation of more vulnerable, 'hard to reach' communities.

Compared to Bosnia, CSOs in the UK operate in far more favourable conditions, being able to rely on a relatively richer and more stable economy, a stronger and long-established institutional and legal system that supports their work and, as I showed for the case of Dorset,

upon partnerships with local institutions, from local Councils to the Police. This would lead to the assumption that 'success' could be more easily achieved by CSOs in the UK. However, the application of the 'local turn' to Dorset (through long ethnographic fieldwork observing CSO work there) revealed a more complicated picture in regards to implementing change on the ground. One surprising main finding is that, while, in the field of international intervention Bosnia has been described as an experimental ground for civil society organizations dealing with reconciliation, what takes place in the UK in terms of attempts to bridge societal divisions is no less experimental.

Just as in Bosnia, CSO staff in Dorset highlighted that their success is limited by the lack of resources at their disposal. The fight for survival of the organizations themselves leads to difficulties in strategizing, rendering any continuity of their actions unpredictable and forcing them to be reactive rather than becoming more pro-active. In consequence, as the fieldwork demonstrates and different from Bosnia, CSO staff manage and downsize expectations from high-sounding aims to smaller objectives, evident in discourses constructing change in terms of 'planting a seed' and 'act as a spark' only.

A second finding concerns the ways in which intervention paradigms are interpreted by CSO staff, and how their interpretation translates into expected change on the ground. The fieldwork chapters demonstrated that in, both, Srebrenica and Dorset, the CSO initiatives observed are rooted in the notion that people overcome prejudice by making new friends or through emotional experiences of a shared humanity. As remarked in section 2.3, the notion of "humanising the 'other'" is considered an objective of interventions guided by both paradigms of 'reconciliation' (Eastmond 2010; David 2020) and 'community cohesion' (Cantle 2005).

However, the Bosnian experience can teach us that a general focus on 'we are all the same, we are all humans' is not enough if it is not coupled with providing space and occasions to deliberate the topics that divide. As I demonstrated, in Bosnia, by having conversations about 'difficult topics', CSOs offer participants the opportunities to build 'civil friendships' (Schaap 2004) experience how ethnic categories are contingent and how they can become more or less relevant contextually. Therefore, the focus is placed on a qualitative development of critical thinking rather than on the 'humanising' aspect of the reconciliation paradigm.

The focus on the humanisation of the 'other' as the main, and, sometimes, only, focus of these initiatives, can lead, for the UK as much as for Bosnia, to what Irfanka called for Bosnia the 'superficial society'. With this term, which recalls the 'thin' notion of reconciliation

(Crocker 2000), she referred to situations where relations between people are friendly at the convivial level but risk falling apart when more sensitive issues are touched. In Bosnia, CSO staff and participants criticized examples of reconciliatory projects where multi-ethnic conviviality is reduced to artificial 'performances' of multiethnicity aimed only at "ticking donors' boxes", fulfilling expectations, while thereby creating a risk, moreover, of reifying 'us' and 'them' identities, thereby consolidating societal divisions (David 2020).

Similarly, in my observation in Dorset, it emerges that the way in which 'community cohesion' is interpreted by the CSO staff is often limited to a general focus on 'humanisation' and conjuring up the value of 'coexistence and contact in itself' (Williams 2013) – a limited objective which translates into initiatives that are at risk of remaining on the surface only rather than addressing the more complex, underpinning issues of increasing social alienation of some groups.

This leads to the third finding. In both contexts the initiatives observed put emphasis on building a microcosm of social relations, 'bringing people together' through the creation of relatively small groups of ethnically/racially/culturally mixed participants. However, the initiatives observed in the two contexts present one main difference in terms of the characteristics of the groups targeted by their initiatives. In Srebrenica, as demonstrated, projects with the aim of 'dealing with the past' are usually constructed by ensuring a balanced ethnic proportionality. In Dorset, on the other hand the 'community projects' observed are directed mainly at one part of the population, those categorized as 'different' from the majority, only. While this strategy, as expressed by the staff, can be a way of creating opportunities for people from different cultural/racial backgrounds to fight prejudice and isolation, it might also contribute to the risk of placing on the shoulders of immigrants and minorities alone an expectation to engage with difficult topics concerning race relations and inequalities. Meanwhile, "majorities and the mainstream are treated as the unchanging core that does not need to shift far in its cultural practices" (Amin 2013, p.7). This finding suggests that the population most 'hard to reach' for local CSOs, is the white British majority (with exception of those few, regular members of the public subsumed under those 'already converted', i.e. benevolent and well-sensitised members of the public, who enjoy participating in multi-cultural events).

