

6

The (Un)spoilt Generation: The Post-Yugoslavs

In this chapter I give voice to the Post-Yugoslavs, the youngest generation. The Post-Yugoslavs were teenagers or in their early 20s when I met them, between two and 10 years old when the war started, and between five and 14 years old when it ended. This means that all of them spent more years of their lives in post-wartime than in pre-wartime. The majority of my interlocutors spent at least part of the war as refugees away from the war zone (either in BiH or outside the country), some of them accompanied by a sibling or parent and others by themselves.

In Mostar young people are often presented by older people as being crucially different from the rest of society because of their lack of pre-war experience. Mostar's youths are often presented as ignorant, manipulated and lethargic. Pre-war memories are used here as boundary markers, allowing, for example, young Mostarians in their late 20s or early 30s to differentiate themselves from those in their early 20s. Mostar's youths are often presented as ignorant, manipulated and lethargic. As shown in the previous chapters, for many Last Yugoslavs and First Yugoslavs, pre-war Mostar is still the true Mostar while post-war Mostar is a kind of artificial state. Following this line of thought, the youngest generation, which I refer to as the Post-Yugoslavs, are pitied for their lack of memory of true (pre-war)

Mostar. Due to the post-war division of BiH and Mostar in particular, the youngest generation is much less familiar with customs associated with the other national group, which are part of the older population's common knowledge. A Croat woman in her late 20s when I met her repeatedly expressed her astonishment about the youngest generation. For instance, she once expressed disbelief at the fact that her younger friends are no longer familiar with Bosniak names. Names which for her were typically Bosnian (sic: not Bosniak!) did not sound familiar to her friends who were only a few years younger than her. This unfamiliarity also extends to socialist festivities, pre-war rock bands as well as *turcizmi*¹ (in the case of Croat youth), which were all common in pre-war BiH.

The way the Post-Yugoslavs are presented by older compatriots is contradictory. They are said to be the part of the population that is most manipulated by nationalist politicians as well as traumatised; they grew up in a time of extreme nationalism, war and national partition. On the other hand, the Post-Yugoslavs are the generation who shoulder the hope for a more positive future on behalf of their parents, grandparents and teachers, as well as domestic politicians and members of the so-called 'international community' (see Palmberger 2010). As I will show below, the Post-Yugoslavs instead perceive themselves as the 'unspoilt' rather than the 'spoilt' generation, which is less affected by negative feelings caused by the war.

Even if most of the time my interlocutors 'downplayed' their war experiences, most of them also had an alternative story to tell, indicating that neither their young age nor the fact that they were evacuated to safer places spared them from feelings of fear and insecurity. Three immediate realms were essential in these narratives: the family, neighbourhood and school. It was first and foremost in these places that children sensed changes, changes that were often left unexplained. There were the fathers who began to dress in military uniform (an item of clothing the children had never seen at home before) and to leave the family for days or weeks. Plus the silence upon their return about what they had experienced. There were the pupils who disappeared without saying good-bye, leaving behind empty desks in the classroom. In particular, those who had just

¹ *Turcizam* is the local name for a word of Arabic origin incorporated into what used to be referred to as Serbo-Croatian and is nowadays used mainly by Bosniaks or the older population.

reached primary school age when the war started described how confused and threatened they felt, sensing that something was going on without ever being told.

First, their Serb schoolmates suddenly disappeared. Then, during the following weeks, more and more friends stopped attending classes and their schooling was often interrupted by shelling. For many of my interlocutors this was the point when they first realised that they belonged to a nation or at least became aware of the importance of such an identity. There were long periods when many of the children were parted from their families (or part of their families) after being evacuated to safer places in and outside BiH. In accounts of the time they were away from their family, young Mostarians expressed the anxiety and fear they experienced on behalf of the family members who stayed behind. Lacking any means of communication with their loved ones, they were entirely dependent on the news on foreign TV channels broadcasting images of war and destruction. Some of them even had lost hope they would ever see their family again. One young man, who had been evacuated to a foreign country, learned only months after the event that his little brother had died after being shot by a sniper. He told me this during a stroll through Mostar when we passed by the graveyard where his brother is buried. Such events made it very clear that my youngest informants had also experienced the war in its fullest sense. Nevertheless, they tend to dissociate their experiences from that of the wider society, as I will show in this chapter.

Even though the Post-Yugoslavs tend to present themselves and their environments as somehow 'untouched' by the war, this does not mean that members of this generation are not critical of their city at all. The Post-Yugoslavs often told me how unhappy they were with BiH's education system, especially with the old-fashioned teaching and examining methods. There was also a considerable group of Post-Yugoslavs who complained there was too little to do in Mostar for young people besides meeting friends in coffee bars.² Mostar does not even have a cinema. Those who had already finished school especially complained about the constraints they faced around travelling (not only

² The lack of public places for young people besides coffee bars is significant throughout BiH (see Abaspahić et al. 2003).

about financial constraints but also about the restrictive visa regulations). Another worry, expressed especially among the older Post-Yugoslavs, was the difficult economic situation in Mostar (as throughout BiH) and the relatively bad prospects for finding an appropriate job. Among the students I talked to, many considered the high unemployment rate as one of several factors causing them to pursue university study (rather than being unemployed). I also sensed that the Post-Yugoslavs (like the older generations) were tired of politicians' inability to improve the situation.³

This chapter focuses on two central questions. Firstly, how do the Post-Yugoslavs narrate their and their nation's war experiences and which discursive tactics do they follow to deal with the legacy of the war in everyday life? Secondly, how do they narrate the pre-war period and incorporate the narratives of that time passed on to them by their older compatriots? As this chapter will show, encounters between young Bosniaks and Croats in Mostar are rare and members of the Post-Yugoslavs generation rarely speak about memories of the war. They nevertheless share discursive tactics utilised in order to position themselves with reference to the past and, at the same time, to situate themselves within the context of present-day Mostar. Their discursive tactics, I suggest, are characterised by depoliticising their personal lives and their city. This way of coping with war experiences and defending one's life (and to some extent one's generation as well) is due to generational positioning rather than to national affiliation.

