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Authentic conflicts in post-Yugoslavia: A model of a post-war generation's communication system

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Abstract: The Yugoslav wars of secession in the 1990s left traces of the past among the societies living in the successor states. Those traces can be found within the collective memory of these societies, and are transmitted through various communication channels to the next generation. Today, this post-war and post-Yugoslav generation, born during or shortly after the violent conflicts, are young adults dealing with the recent past. Based on findings from life-story interviews that are examined and interpreted using the approach of sequence analysis, I elaborated a model of the transregional post-Yugoslavs' communication system regarding the wars. I identified three communication practices on war-related topics by actively reflecting on the "Other," which I present in this paper. During their adolescent years, post-Yugoslavs created their own narratives, and thus their own, authentic communication strategies in response to the "invisible war," which still continues today, according to the post-Yugoslav generation.

Keywords: life-story interviews, post-war generation, communication practices, authentic communication, post-Yugoslav memory

1 Introduction

The traces left on post-war generations after a violent conflict have been researched exhaustively within historical, social, psychological, and cultural studies, but not to such a great extent in communication science (Jovanović and Bermúdez, 2021, pp. 4–5). Yet, how the partly traumatized post-war generation deals with a difficult past is first and foremost a matter of communication, as Welzer (2010) argues. He highlights the fact that the past and history as a "subject of a communicative practice" not only serve as a transmitting modus of knowledge, but also create re-narrations based on the inhabited information as well as on "new experiences

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and needs, and especially under conditions of new frames of meaning from the present" (p. 15). Hence the past is always perceived and narrated differently from one generation to the next, and communicating about it has an important social function that provides orientation in present times on an intragenerational level.

Following Welzer's arguments, the process of dealing with, and, in particular, communicating about, the history of conflicts and wars has a history itself, especially for the persons affected, and for subsequent generations. In my analysis, I focus on how the post-war generation in the successor states of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia manages the inhabited conflict. Consequently, I examine their communication practices, which, as part of their everyday practices, constitute relationships, form (collective) identities (Davis, 2015, p. 24), and create social realities (Craig, 2018, p. 294). The generation that experienced the Yugoslav wars of secession as small children, or who were born during and shortly after these times of armed conflict, challenged the predominant deadlock of not talking about the recent past by implementing a communication system that enabled practicing critical reflection. I refer to this generation as the post-Yugoslav generation in order to highlight their common territorial as well as cultural heritage. Ramet (2013) calls it a "*sense* of shared history" (p. 872).

This history counts three Yugoslavias: The first Yugoslavia was established in 1918, with the idea of uniting all South Slavs (Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) in one state. It was marked by internal struggles between the constituting nations, resulting in political discontentment and dysfunctional institutions. The second Yugoslavia emerged in 1945 after World War II, with Tito as leader of the Socialist Federal Republic, whose leadership suppressed ethnic belonging to strengthen a common national identity. The third "rump" Yugoslavia was established in 1992, with the remaining parts of Serbia, Kosovo, and Montenegro. Ramet (2009) concludes that "to reflect on the meaning of Yugoslav history leads one in the direction of reflections on the failure of state-building three times over and on the descent into the most sanguinary European war since the end of World War II" (p. 147).

These Yugoslav wars of secession in the 1990s were accompanied by ethnic cleansing: Over 80 % of non-Serbs were forced out of Republika Srpska during the Bosnian War. In 1995, over 150,000 Serbs were expelled from Croatia's Krajina region, and over 800,000 people fled from Kosovo. Now, the post-Yugoslav generation lives in regions that "have changed their ethnic structure substantially and, perhaps, permanently" (Calic, 2020, p. 520) and in contexts of ethnonationalism and ethno-political structures, related to historical revisionism (Dević, 2021).

My data collection process for analyzing the post-Yugoslav generation consists of life-story interviews, which were conducted during several field trips to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia. Together with my colleagues and in the broader context of a transdisciplinary research project, a selection of

life-story interviews was interpreted using the method of sequence and biographical analysis, and the results are presented in this paper.