An important learning from Bosnia thus rests in a difference of criticality discovered between CSO actors in Bosnia and the UK, in terms of how the intervention paradigms

analysed are questioned by CSO staff when implementing initiatives on the ground. In Bosnia the 'benevolent character' of reconciliatory initiatives is not taken for granted or assumed as both participants and CSO staff are aware of the limitations of the 'reconciliatory model', criticised for its normativity and perceived as externally imported – a critique shared with the 'local turn' in peacebuilding studies. The findings confirm an original assumption introduced on page 13: that 'home grown' solutions to societal problems in the UK are not as contested, and their ability to produce change not as questioned, as in Bosnia. Even if not imported from the outside, such as the demand for 'reconciliation' in Bosnia, but developed nationally, high-sounding promise such 'community cohesion', 'humanising the other' or 'celebrating diversity' in the UK can also become 'buzz words' when the impact on the ground is limited. Higher criticality could lead to an improvement of the interventions in a context where CSO staff also in the UK, just as in Bosnia, highlight difficulties such as a lack of funding, struggles to develop long-term programs of action, the risk of limiting impact to 'ticking donors' boxes', difficulties to guarantee continuity and strategizing. In short, what Sampson called out as the development of a 'project society' in the Western Balkan context is not alien to a British context, yet the criticality arising from potential resistance to outside impositions of paradigms seems to be lacking in the latter case.

As this study has shown, 'inverting the gaze' from East to West means working through epistemological challenges. Here, this has meant comparing the discursive construction and practice application of intervention paradigms in both contexts outside the normalised symbolic hierarchies underpinning our ways of knowing. My multi-sited micro-approach-based findings support the local turn's more recent realisation that anthropological studies about local systems of meaning, offer insights that can make interventions more successful exactly because these need to make sense and be tailored to the intended beneficiaries at local level and critically reflect on any imposed paradigms.

This study's focus made Bosnia and the UK communicate at theoretical level while exploring the impact of respectively relevant discourses on localised intervention practices. Future research might explore how some of these CSOs in Bosnia and the UK already communicate, concretely and in a practical way, with each other. For example, different British charities have developed educational materials based on the war in Bosnia with the intention to make young people in the UK reflect upon issues of tolerance, media disinformation and coexistence in their country – which would offer another possible path of exploring what can be learnt from Bosnia. It would be interesting to analyse what aspects of the Bosnian experience

with war and post-war reconstruction are made relevant by the organizers and why, and how participants from other countries 'translate' them to better understand their own reality, identifying problems and proposing solutions. Furthermore, much scope remains to study and compare specific practical methods and technologies of intervention, as intended by the international call for this project and conducted in selected other studies already (e.g. Redwood et al. 2022). However, the immersive ethnographic and comparative methodology chosen in line with 'the local turn', coupled with epistemological considerations, has helped generate some unexpected insight on CSO work aimed at bridging societal divisions in the UK based on learning from the Bosnian case.

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Appendices

1 List of interview participants in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Date of the interview	Name of participants	Organization	Location of the interview	Recorded / Length (hh.mm.ss)
18.05.18	Valentina Gagić	Sara Srebrenica / Adopt Srebrenica	My place, Srebrenica	Yes / 01.03.00
18.05.18	Anonymous		Café, Srebrenica	No / 00.40.00
19.05.18	Dragana Živković and Vladimir Ziza	Udruzenje Klisa	Café, Bratunac	Yes / 01.29.00
19.05.18	Mladen Kojić	Kuča Dobrih Tonova	Malboro Café, Srebrenica	Yes / 00.53.40
21.05.18	Muhamed Avdić	Adopt Srebrenica	Srebrenica Town Council	Yes / 02.47.00
22.05.18	Arif Golubović	Former member of Adopt Srebrenica	Srebrenica Town Council	Yes / 00.19.28
23.05.18	Mladen Grujčić	Srebrenica Mayor	Srebrenica Town Council	Yes / 00.31.32
23.05.18	Bego Bektić and Hasudin Mustafić	Employees of the Srebrenica Municipality, Civil Society Department	Srebrenica Town Council	Yes / 00.33.27
24.05.18	Nedeljko Simić	Rotary Club / Former member of the Youth Centre	Café, Srebrenica	Yes / 01.25.00
26.05.18	Bekir Halilović	Adopt Srebrenica	Hotel Lovac, Srebrenica	Yes / 00.04.10
29.05.18	Bekir Halilović	Adopt Srebrenica	Office Adopt Srebrenica	Yes / 01.03.00
03.06.18	Zike	Participant of the Youth Peace Camp	Café, Srebrenica	Yes / 00.05.27
03.06.18	Marko Milosavljević	Youth Initiative for Human Rights	Café, Srebrenica	Yes / 00.07.16
07.06.18	Zlatan	Youth Initiative for Human Rights	YIHR Office, Sarajevo	Yes / 00.23.22
12.06.18	Irfanka Pašagić	Tuzlanska Amica	Tuzlanska Amica's Office, Tuzla	Yes / 00.25.13
13.06.18	Anonymous	International Organization in Bosnia	Their office	No / 00.35.00
16.06.18	Muamer Čivić	Srebrenica Wave	Outdoor in the surroundings of Srebrenica	Yes / 01.14.51
16.06.18	Željana Pjevalica	Priroda	Office Priroda, Bratunac	Yes / 00.47.25