Mario and Lejla: 'Distancing' Personal Experience from that of the Collective

Mario was 22 when one of his friends introduced me to him. Like many other young Croats, Mario came to Mostar to study history at *Sveučilište u Mostaru* (University of Mostar), the only Croat university in BiH, as he

³ A report on youth and youth policy in BiH confirms that BiH's youth are primarily dissatisfied with the education system, unemployment, lack of prospects and unstable political situation, see *Youth Information Agency Bosnia and Herzegovina* in 2005 for the UN Review of the *World Programme of Action for Youth*.

repeatedly said to me. He grew up in a city that was part of *Herceg-Bosna* during the war, some 50 kilometres away from Mostar, and was divided along similar conflict lines. There, too, Bosniak and Croat forces first fought as allies while during the second part of the war they fought each other. Mario was born in 1984, and was eight years old when the war began. Although he does not glorify the war, he believes that it brought an end to the 'dark and worn-out' period of communism in his country and enabled Croats to freely practise their language, culture and religion. His personal memories of pre-war times, however, are not as dark. He still fondly remembers the building complex he grew up in where families of different nationalities used to live. Although he has always been aware of his Croat identity, he only sensed the impact of it when war broke out and some of his classmates did not attend classes anymore.

Generally, Mario liked to talk to me about BiH's history. This used to change, though, when I showed interest in his personal experiences of the war. His answers then became brief and he was quick to point out how young he was when the war broke out. He claimed the war would surely have had a completely different effect on his life if it broke out now and he had to take up a rifle and fight. Although the war had a traumatic influence on people, this was not the case for him personally, he told me. Mario's narrative of the war is ambiguous. While he states that this war, like any war, did leave behind many scars, he simultaneously removes himself from that experience by stating he had been too young to understand what was going on. He explained why he was spared any feelings of hate due to his age and his lack of direct war experience:

Because when my town was shelled I was in Split, I went to excursions on islands, I went swimming, I didn't feel the war and later on when I came back to my community I didn't have anything against Muslims or Serbs. (...) Coexistence (*suživot*) is good, especially among young people in my age who didn't feel the war a lot.

When narrating the war, Mario shows that he distances his personal story, and to some extent also that of his entire generation, from what is often described as a collective experience. Other interlocutors of his age narrated their war experiences to me in a similar way, especially when

they had been evacuated to safer places. This was also the case for Lejla, a 16-year-old, who will be introduced in more detail below. Lejla told me the following:

It is for sure easier for us than for our parents, because they are familiar with everything, with the situation that led to war and everything else, while we were protected from everything; we were just facing some consequences of the war.

In this citation Lejla clearly expresses what I so often encountered in conversations with young Mostarians, namely that they present themselves as the ‘unspoilt’ generation due to their young age and thereby distance their personal experiences from that of the wider society. Lejla does so with the phrases, ‘we were protected from everything’ and ‘we were just facing some consequences of the war’. These phrases also show that Lejla (as others of her generation) speaks of youth in Mostar (at times at least) as a ‘we’ group although the lives of young Bosniaks and Croats are separated and points of encounter are rare. Most of the time, my young interlocutors removed their personal memories from the discourse of victimisation, which is a strong element of the dominant Bosniak and Croat public discourses as well as of the older generations’ narratives. Discursive tactics of distancing also find expression in the choice of the grammatical person and, consequently, the pronoun employed. Personal war experiences among the Post-Yugoslavs generation are generally narrated in first person singular (‘I’), while those of older generations are often told in first person plural (‘we’), in which personal experiences come to be narrated as a collective experience of the nation.

Mario only told me about experiences of fear, including the fear for his father who joined the HVO (*Hrvatsko vijeće obrane*, Croat Defence Council) when I explicitly asked him about it. Otherwise, he spoke about the war without showing much emotion. Without planning it, I obtained a direct reaction to Mario’s narrative from Marina, a Croat woman who is only eight years older than him, when she helped me with the transcription of Mario’s interview. Apologising for her indiscretion,

she told me how irritated she was by the ease and light-heartedness with which my interviewee spoke about the war and especially about present-day Mostar. She became very emotional and started cursing and accusing 'these kids' of being ignorant of what had happened in and to Mostar. In her view, they do not and cannot know better because they possess too few memories of Mostar before the war, and they do not understand that the war ruined a whole world, her old Mostar, over whose destruction she still grieves.

I heard many similar statements from other young adults who were sometimes only a few years older than those they blamed to be ignorant. Although Mario's words did not provoke me as they provoked Marina, I was still puzzled to hear from Mario about the good coexistence of members of his generation across national lines since in Mostar most young people, including Mario, have little contact with their peers on the other side. To a good part this is to blame on the division of schools and universities introduced during the war, an effective way of institutionalising the division of Mostar (see Chap. 3).

As described above, young Mostarians have a story to tell that includes fear and hardship connected to the war. At many times, however, they distance themselves from the nationalised discourses of victimisation, discourses that serve as important reference points for members of the two older generations. In the following section, I suggest that such apparent ambivalences in my interlocutors' narratives are strongly bound to the specific social context of their present lives. Maurice Bloch reminds us that 'the past is an ever-changing resource according to the situations or moods in which the persons find themselves, situations and moods which will often be due to organised social contexts' (Bloch 1998: 119). With this in mind, let us first explore the immediate environment of my interlocutors, and the attitude towards the experiences of the young generation that they confront.

A study by Freedman and Abazovic (2006) on secondary school students in Mostar and Vukovar, focusing on those who experienced the war as children between the age of five and eight, states that adults tend to belittle the war experiences of this age group or deny them altogether. Freedman and Abazovic report: 'Some said that their parents thought

they were too little to remember very much and that their parents thought that they themselves were the ones who really suffered most in the wars' (Abaspahić et al. 2003). I heard similar complaints from some of my interlocutors, such as Lejla.

Lejla is from a Mostar family whose members identified themselves as Yugoslavs before the war but today declare themselves as Bosniaks. Lejla left Mostar with her parents and sister in 1992 for Italy and only returned six years later, while her grandparents, cousins and other family members remained in Mostar throughout the war. At the time I met Lejla, she was a student of Mostar's prestigious old grammar school (*Stara gimnazija*) that was officially reunited in 2004 (see Chap. 3). Although uniting 'two schools under one roof' was sold as a big success by the international community (OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, was active in the reunification process), it needs to be said that Bosniak and Croat students attend different classes following different curricula even though they share the same building (see Hromadžić 2008, 2015). Lejla was disturbed by this division and thus became active in school politics. Lejla is very aware of the serious shortcomings existing in her hometown. In spite of her young age, Lejla is active in one of the youth NGOs and full-heartedly fights for more participation of youth in the political decision making process.

Even if, as illustrated above, at times Lejla distances her personal war experiences from that of the older generations similar to Mario, she still claims the right of young people in Mostar to engage with war and post-war issues, which older generations claim for themselves. When it comes to war-related issues, however, she faces a situation in which adults do not find it appropriate to discuss them with her due to her young age. In the following story, she illustrates this experience:

I wrote [in an article for the youth magazine she works for] how sad it was to see that art, which shouldn't be divided, shouldn't be put under any conditions of national division, had been divided after all. In our city we don't actually realise this anymore because it has become normal to us to have two sides, to have this and that side, left and right side, left is their side and right is our side and so on. I realised that nobody wants to speak about

it; everybody was avoiding the topic saying that I'm too young and cannot write about it. But it's not only about me! ... When I tell them that I am 16 (Lejla appears older) their faces freeze and they suggest changing the topic. Why? We students, especially from *Stara gimnazija* are faced with this ugly situation of separatism every day, and I really hope it will improve.

It is not only due to her age that Lejla does not feel taken seriously enough but also due to the fact that she left Mostar during the war. On one hand, she feels privileged not to have had to experience the war in Mostar and believes that this gives her the opportunity to be more impartial (in a similar way to Mario). On the other hand, Lejla stresses to always have cared about her hometown and to have feared for her loved ones remaining in Mostar. When she returned she sensed that those who had remained in Mostar did not believe she cared about her hometown since she and her family had decided to leave.⁴ Most of the time, Lejla downplays her experiences related to the war, disentangling her experiences from the Bosniak victimisation discourse. However, at other times she contests her exclusion from debate and claims the right to have her experiences accepted as part of the national experience of victimisation.

Darko and Elvira: 'Normalising' Mostar

I observed another discursive tactic among my young interlocutors that I see connected to 'distancing'; the attempt to present Mostar as just another city. Both phenomena represent ways of dealing with the war and its aftermath. In both cases, individuals disentangle their personal experience from (what is claimed to be) collective experience. Not only did my interlocutors distance their personal memories of war from that of their nation, but they also removed their (and their generation's)

⁴She not only shares this experience with others of her generation but also with other returnees who did not necessarily receive a warm welcome by those who had stayed. The latter saw themselves as defenders of the city (nation) and those who left as traitors. On the other side, those who stayed wished that they had left the city too, sparing themselves and their families the direct experience of war. The exclusion of those who fled the country during the war from the discourse of victimisation and suffering has become increasingly contested by the people in question, even if feelings of guilt coexist.

present life from the wider society by narrating their lives (at least at times) as if they were not affected in the same way by the aftermath of the war as the older population was.

In the spring of 2006 I was asked by an Austrian university professor to find a tour guide for a group of political science students from Vienna visiting Mostar on a study trip. I thought the students would benefit most from a tour covering both the east and west sides of the city. Armen, an elderly Bosniak man introduced in Chap. 4, who had grown up in Mostar and possessed seemingly infinite knowledge about its history was my first choice as tour guide for East Mostar. Darko, a young Mostarian, agreed to show the students West Mostar where he lived with his family. Back then, Darko was in his penultimate year at *Stara gimnazija*, the same grammar school Lejla also attended. I was happy about Darko's offer to help, especially as I hoped the relative small age difference between him and the students would make it easy to engage everyone in a post-tour conversation over lunch. Though I knew the sites we were visiting and had read and heard about them before, it was very interesting to see how Armen and Darko respectively presented their city to the foreign students.

It was not particularly surprising how much Armen's and Darko's tours differed. I knew (from conversations and a previous tour) that Armen's knowledge of Mostar's history was extensive, to say the least. Unsurprisingly, Darko did not have the same historical knowledge if for no other reason than his younger age. Still, his tour (after Armen's seemingly endless and detailed explanations) was, I suppose, refreshing for everyone. However, what struck me about Darko's guided tour was his effort to depoliticise all spheres of life that touched upon his own personal life. In order to discuss the discursive tactics inherent in Darko's narrative, I give a short account of the tour he gave us.