2 List of interview participants in the UK

Date of the interview	Name of the participant	Organization	Location of the intervew	Recorded / Length / hh.mm.ss
08.05.2019	Ebi Sosseh	Citizens Advice Beureau	Bournemouth House	Yes / 01.13.38
09.05.2019	Nathalie Sherring	DREC / French citizen	DREC's office, Bournemouth	Yes / 00.53.13
19.05.2019	Jane Jones	DREC	In her car driving to Bridport's Multicultural Meetup (MCMU)	Yes / 00.39.40
23.05.2019	Tina Thompson	DREC	DREC's office, Bournemouth	Yes / 00.40.45
28.05.2019	Eva Zabarylo	DREC / Polish citizen	On the train from Weymouth's MCMU to Bournemouth	Yes / 00.20.32
30.05.2019	Gwen Scolding	Independent - Community engagement activities	Her place, Bournemouth	Yes / 00.50.29
06.06.2019	Eva Zabarylo	DREC / Polish citizen	DREC's office, Bournemouth	Yes / 00.42.48
06.06.2019	Anonymous	None / Greek citizen	Bournemouth	Yes / 00.33.10
21.06.2019	Adnan Chaudry	Former DREC Chief Executive	Southampton Library	Partially / 01.27.00
24.06.2019	Jared Parkin	Superintendent Dorset Police	Poole Police Station	Yes / 00.42.38
26.06.2019	Agniezska Masio	Bournemouth University / Polish citizen	Bournemouth House	Yes / 00.20.00
09.07.2019	Christine Brienne	DREC, French citizen	West Cliff Hotel Café, Bournemouth	Yes / 01.15.09
12.07.2019	Mona Elkotory	Chair South-West Multicultural Network	Café, Dorchester	Yes / 00.26.25
15.07.2019	Ewa Erdmann	Polish citizen	Café, Poole	Yes / 00.31.00
19.07.2019	Katarzyna Golc	Polish citizen	Her place, Bournemouth	Yes / 00.48.17
15.08.2019	Graham Farrant	Chief Executive BCP Council	Poole Civic Centre	Yes / 00.22.02
21.08.2019	Epameinondas Triantopoulos	British/Greek citizen	His place, Bournemouth	Yes / 00.37.06
23.08.2019	Magda Wielgus and her son JJ	Polish citizen	Café, Bournemouth	Yes / 00.17.10
29.08.2019	Maria Fatima Possante	BU employee	Bournemouth University Building	Yes / 00.47.23

13.02.2020	Peter Dale Green	One of DREC's founder	His place, Dorchester	Yes / 01.21.00
19.02.2020	Susan Ward-Rice and Kathleen Boston-Mammah	Equality Officers at Dorset Council	Dorset Council, Dorchester	Yes / 01.17.00

3 Participant information sheets

a) Participant information sheet for the fieldwork in Bosnia (translated into BHS when delivered)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Faculty of Health and Social Sciences
Researcher: Giulia Levi glevi@bournemouth.ac.uk
Supervisor: Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers sssievers@bourenmouth.ac.uk

Bournemouth University

Research into civil society interventions to bridge societal divisions: a comparison between post-Brexit referendum UK and post-war Bosnia.

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

The researcher

My name is Giulia Levi and, since September 2017, I am a PhD student in the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences at Bournemouth University (United Kingdom). After my studies in Sarajevo I worked for 3 years for the Alexander Langer Foundation where I collaborated on activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina with local organizations.

What is the purpose of the project

The purpose of my project is to explore na iskustvima ljudi u kontekstu intervencijama medjunarodnog i civilnog drustva za prevazilazenje drustvenih podjela. Ideja je da se izvuce zakljucak iz positivnih i negativnih iskustava u Bosni i da se vidi kako se mogu pobolsati intervencije i u drugim zemljama.

Why have you been chosen?

You have been chosen for your experience with initiatives aimed at improving social justice and relations among people.

One/or more of the following reasons could apply:

- you participated in such initiatives
- you carried out these initiatives
- you have specific knowledge about these initiatives

Do you have to take part?

You are free to decide whether or not to take part. You can withdraw during the interviews at any time, without giving a reason, and we will remove any data collected about you from the study. Once the interviews have finished you can still withdraw your permission to use the information gained from you within a month from the interview. After that the data will be analysed, transcribed and will become anonymous.

What would taking part involve?