The first site Darko decided to show the students was the modern shopping mall at *Rondo*, the central roundabout in West Mostar. He proudly presented this piece of 'modernity' in his city that otherwise was still heavily marked by its destruction. Darko's tour soon revealed which places he thought to be presentable and which not; oftentimes these places did not correspond with the foreign students' ideas of places of interest. This was the case when the students said they wanted to visit the biggest Partisan memorial in the city which, ironically, is located on

the west side where it has survived so far, albeit in a heavily neglected state. Darko had not planned to show the memorial to the students. He thought of it as a dirty place where drug addicts hung out, so he decided to stay at the memorial's entry at the bottom of the hill until the students returned. Darko's strong dislike of this place, which made him refuse to even enter it, is most likely connected not only to the monument's present state of neglect but also to the fact that for him it no longer has a right to exist. In conversations with Croats who pursue a nationalist discourse, such as with professors at *Sveučilište u Mostaru* (the Croat-dominated University), I realised that the place is noticeably absent from discussions such that when I mentioned it I was likely to be asked which memorial I was talking about. Ironically, in such conversations the existence of the by far largest memorial site in all of Mostar (just opposite *Sveučilište*) was neglected or ignored.

A site that Darko was happy to show the students was the Catholic cathedral. On our way there he pointed to the street where he and his family live, proudly stating that the former HDZ leader lived in a flat in the same building. When we arrived at the cathedral, Darko spoke about the suppression of religion under Tito. He shared that while preparing this tour his mother had told him the cathedral's tower had not been allowed to be built any higher than the nearby Partisan memorial (which is located on a hill). This resulted in the church's decision to remove some earth by digging several metres into the ground on and around the site so that building the cathedral in this hollow would maintain the tower's originally planned height. In this explanation, the two sites—the Partisan memorial which he refused to visit and the cathedral that he decided to show the students—were finally put into relation to each other.

Besides this instance, this type of political-historical contextualisation was otherwise absent in Darko's tour, such as when he talked about the annual pilgrimage of young people from Mostar to Medjugorje. The Austrian students, all of whom had taken courses on Yugoslavia and the war in BiH, were well aware of the contested meaning of Medjugorje (see Chap. 2). I noticed their bewilderment when Darko discussed the pilgrimage in a highly apolitical way, stressing only the fun parts of it, like going out with peers before the pilgrimage, listening to music they liked, and so on without acknowledging any religious or political connotation.

At the end of the tour the Austrian students, quite obviously puzzled by the ‘depoliticised’ tour Darko had given, tried to get to the more ‘serious political matters’ in Mostar. In the question-and-answer session they persistently asked Darko about his experience of living in a divided city, of being taught in a reunited but still divided school, and so forth. Darko insisted, however, that his life was quite normal and did not differ greatly from any other young person’s life. His daily routine included going to school, returning home for lunch and doing his homework so that he could meet friends in one of the numerous cafés afterwards. He made an effort to explain the importance of cafés as places to socialise and the amount of time people spend there. He also said how easy it was for young people in BiH to get hold of alcohol and cigarettes, hinting at the many parties they had. He made clear that he did not support the national division of his school and that young people knew best how to break this division; secretly smoking in the school’s bathrooms is the best way to bring pupils from both curricula together and works much better than any of the ‘reconciliation programmes’ brought to them from the outside.⁵ When asked about the effects of war on Mostar, Darko tried to explain that the war had already been over for more than 10 years as if he hoped that the students would finally understand that Mostar had become a normal city.

Darko’s representation of Mostar certainly has to be understood in the context of its narration, in the encounter with foreigners. Since the war, almost all international news coverage on Mostar has concentrated on tensions between Bosniaks and Croats; this is also true of most international NGOs active in BiH, not to mention tourists and researchers who visit Mostar, sometimes only for short periods. The fact that Darko presented Mostar as a city just like any other city and his life just like any other teenager’s life is not only a reaction towards the judging eye of outsiders, but also serves as a way to protect his own life and to restore hope for the city to which his life is bound.

Considering these attributes ascribed to my interlocutors, normalising present-day Mostar can be seen as a discursive tactic that detaches the actor from the legacy of the war, in defence against the stigmatisation of

⁵ For a detailed discussion of this subject see Hromadžić (2015).

being trapped in the realm of the 'lost generation' but also in defence of one's own future. Haukanes (2013) encountered a similar phenomenon among Czech youth, who did not include the far-reaching transformations of their country's recent history and the 'biographical uncertainties' that came with it in their biographical narratives. In the case of Mostar's youth this is complemented by the act of distancing personal memories from the collective. While the latter represents an attempt to disentangle past experiences from that of the nation, the act of normalising present-day Mostar has a similar role for present experiences. I was supported in this interpretation by the observation that those who felt the consequences of war in their personal lives the most were likely to be those who skilfully avoided addressing their experience as related to the wider problems Mostar's society faces today. I encountered this vividly with Elvira, a 21-year-old woman whom I became friends with at the beginning of my fieldwork and whose life I followed for the three years I was based in BiH.

Elvira faced the difficulties of the city's division in her private life more than most others I knew. She had been in a relationship with a Bosniak man for a couple of years but had to keep it entirely secret since she was from a Croat family. Neither her friends nor her family were allowed to know about it as they would have greatly disapproved. Unlike her parents who avoided crossing to the Bosniak-dominated east side of the city, Elvira crossed sides almost every day because she studied at the Bosniak-dominated university. This choice was approved by her parents only because the Croat-dominated university did not offer the subject she had chosen. When asked about the experience of being a Croat student at the Bosniak-dominated university, she told me she had not encountered any problems, after a while adding that indeed nobody knew of her Croat origins as her first and last names are not clearly and exclusively identifiable as Croat. I was surprised she never complained about having to keep the issue about her Croat background as yet another secret.

Love relationships between young Bosniaks and Croats are rarely approved by parents. This is particularly difficult since all of my young interlocutors still lived at home. Sometimes it seems as if such relations are considered a betrayal not only of the family, but also of the nation. As a result, cross-national couples often find themselves forced to keep their relationship a secret. While some of the Post-Yugoslavs were open to cross-

national relationships, when it came to marriages they were sceptical in a similar way as their parents. They thought it would be too difficult in a cross-national marriage to agree upon how to raise the offspring, such as in terms of religion and knowing that children from cross-national marriages face particular hurdles in BiH. A teacher of ethics in Mostar, herself from and in a mixed marriage, told me in an interview that her high school pupils perceive religious identities as primordial. For them their religious and national identity was so intertwined that they did not think they had a free choice to change their religion. In a similar vein many of them did think of Mostar's division as a given and historically grounded.

When from time to time I went for coffee with Elvira and her fellow students in a café on the university campus, I understood how it was possible for her to keep her national identity out of conversations. Elvira and her friends talked about exams, professors, fellow students, fashion and similar topics, but avoided conversations about local politics. Their dissatisfaction with Mostar's present situation was expressed mainly through sharing their mutual dissatisfaction with the bad economic situation and bleak job prospects. Like others of her generation, Elvira would consider leaving Mostar if the right opportunity presented itself.⁶

It was only Elvira's Bosniak partner who, now and then, challenged her way of presenting Mostar's reality as removed from politics. Once in a coffee bar at the beginning of my stay in Mostar, Elvira, her boyfriend and I discussed in which parts of the city it would be good for me and my family to live. Elvira suggested West Mostar (where she lived) since it was greener than East Mostar. Her Bosniak boyfriend, however, found this statement provocative, adding that the east side used to be green as well but during the war people needed heating material so they had cut down most of the trees. I never felt quite comfortable challenging Elvira's depoliticised presentations in such a way and assumed that once

⁶ Several opinion polls in BiH have shown a high percentage (more than 70 %) of young people wanting to leave their country, especially for economic reasons. In my judgement this high percentage expresses the frustration experienced by youth due to grim job prospects and other difficulties they face. However, I believe that a much smaller number than those who declare their desire to leave the country would actually decide to move when given the chance. See, for example, UN Review of the World Programme of Action for Youth (2005). *Independent Evaluation of the National Youth Policy in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpaysubmissions/bosnia.pdf> [03.07.2015].

we knew each other better she would share her thoughts on such matters anyway. But I was wrong; all my subtle attempts to engage her in conversation about the political situation of her city failed despite the fact that we met frequently over a period of almost three years. By offering me only monosyllabic answers she clearly indicated her desire to change the topic and talk about more light-hearted things such as parties, shopping, holiday plans and so on. When once she passed by a photograph exhibition in the Bosniak-dominated university showing images of a heavily destroyed Mostar, I was sure she would be moved to share her thoughts about Mostar's recent past with me. However, she only said three words: 'That is horrible!'

As shown, the discursive tactics of those who experienced the war as children included strong elements of silencing and distancing the effects the war may have had on their lives. Similar observations were made by Kolind (2008) in Stolac, a town in Herzegovina, where young people also tended to avoid the war in conversations. While those belonging to older generations sometimes expressed the wish to forget about war atrocities that they themselves or their nation had experienced, the war and its aftermath crept into almost every longer conversation. This was particularly true for those who experienced great loss (of family members, property, social and economic status and so on) during the war and did not think that it had changed anything for the better. Instead, they narrated the war as a 'senseless historical drama', as Skultans (1997: 767) termed it in the case of Latvian victim narratives. Often, personal experiences were subordinated within the dominant national discourse of victimisation.

Though individuals tend to embed their personal memories into wider officially accepted narratives, one is also likely to encounter dissonance between stories of individual experience and their larger social and historical context. By analysing life stories of Israeli male veterans, Lomsky-Feder (2004) shows how her interlocutors narrated their lives as not affected by the war. Similarly to the Post-Yugoslavs they thereby separated their personal memories from wider societal experiences. But different to the Post-Yugoslavs, Lomsky-Feder's war veterans described their generation as traumatised, while excluding themselves from this experience. Lomsky-Feder traces this distancing back to the veterans' feelings of inferiority due to the fact that her interviewees did not take part in key battles. Not

being actively involved in the war due to their young age, my interlocutors may, like Lomsky-Feder's war veterans, feel that their personal war stories do not pass as 'true' stories of the war. But their distancing from the older generations' experiences may also be an act of self-protection, as suggested below.

Climo (2002) describes a similar phenomenon of distancing autobiographic from group memories in the case of WWII and suggests that it may be a conscious choice when people do not make a connection between their personal and social memories. This may occur when it feels too threatening to put oneself into the recognised historical context. So, by separating personal memories from collective memories, the person feels protected from the difficult collective experiences (Climo 2002: 126; see also Leydesdorff et al. 1999). This would suggest that past war events are so overwhelming and threatening that young Mostarians prefer to remove their personal stories from the wider social context. This avoidance or distancing may well be a constructive (rather than pathological) mechanism for children who experienced war (Jones 2004). Achugar and colleagues (2013) and Larkin (2010) come to similar conclusions in the context of the Uruguayan post-dictatorship period and the post-civil war period in Lebanon respectively. They show how young people distance themselves from the past in order to construct a positive self-identification (in the case of Uruguay) and in order to make room for reconciliation (in the case of Lebanon).