We will have a loosely-structured conversation of up to two hours along above-mentioned topics. I am particularly interested in your personal opinion and experiences. We will decided together on the best place to meet. Our conversation will remain confidential. We can take a break or stop whenever you wish.

What type of information will be sought from you and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

Questions will be about your experience of working in, or participating in, civil society organizations' initiatives which have addressed questions of societal divisions.

What are the advantages and possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

There are no immediate benefits for people participating in the project. However, your experience and knowledge will contribute to improving civil society activities and best practice in the relevant fields, both in BiH and the UK.

Will you be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

With your permission only, the conversation will be recorded and, subsequently, transcribed. Your identity will be anonymized fully, unless you would like to be named. This will help my analysis. Your words might be cited in my future work (PhD, academic publications, conference presentations, lectures).

How will your information be kept?

All the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly in accordance with current EU Data Protection Regulations. All personal data relating to this study will be held for 5 years, electronically, from the date of publication of the thesis in hard copy in a secure location, accessible only through a BU password-protected secure network. Access to your personal data will be restricted to me and my supervisory team only (Dr. Stephanie Schwandner Sievers, Dr. Melanie Klinkner and Prof. Jonathan Parker).

In case of complaints

If you have any concerns regarding this study, please contact the Deputy Dean of Research of Research and Professional Practice of the Faculty of Health and Social Science Prof. Vanora Hundley by email to researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Finally…

If you decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed participant agreement form to keep. Thank you for considering taking part in this research project!

b) Participant information sheet for CSO staff in Dorset

Ethics ID: 17267
Faculty of Health and Social Sciences
Researcher: Giulia Levi
glevi@bournemouth.ac.uk
Supervisor: Dr. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers
sssievers@bournemouth.ac.uk

Bournemouth University

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Bridging societal divisions in the Brexiting UK – Learning from Bosnia.

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

The researcher

My name is Giulia Levi and, since September 2017, I am a PhD student in the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences at Bournemouth University.

What is the purpose of the project?

The purpose of my study is to help develop best-practices for civil society organizations that work to create a more inclusive and tolerant society in Dorset after the Brexit referendum.

Why have you been involved?

You have been chosen because of the perspective you could bring in developing new ways to improve social justice and relations among people in Brexiting UK.

One/or more of the following reasons could apply:

- you belong to an organization dealing with hate crime or with community development initiatives more generally
- you have specific knowledge about hate crime

Do you have to take part?

You are free to decide whether or not to take part. You can withdraw during the interviews at any time, without giving a reason, and we will remove any data collected about you from the study. Once the

interviews have finished you can still withdraw your permission to use the information gained from you up to a month from the interview. After that, the data will be analysed, transcribed and will become anonymous and cannot be withdrawn.

What would taking part involve?

We will have a loosely-structured conversation, individually or as part of a focus group, of up to two hours long. Meetings are likely to take place on the premises of Dorset Race Equality Council (DREC) or at alternative venues to be agreed. Our conversation will remain confidential. We can take a break or stop whenever you wish.

What type of information will be sought from you?

We will discuss about examples of support offered by civil society actors to victims of hate crime and your opinion of the ways in which these could be improved. The discussion will focus also on what, according to you, changed in people's everyday life after the Brexit referendum. This might include how you or someone you know dealt with experiences of discrimination or hate crime.

What are the advantages of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, your experience and knowledge will be very valuable in giving new perspective on how civil society organizations can address more efficiently and sensitively current societal divisions in the UK.

What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?
Discussing difficult experiences can be distressing. Your wellbeing is my main priority. Please let me know at any time if need to stop the session, or if you require additional support which can be provided by DREC.

Will you be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?
With your permission only, the conversation will be recorded and used only for analysis and the transcription of the recording(s) for illustration in my future work, (PhD, academic publications, conference presentations, lectures).

How will your information be kept?
All the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly in accordance with current data protection legislation. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest, as part of our core function as a university. Bournemouth University (BU) is a Data Controller of your information which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it appropriately. BU's Research Participant Privacy Notice sets out more information about how we fulfill our responsibilities as a data controller and about your rights as an individual under the data protection legislation. We ask you to read this Notice so that you can fully understand the basis on which we will process your information: https://intranetsp.bournemouth.ac.uk/documentsrep/Research%20Participant%20Privacy%20Notice.pdf

Publication
You will not be able to be identified in any external reports or publications about the research without your specific consent. Otherwise your information will only be included in these materials in an anonymous form, i.e. you will not be identified.

Security and access controls
BU will hold the information we collect about you in hard copy in a secure location and on a BU password protected secure network where held electronically.
Access to your personal data will be restricted to me and my supervisory team only (Dr. Stephanie Schwandner Sievers, Dr. Melanie Klinkner and Prof. Jonathan Parker).

Sharing and further use of your personal information

The information collected about you may be used in an anonymous form to support other research projects in the future and access to it in this form will not be restricted. It will not be possible for you to be identified from this data.