It is likely that both explanations outlined above are true in the case of the Post-Yugoslavs. They may not feel that their own war experiences count as full ones, not least because this is often suggested to them by older family members. On the other hand, distancing their personal war memories from those of older compatriots may provide a strategy to make room for one's future. For the young Post-Yugoslav generation, adopting a victim identity would not only mean having to acknowledge the effect the war had on their lives but would also lead them into having to adopt a passive position. Discursive tactics of distancing and normalising are then utilised in order to cope with the legacy of the war and as a defence against stigmatisation by the older generations as well as to create room for hope for the city to which the Post-Yugoslavs' lives are inextricably bound (see Palmberger *forthcoming*). This dynamic is likely to be connected

to the Post-Yugoslavs' strong orientation towards the present and the future, which also becomes visible in their narratives, which are less past-oriented than those of the older generations (see Neyzi 2004). But the relative silence of war experiences may also be connected to the fact that the Post-Yugoslavs have not yet found their meta-narrative. Silence, as Connerton (2011) rightly reminds us, 'is not a unitary phenomenon; there are, rather, a plurality of silences' (2011: 53), which seems also to be the case here.

Sabina: Facing Conflicting Memories of Yugoslavia

Having attended primarily to the war and post-war periods, I now turn to some observations and insights into the way my young interlocutors narrated Yugoslavia. This will open up a discussion about the way the Post-Yugoslavs give meaning to the experiences of the older generations and about the transmission as well as transformation of (collective) memory. Yugoslavia is not a central topic in everyday conversations among the youngest generation as it is among the older generations who often speak of life in Mostar at the time of Yugoslavia as 'normal' compared with the present situation. With the Post-Yugoslavs, I often had to take the initiative in triggering conversations on Yugoslavia.

Unlike the memories of the 1990s war discussed above, memories of Yugoslavia among the Post-Yugoslavs are to a very limited extent only personal memories. Most things they know of Yugoslavia were passed on to them by older family members. Besides personal transmission, the Post-Yugoslavs also gain information about this period in school and through the media. Narratives of Yugoslavia among this generation differ as they do among the other generations. Nevertheless, something distinguishes the Post-Yugoslavs' Yugoslavia narratives. Those who have no or very limited memories of Yugoslavia and mainly refer to experiences shared by their parents express less emotion towards the period. Regardless of whether they condemn Yugoslavia or have positive feelings for it, they do so less vehemently, less emotionally than the First and the Last Yugoslavs.

Although I examine the way Yugoslavia is narrated among this generation by analysing Sabina's narrative, this does not mean that her narrative is representative of her entire generation. Instead, I focus on her narrative because it poses important questions crucial to this discussion.

Sabina, an energetic and communicative young woman in her early 20s, grew up in a town about 200 kilometres from Mostar. By the time I met her, she had been living in Mostar for more than three years already. She fell in love with the city right from the beginning. After spending the war years together with her little sister at her aunt's place in Zagreb (the rest of her family remained in their hometown and her father joined the HVO), she returned to her comparatively small hometown. Later on, it was a relief for her to move to Mostar for her studies at *Sveučilište* because Mostar offers not only a beautiful Old Town but also a vibrant student life, with plenty of cafés, pubs and parties. Already during the first days after her arrival in Mostar, she was desperate to see the Old Bridge. All her colleagues warned her not to go to the Old Town, saying she would put herself in danger if she did not take their advice seriously. But she did not pay attention to them and, as she had expected, nothing untoward happened to her.

Sabina is aware that nobody can tell the difference between a Bosniak and a Croat just from appearance alone. They could identify her from her accent (mainly because she spent a long time in Zagreb) but no one in the Old Town treated her offensively. Today, she frequently crosses the *Bulevar* (the main-street before the war and frontline during the war), especially because of her involvement in one of the youth NGOs situated on the east side. Through her activities at the NGO she met a young Bosniak with whom she fell in love. Sabina is aware that if her parents find out about the relationship they would strongly disapprove.

Sabina is very aware of her national background. She also shows an interest in learning more about it by studying Croat language and literature. Catholicism plays a central part in her life as well. Nevertheless, her strong national awareness does not prevent her from believing that Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs can live together in one city in the same state. She always stresses the fact that Bosnians of all national background share a lot of local customs and attitudes, so what they share is at least as strong as what sets them apart. Sabina maintains a peculiar mixture of sympathy

and antipathy towards Yugoslavia. From her parents she heard many negative stories about the time of Yugoslavia. She was taught, for example, that her paternal grandfather was killed by the communists and that legal action was taken against her mother for using the Croat language (instead of Serbo-Croatian) at her workplace.

In conversations with Sabina (as well as with others), I observed that when she referred to memories of a time she had not experienced she made clear that what she recalls is an account she was told by an older family member. When asked about her memories of Yugoslavia, she characteristically replied: 'I don't remember anything, only some things, I remember what my parents told me.' In this, Sabina not only makes explicit the fact that what she remembers are the memories of her parents and not her own; she also makes clear that the way a political period is presented depends on a person's experience of it. She explains that her father and mother hold different points of views regarding pre-war BiH because of their differing personal experiences. Her paternal grandfather was murdered under Tito's period of rule, but all of her mother's close kin survived. She reasons that this is why her father has much worse feelings about this period and never stops cursing Tito, elaborating:

My family went through a lot of bad things, especially my father because they killed his father. He doesn't like to talk about it but he thinks that they are all evil people; that nobody can justify what they did. My mother on the other hand is milder about it, she didn't so much... she didn't go through a lot of bad things. I, for example, I don't have any bad memories. I don't know, there is just what I was told and what I found out, but life has to go on.