In case of complaints

If you have any concerns regarding this study, please contact the Deputy Dean of Research and Professional Practice of the Faculty of Health and Social Science Prof. Vanora Hundley by email to researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Finally…

If you decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this document and a signed participant agreement form to keep.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project!

c) Participant information sheet for members of the community in Dorset

Version: 2
Ethics ID: 17267
Faculty of Health and Social Sciences
Researcher: Giulia Levi
glevi@bournemouth.ac.uk
Supervisor: Dr. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers
sssievers@bournemouth.ac.uk
Date: 9 April 2019

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Bridging societal divisions in the Brexiting UK – Learning from Bosnia.

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

The researcher

My name is Giulia Levi and, since September 2017, I am a PhD student in the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences at Bournemouth University.

What is the purpose of the project?

The purpose of my study is to help develop best-practices for civil society organizations that work to create a more inclusive and tolerant society in Dorset after the Brexit referendum.

Why have you been involved?

Because you are a self-selected non-majority member of the public who feels affected by the Brexit referendum and its aftermath. I am very interested to listen to your experience and your opinions

Do you have to take part?

You are free to decide whether or not to take part. You can withdraw during the interviews at any time, without giving a reason, and we will remove any data collected about you from the study. Once the interviews have finished you can still withdraw your permission to use the information gained from you up to a month from the interview. After that, the data will be analysed, transcribed and will become anonymous and cannot be withdrawn.

What would taking part involve?

We will have a loosely-structured conversation, individually or as part of a focus group, of up to two hours long. Meetings are likely to take place on the premises of Dorset Race Equality Council (DREC) or at alternative venues to be agreed. Our conversation will remain confidential. We can take a break or stop whenever you wish.

What type of information will be sought from you?

The discussion will focus on what, according to you, changed in people's everyday life after the Brexit referendum. This might include how you or someone you know dealt with experiences of discrimination or hate crime. We will discuss also examples of support offered by civil society actors and your opinion of the ways in which these could be improved.

What are the advantages of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, your experience and knowledge will be very valuable in giving new perspective on how civil society organizations can address more efficiently and sensitively current societal divisions in the UK.

What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?
Discussing difficult experiences can be distressing. Your wellbeing is my main priority. Please let me know at any time if need to stop the session, or if you require additional support which can be provided by DREC.

Will you be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?
With your permission only, the conversation will be recorded and used only for analysis and the transcription of the recording(s) for illustration in my future work, (PhD, academic publications, conference presentations, lectures).

How will your information be kept?
All the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly in accordance with current data protection legislation. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest, as part of our core function as a university. Bournemouth University (BU) is a Data Controller of your information which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it appropriately. BU's Research Participant Privacy Notice sets out more information about how we fulfill our responsibilities as a data controller and about your rights as an individual under the data protection legislation. We ask you to read this Notice so that you can fully understand the basis on which we will process your information: https://intranetsp.bournemouth.ac.uk/documentsrep/Research%20Participant%20Privacy%20Notice.pdf

Publication
You will not be able to be identified in any external reports or publications about the research without your specific consent. Otherwise your information will only be included in these materials in an anonymous form, i.e. you will not be identified.

Security and access controls
BU will hold the information we collect about you in hard copy in a secure location and on a BU password protected secure network where held electronically.
Access to your personal data will be restricted to me and my supervisory team only (Dr. Stephanie Schwandner Sievers, Dr. Melanie Klinkner and Prof. Jonathan Parker).

Sharing and further use of your personal information
The information collected about you may be used in an anonymous form to support other research projects in the future and access to it in this form will not be restricted. It will not be possible for you to be identified from this data.

In case of complaints

If you have any concerns regarding this study, please contact the Deputy Dean of Research and Professional Practice of the Faculty of Health and Social Science Prof. Vanora Hundley by email to researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Finally…

If you decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this document and a signed participant agreement form to keep.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project!

4 Participant Agreement Form

Participant Agreement Form

Bournemouth University

Full title of project: Between silence and agitation. Coping strategies and third-party interventions in divided societies: a comparison between post-conflict Bosnia and post-referendum UK
Researcher: Giulia Levi, PhD Student, glevi@bournemouth.ac.uk
Supervisor: Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, sssievers@bournemouth.ac.uk

Please tick the appropriate boxes	***Yes***	***No***
Taking Part:		
I have read and understood the Project Participant Information Sheet	☐	☐
I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions	☐	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary	☐	☐
I understand that I am free to withdraw up to the point where the data are processed and become anonymous, so my identity cannot be determined	☐	☐
Should I not wish to answer any particular question(s), I am free to decline/amend sentence as appropriate.	☐	☐
I understand taking part in the research will include being recorded (audio) but that these recordings will be deleted.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project.	☐	☐
Use of the information I provide for this project only:		
I understand my personal details such my name will not be revealed to people outside this project.	☐	☐
I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs. Please choose one of the following three options: I would like my real name used in the above I would not like my real name to be used in the above I would like to be anonymised for certain parts which I will discuss and agree with the researcher	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐
Use of the information I provide beyond this project:		
I understand that the anonymised data I provide may be used by me and my supervisory team to support other research projects in the future, including future publications, reports or presentations	☐	☐

_____ _____ _____
Name of Participant Date Signature

_____ _____ _____
Name of Researcher Date Signature

This document was translated in BHS when delivered in Bosnia.

5 Recruitment flyer for fieldwork in Dorset

Call for interview participation
"BREXIT REFERENDUM IMPACT ON MINORITY PEOPLE'S LIVES"

ARE YOU A MEMBER OF A MINORITY COMMUNITY IN DORSET?

DO YOU FEEL THE BREXIT REFERENDUM HAS AFFECTED YOUR EXPERIENCE OF LIVING IN THE UK?

As part of my PhD project, I am exploring how the Brexit referendum may, or may not, have affected people's everyday life and what experiences people may have had as a result.

Between June and August 2019, I am recruiting participants for interviews.

Please **contact** me if you are interested:
Giulia Levi
PhD Candidate, BU
glevi@bournemouth.ac.uk
tel: 01202 962164

This study is conducted in collaboration with Dorset Race Equality Council

http://www.dorsetrec.org.uk/

Bournemouth University

This is a Bournemouth University post-graduate research study that has been approved by BU Research Ethics Committee.

I am looking forward to learning from your experiences and insights!
glevi@bournemouth.ac.uk

6 Interview samples with coding

Extract of interview to N.S., Bournemouth, 2019

Themes and codes highlighted in this extract

1. **Brexit**
   Impact of the Referendum
   Before the Referendum
   Hate crimes and incidents
   Political divisions
2. **CSO's work**
   Aim of their events
   Common humanity

   Reactions to problems
   Judgement on their work
3. **Identity / changes in the rights regime**
   Breach of normality
   Settled status
4. **Emotions**
   Fear
   Division / Lack of trust
   Feel different / Unwelcome

G: What happened 3 years ago, what happened during in the referendum, what do you recall from that period?

N: In terms of work in the community we had lots of informal reports from various community members and from neighbours, so not necessarily from the people affected directly but also neighbours saying that they had seen something happening or they have heard somebody being insulted. That was, I can't really remember, it must have been a Thursday, 'cause it's always Thursday, but it was the day after, from the day after for about two weeks we had an increase amount of informal feedback coming from both people who have been affected and people who had been witnesses. So I remember that what we did is that we sent an email around all the voluntary organizations through Bournemouth CVS to let them know, we were starting to experience a high level of reports, if they could send a message to all their community members that, if anybody was witnessing or experiencing any kind of abouse because of Brexit to come to us. So that increased as well, that worked well and people did come to us saying you know, my neighbour was abused and that happened and we saw leaflets and stuff like that. And we work very closely with the police but unfortunately, apart from a few people who wanted us to deal with their case directly, a lot of people didn't want anything to happen. So we had conversations about what had happened and we asked if they wanted us to support them any further and if they wanted to involve the police and stuff like that and it was always no, scared of reprisal, mainly, that was the main reason, also they don't want to make a fuss, and its one of the things, so that was the main response. But it lasted for about 2 weeks, solidly and then after that that was it. After that it went back to, you know, I don't like the word, but normal, it went back to a previous thing. It was definitely two weeks of quite intense reporting. But always with no real action. There were only a few cases that we dealt directly, supporting the individuals, but nothing major in terms of cases.

G: Do you think that the referendum and what happened next had an impact on how conduct your work now?

N: It did, because prior to the referendum we were not recording the informal reports that we had, so we were only recording the cases that we had. When we had a conversation where somebody said 'oh,