When Sabina told me the story of her grandfather's execution she did not express the anger her father had felt. And it became obvious that she gave a different meaning to her father's memories. Frequently, memories of a time they have not experienced themselves acquire a touch of unreality when recalled by young Mostarians. Such stories are somewhat absurd to them, exotic and sometimes, even amusing. Therefore it might be more accurate to talk about 'recalling' than 'remembering', with the latter including a heightened emotional component. When Sabina told me the story of her grandfather she eventually even started giggling:

When was your grandfather killed?

Killed? 1979.

And how was he killed?

They suffocated him. They suffocated him close to his home, two metres away, but my father shouldn't know that they killed him, no. He died, they said. They didn't kill him, he died. That was it. [Martina starts giggling] But I'm laughing.

Other Post-Yugoslavs I interviewed also admitted their parents had a certain degree of authority to speak of history, but at the same time the children audited what they were told by their parents by putting it into their own context. Despite the fact that Sabina was a small child when the war broke out, she still has personal memories of life before the war. Her narratives are all about good *komsiluk* which the children as well as their parents enjoyed:

I remember we lived at my grandfather's, my mother's father. Croats lived there, Serbs were there, across from them Croats too, and upstairs Muslims, one mixed family of a Serb woman and a Muslim. They were all married couples of similar age to my parents and they all had kids. We played and hung out together. My parents were drinking coffee with our Serb neighbours every day, and they joined us at Christmas.

Did you know who belonged to which group?

Yes, I knew pretty early who was who. Yes I knew, I knew we were different. I understood that. But not all kids did. For example, I spoke with my friend Božica, she is Croat too, she didn't understand it, but I did.

How did you know, did your parents tell you or did you know it from their names?

Yes, I asked, I went to church on Sundays and I asked why Jovica was not coming with us? Jovica went to another church. In fact Jovica didn't go to church at all. This way I found out. Or for example one of my friends, Alma, came to my place for my birthday party and afterwards her mother called my mother in anger, because we had juice, cake, hats, smoked ham, cheese. In fact my mother asked Amela if she was allowed to eat that. She said yes. She ate smoked pork. It was all settled with a talk. And I was asking why Amela was not allowed to eat smoked ham when it was so tasty.

From the above excerpts we can clearly see that Sabina's personal memories differ starkly from those of her parents'. Unlike her parents' more

straightforward memories, she is confronted with conflicting memories, especially between her father's sad memories and her own cheerful personal ones. When asked about her explanation of how war was possible, considering the good neighbourliness she remembers, she reached the following conclusion:

I think that most people were just pretending to have good friends and if one day that friend needed help...they wouldn't help, they would act against him.

But was that also the case for kids?

No, friendship for kids was true friendship, for sure!

Interestingly, Sabina seems not too bothered by the contradicting narratives between her father and herself. Not before I asked her to do so did she give an explanation for the discrepancies. During my research I realised that many of my youngest interlocutors were confronted with diverse and divergent stories about Yugoslavia because in Mostar it is likely to find in the same family members with different political and religious loyalties.

Although Sabina was certainly influenced by her parents' perception of Tito, she actually grew up at her maternal grandmother's house. It is most likely that Sabina owes to this grandmother, to whom she feels closest in her family, the positive picture she also maintains of Yugoslavia. Sometimes I even sensed something akin to nostalgia for Yugoslavia in Sabina, for example, when she recalls childhood memories like her excitement at becoming one of Tito's *Pioniri* (Pioneers).⁷ But nostalgia for her has a somewhat different quality from that displayed by older Mostarians characterised in previous chapters. Even when Sabina recalled positive memories of Yugoslavia, I never encountered the same types of strong emotional ties expressed by older generations. It is also important to bear in mind that the Yugoslavia Sabina grew up in was already in decline, a rather different Yugoslavia than that experienced by her parents.

⁷ For a discussion on the Yugoslav Pioneer Organisation and its role in the Yugoslav socialist project, see Erdei (2004).

More often than simply being directed towards the past, Sabina's type of Yugo-nostalgia is an expression of her political views and is used to criticise the present political situation. Sabina strongly believes that BiH should be a multinational place. She herself feels a double identity, as a Croat and as a Bosnian. Her Croat identity is more private/family-based, where religion and religious holidays play a considerable role. Her Bosnian identity links her with all her other compatriots, be they Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox or atheist. In Sabina's case nostalgia for Yugoslavia is actually a tool for overcoming the troubled relationship between Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs in her country; she uses memories of Yugoslavia and the good coexistence as a 'guiding star' for the future. She also employs Yugo-nostalgia in order to find a basis of communication with those of Bosniak background. One day, Sabina and another friend of mine, Minela (see Chap. 5) met at my home. It was their first meeting, and I could feel their mutual uneasiness. It was the time of *Ramazán* and Minela was fasting, but Sabina was not aware of this, so was surprised to hear that Minela did not want to join us for coffee and cake. After a while they found a subject that gave them the way out of this somewhat tense situation: their pre-war memories. They remembered the *Pioniri*, the sweets they liked back then and many other things connected to their childhoods in Yugoslavia. It was a safe discourse for them to follow as it showed their mutual willingness to communicate, to get to know each other without fear of being caught up in some political discussion related to the war or the post-war politics of their country (see Palmberger 2013).