this happened to me, but I don't want you to do anything', we never put it anywhere, but now we record it. We've got a spreadsheet where we record the basic info that we get. Sometimes is not a lot but it helps us as well to have a kind of idea of all the informal stuff that is happening in communities. So, we changed that, and that has helped us and restarted having an agreement with the police by getting their data as well, because they wanted to have our data so we said right, it would be really good if you could let us know as well about what kind of level of hate incidents and hate crime you get. So, on a weekly basis we get a data sheet from the police looking at the area and what type it is, if it's hate incident or hate crime, so that's quite useful for us. That was following all the work that we did because of Brexit so that helped us a little bit to focus our mind on the non-official cases, really… basically. But it is still worth recording to look at potential patch and, actually, can't really remember when it was, but, at one point, we had a little bit report into schools, that especially eastern European mums, mainly mums, were being abused when they were picking up their children because of them speaking polish to their children when picking them up. So, we had some informal reports there as well, nothing solid, but informal report that in some of the schools there was that kind of things happening. I had a conversation with the police crime commissioner about it and he had said: 'do you want me to do something?', and I said: 'what can u do?'. 'What we can do is to try to put some ununiformed police officers, pretending to go and pick up their children as well at school and seeing what is happening'. So, they did it for a little while in some schools in Boscombe and picked up a few conversations, but it wasn't sufficient to guarantee officers to be there on a long-term basis. But that was an action that was possible by monitoring the…because if you don't record its difficult, because you know, you've had it, but then 2 or 3 days afterwards you have a similar thing but u don't necessarily remember if it hasn't been recorded, but when u are looking and u say oh my goodness, last week we had 2 reports in school and this week we got 3 and we must start thinking there is something brewing there and that we need to look at. So that was really useful to do that. That was post-referendum that we started doing that, that's been really useful for us. We keep doing it, its probably not very systematic but we tend to record informal conversations that we have with community members who don't want us to act because unfortunately it's still happening quite a lot and when we try to say 'well, do you want me to take that forward?', to support and things like that, and they say no, because they are scared of reprisal.

[Break, the recorder stops working]

G: The events that you organize in the community, what is their function?

N: It depends, but it's very much about promoting diversity and celebrating diversity. When it's, for example, when we attend a Gypsy Roma and traveller history month event, it is about promoting the Gypsy culture and raising awareness about what we can do for the Gypsy culture. So that's the reason why we…other events like multicultural lunches for example, that we've organized, and the multicultural mee-tups that we are currently organizing across Dorset, the aim is to bring the different cultures together for them to share their culture with each other, for them to talk about their culture and to talk to each other and to realize that they are all the same because discrimination is not just white people against black people, Gypsies…it goes various ethnic groups towards various other ethnic groups, so you've got discrimination everywhere. Our aim is very much about promoting the diversity as a whole and promoting various cultures and make sure that people understand each other's culture, to be respectful and to realize…and very often, what happens is that when, those events were very powerful because people realize and said, 'oh, we celebrate the same thing, maybe not at the same time and not in the same way, but yes we do celebrate that or that's the food that we celebrate Christmas or the end of the year, and oh, yeah, we use the same food, the same thing'. So, they realize that the commonalities between different cultures and different ethnicities, and that actually we are all the same. It brings people together and it breaks down the barriers and I think that's what is really really necessary for people to realize that actually we are all the same and, there are just a few differences but they are quite insignificant in the big picture. That we can respect each other, we can live together and its actually really rich to have a diversity in the place, in your community. I think what unfortunately, what

happened with Brexit and subsequently in the atmosphere that has been created is an atmosphere of fear, and it's an atmosphere of division for power really, so I don't think, obviously I don't want to be political but I don't think people in power are interested in **social cohesion** because they do everything to divide the society, **and they are not really interested in social cohesion so yes, on the one hand they want us to create social cohesion and they are targets, you know the police has got targets around social cohesion**, but when u look at what is happening it is dividing to rule basically. Which is not helpful and which is what has been happening and we see that over the last 3 years that we have been talking about Brexit, there's that sense of division that atmosphere, that negative atmosphere and that fear atmosphere, that u can't trust your neighbour, that you can't have a conversation with other people and that you've got to be careful about what you are saying and all those things which is really unhelpful to the whole community, not just Europeans or Muslim, but to the all community, it's very detrimental and a lot of people, we know, anecdotally again, nothing very scientific, but anecdotally we know that a lot of people have left because they were fed up of being treated like second class citizens and that feeling when …and I know that personally, for me being French national, having lived in England for 21 years now, I've got that feeling as well, because the reason why I came to England was because it was so easy to change life and to have opportunities and there was no problem. Whatever I wanted to do was possible because nobody checked whether I was French, Polish, Italian, Spanish, that didn't matter at all. I was accepted, because obviously my level of English was good originally, that helped. That could be a massive barrier for people but for me I've never had…yes, I experienced certain of hate incident but nothing major. But I've never had any problems in finding a job, in having a mortgage or anything like that. But now, every time I'm gonna do something official, I'm gonna have to justify that I'm not a UK national. And that is a big thing, because you want to be treated like anybody else, but actually you realise that you're not like anybody else because you've got to justify that you are not a UK national. And it's like the elections, one thing that has always annoyed me is that I've got the right to work here, that's great, you know, I've never had any problem. But I pay my contribution to the country but I'm not able to vote in the general elections. And I don't understand that because the government is quite happy to take my taxes every month and to use those taxes for whatever they do. I heven't got the choice to say, 'oh yeah actually I don't want to give you my taxes because I'm an EU member of the community, so I don't want to give the UK government my taxes'. I haven't got that right, but I haven't got the right to vote in the UK election, which is a bit of a difference but now it's even worse because every time there's gonna be something officially happening…

G: For example?