For Sabina, the act of remembering Yugoslavia in a nostalgic way is less oriented towards the past than is the case with the many older compatriots introduced in previous chapters; instead she adopts Yugo-nostalgia in order to envision a future for Mostar specifically and for BiH as a whole. Although Yugo-nostalgia is not always employed to counter the nationalist discourse (as seen in Chap. 5), it brings with it not only the potential for criticising the present situation but also provides an orientation towards the future. Sabina feels free to do so because of her comparatively loose emotional tie with Yugoslavia. Yugo-nostalgia for her does not have the same gravity as for her older compatriots. This gives her the possibility to playfully adopt and adapt the parts of Yugoslavia she believes can contribute to a better future.

As I have shown in the cases of Minela and Sabina, positive (often nostalgic) memories of pre-war times even bear an integrative potential. In sharing positive anecdotes of Yugoslavia (most often with others of the same generation), individuals with different national backgrounds find an initial common ground that is less controversial than topics related to the war or the present situation. The concentration on pre-war memories also includes a strategic silence of more divisive topics, such as the war. The act of silencing memories of war in order to re-establish cross-national relationships has been described by several authors, working in diverse regions, as conducive for post-war coexistence (Argenti-Pillen 2003; Cole 2001; Eastmond and Mannergren Selimovic 2012; Hayden 2009; Skaar et al. 2005; Stefansson 2010). By drawing close attention to strategic silences, the 'ethics of memory' is questioned that emerged at the end of the twentieth century and in which remembering is presented as a virtue and forgetting as a failure (Connerton 2011: 33). Such ethnographic insights may also be valuable for other post-war societies that are equally divided along ethno-national lines, particularly if a relatively peaceful past preceded the violence.⁸

Transmission of Memories: Between Persistence and Change

Sabina's story touches on one central topic of research connected to memory, the transmission of (collective) memory, which at this point deserves a more lengthy discussion. In the tradition of Durkheim⁹ and Halbwachs, anthropologists have paid special attention to the phenomenon of the transmission of memories downwards through generations, from old to young, stressing the way that collective identity is main-

⁸ Even in cases, such as that of Northern Ireland, whose violent past stretches back centuries, there have been peaceful periods in between the violence that are easily overlooked (Barton and McCully 2003). To shift the focus from violence and conflict between national groups to 'conviviality' (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014) and to elements of a 'shared identity' helps to re-establish post-conflict trust and subsequently encourage more cross-national engagement (see Dembinska 2010; MacDonald 2013).

⁹ Durkheim's idea of society as an organism, held together by shared social ideas or the *conscience collective*, greatly influenced Halbwachs' work, see Durkheim 2001 [1912].

tained. Cornelia Sorabji (2006) in her article, 'Managing memories in post-war Sarajevo', engages in a pioneering endeavour by instead focusing special attention on memory as a *personal* experience. Her data reveal that people in BiH are not less conscious of what or what not to pass on to the next generation than anthropologists who study this process. The same is true for those to whom these memories are passed on. In contrast to Cappelletto (2003) who suggests there is no difference between autobiographical memory and historical accounts of WWII massacres in the Tuscan village she studied, Sorabji highlights differences she encountered among accounts of WWII massacres in a BiH village. Sorabji tells of a father who had lost his entire family in a massacre committed by Chetniks and who, more than 60 years later, still mistrusts all Serbs. He has passed on his memories of this traumatic event his son from a second marriage. But even if his son can recall in detail these memories passed on from his father, the meaning ascribed to the memories by the two men should not be viewed as identical:

While Tarik's son may have been able to imagine (or 'recall') the past events richly and without great deviation from factual accuracy, his imaginings or recollections would also have been partially constructed from other images and ideas which formed part of his experience, and not of Tarik's. (Sorabji 2006: 13)

Sorabji's observations correlate with mine. Sorabji's informant Tarik and my informant Sabina were both told traumatic memories by their respective fathers, which they are able to recall. But their accurate recollections do not mean they share the same emotions as their fathers. Rather than unconsciously adopting their fathers' memories (in which case they could be called 'ingrained memories'), Tarik and Sabina both put what they were told within the context of what their fathers, the narrators, had experienced.

Wertsch (2002) suggests differentiating between 'mastery' and 'appropriation' when analysing the reception of historical narratives. 'Just because someone is exposed to a cultural tool—and just because she has mastered it—does not guarantee that she has appropriated it as an identity resource' (Wertsch 2002: 120). When applying this distinction

in analysing Sabina's narrative, there are good reasons to speak of mastery rather than of appropriation because while she recalls her father's memories they do not serve as vital identity resources for her. When narrating the past my interlocutors, rather than unconsciously taking over the memories of older family members, were aware of the fact that the memories they shared with me were not their own (not least because the emotional tie was often missing) and thus sought to contextualise them vis-à-vis their own personal experiences.

Understanding the transmission of (traumatic) pasts as a communicative practice 'highlights the tension between the determinism of the inherited tradition and beliefs embodied in discourses, in relation to the creative action of individual meaning-making agency' (Achugar et al. 2013). This means that memories are not directly transmitted to younger generations but are rather re-narrated by the latter (Welzer 2010). In a similar vein, Pickering and Keightley (2013) stress the importance of the imagination in the process of transmission. It enables a move beyond straightforward bringing of the past into the present since 'imagination exceeds lived experience insofar as it can make something qualitatively new through recombining ideas, objects, practices and experiences' (Pickering and Keightley 2013: 122). Sabina's case shows very well how transferred memories are scrutinised, contextualised and selectively adopted to accommodate personal worldviews. 'Such a reformatting of heard and narrated stories follows familial loyalty on the one hand and generational and individual needs for meaning on the other' (Welzer 2010: 6). This has become visible in the case of Sabina, whose re-narration was guided by loyalty to her grandfather and by generational and personal meaning making.

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