N: I don't know, if I find another job I'm gonna have to prove, or they're gonna have to check that I'm registered with the settled status, u know. So that's another step that local authorities or officials are always gonna check my status to make sure that I'm not abusing the system. And I can understand that they need to check for abusing the system but the … fact that you can move from one country to another …freedom of movement, is really, really important. It's really important. I've seen it going to France, it's never been a major issue, it doesn't take long to go back to France and you just show that you've got your passport and most of the time you go through is just occasionally that they check the passport ant things like that. But at Christmas, just to go through the port it took us an hour and 20 minutes, just to go in line to check the passports. So that's adding on to the trip, time, cost, so and it's probably gonna be worse, when they are gonna check every single person is gonna be probably even worse that it is at the moment. It's all that that you've got to...and it makes you feel different, it makes u fell different, it makes you feel unwelcome, so theres that unfriendly atmosphere and so…

Extract of interview to M.K., Srebrenica, 2018

Themes and codes highlighted in this extract

1. **CSO's work**
   Aim of their events
   Relationship with money / Volunterism
   Impact of their work
   Impact of their events
   Donor dependency
2. **Emotions**
   Enthusiasm
   Sense of hopelessness

GL: Recimo, kad je to bilo? Početak...

MK: 2001. (godina), a omladinski centar se otvorio 2003. Taj omladinski koji sad ne radi. Ovaj, tako da, 15 godina. Ja, više od 15 godina već.

GL: I kako ti je bilo? Prvo iskustvo kako ti je bilo?

MK: Entuzijazam je bio veliki, znaš. Mi smo bili okupljeni oko istog cilja, da se dobro provedemo, da odemo negdje, da radimo nešto što ne rade drugi, da promijenimo svakodnevicu. Činjenica je da nismo mogli svima, ali tih 15-20 ljudi je moglo sebi da promijeni i svakodnevicu i baš to što smo pokrenuli pozorište, pa smo s pozorištem mogli nešto raditi, učestvovati u određenim kampanjama... ono, nastupati kasnije... pozorišni festival smo napravili. Ono, to je nekako kreneš od male grupe koja se širi.

Gl: Da. Onda, prije si bio, recimo, korisnik te inicijative, a nakon toga ti si počeo aktivno da to radiš.

MK: Da, da. Ali i s ljudima stvari su se mijenjale. Pošto je to dosta kvalitetnih ljudi koji su bili ovdje i pošto su imali ideje... ali vremenom, kako ti već odrastaš i kako vidiš da neko, da na osnovu toga na osnovu ono i timskog rada i ideja i tim, ono, u stvari zarađuje pare, tad počinje situacija da se mijenja. Ono, nisu svi tu negdje, nego je neko previše gore i neko previše dole. Znaš... I to se izgubilo i pojavom puno više novca. Dok je bilo puno manje novca, bilo je super. Svi smo bili isti, ima li smo...

GL: Da, da. A ti si bio aktivan i u omladinskom centru?

MK: Da. I sve do momenta kad su ponudili posao. Tad je se i centar opremio. A prije toga sam ja počeo i na festivalu i tu sam počeo. Prve godine nisam bio. I pošto je prve godine organizovala ekipa iz Banjaluke, ali i druge godine i naredne četiri sam ja bio.Ovaj... I to je bila ista ta inicijativa. Idemo da još nešto se dešava. Niko nije pitao za novac. (*)

GL: Aha, da. Svi su bili volonteri, oni koji su učestvovali?

MK: Drugačije je bilo, znaš. Sad imaš mlade ljude, 15, 16 godina – prvo pitaju koliko ću ja zaraditi. Znaš. Nema više, više nema entuzijazma. I to uopšte. Ja evo, i poslije svega, sam ostao i radim neke stvari. Ovaj, mislim, novac nikad nije bio glavni motiv, jer i treba probati nešto uraditi. Ali s vremenom sam vidio da je ovo, u stvari, da je ovo velika rupa bez dna i da koliko god se trudio da uradiš nešto konkretno, da nešto pomogneš lokalnoj zajednici, da, ne znam, pomažeš Srebrenici, da to neće niko prepoznati. I onda kad imaš priliku da kažeš 'žao mi je, ali vi morate podržati ovo jer... mislim, ja sam dao to, ja sam uradio to, to i to, sve to džabe, ali ako hoćete da ideja samo raste, da nešto postane ozbiljno, mislim, morate platiti'. Što? Zato što s vremenom i svi hoće da imaju sigurnost. Ta finansijska sigurnost je nekako osnovno. I međutim, puno stvari, onaj, ne ide ovako... i zato je propao taj, recimo, festival, jer nikad opština nije budžetom planirala za, za, za... nego je sve zavisilo od donatora.