Based on the results from the sequence analysis, I elaborated a model of the transregional post-Yugoslavs' communication system regarding the wars. The attribute "transregional" highlights the fact that the model applies to all countries involved in the research, which today are independent states in Southeast Europe. Additionally, their awareness of the inability of their parents, grandparents, or of the older generation to talk about war was implemented in the system, as was their conscious decision to face the difficulties and potentially harmful responses of the "Others" and to share responsibilities. The model is thus considered an authentic way to communicate about the war and can be seen as a first step towards reconciliation.

Theoretical frame: Post-Yugoslavs' authentic communication

Authenticity "requires responsibility in the face of the 'Other', the act [...] is open to communication and critique by the 'Other,'" argues Bronner (2020, p. 60). As the "Other" is a crucial element in Bronner's approach, it requires further theoretical attention. Since Said's (1978, pp. 10–11) work *Orientalism*, in which he depicts the discursively created notions and images of the Orient from a hegemonial Western perspective, the process of othering was further developed. Within intercultural communication studies, it explains the subordination of groups by charging them with negative characteristics; through othering, the own group becomes more exclusive (Holliday et al., 2021). Thus, it is embedded in everyday communication practices on an individual and on a collective level.

Todorova (2009) elaborated how the West discursively established a hegemonial relationship towards the Balkans through perpetuating the notion of a semi-Oriental region, not fully European, thus still different from it, but with a bridging function. Balkanization or Orientalization, understood as a process of othering, is not oriented towards geographical positions but is rather a cultural marker, such as ethnicity or historical legacies.

History creates the context in which individuals or groups make their inauthentic or authentic decisions, such as taking responsibility for their own acts, Bronner explains. History can thus stimulate the process of reflecting and taking into consideration the "Other." In other words: Inauthenticity is a way to unconsciously accept situations that are only structured by the "Other." Authenticity "does not guarantee the correct judgment or action. But it seeks the translation of potentiality into actuality," as Bronner (2020, p. 107) pointed out. And just like the German post-war generation, young adults in former Yugoslavia translated their

communication needs, as an outcome of shared experiences and expectations, into a new remembrance culture of recent history. "Above all, however, authenticity is entangled with the attempt to grasp how one has become what one is and what one wishes to be" (Bronner, 2020, p. 110), which was certainly also a driving force for our interviewees to share their life story with us.

The generation born during or shortly after the Yugoslav wars of secession consists of today's young adults dealing with the recent past. These wars left lasting marks of the past on the societies living in the successor states, as the literature will highlight. It is important to contextualize a generation within the political system in which it grew up and to consider the possibilities, privileges, and options that were either available or nonexistent (Gries, 2008, pp. 247–248). According to the theories about social generations, they share spaces of experience, such as growing up in a (post-)war and post-socialist society. Within this space, they also share expectations, such as living a decent life despite economic challenges, or travelling despite visa restrictions. Because of these common experiences and expectations, they feel connected by similar political, social, and cultural challenges; they respond to them in a similar way, and they are able to recognize each other (Gries, 2008; Jureit, 2017). These similar responses are understood as intragenerational communication practices, while intergenerational transmissions are passed on from one generation to the next (Koleva, 2009).

Scholars use the term "post-Yugoslav" to show transregional interrelations, because it describes a "certain culture, certain types of experiences and the whole of certain geography and history" (Matijević, 2016, p. 108). Consequently, the post-Yugoslav generation, who are dealing with the past in their everyday situations, share not only intragenerational but also transregional communication practices. No matter which successor state they grew up and live in, they all join the discourse with a high degree of authenticity, and the model of the post-Yugoslav generation's communication system shows the different modes that the members of this generation pursue, which are addressed to a heterogeneous audience. Moreover, they share the competing collective memories of three Yugoslavias as well as of the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman legacy.

This legacy, stemming from the shared past, transmitted to the post-Yugoslav present, is the starting point for many studies analyzing the younger generation, regardless of the successor state in which they live. However, since the wars in the 1990s, the agreement over common interpretations of past events was broken and the cultural Yugoslav memory openly questioned and disputed (Kirn, 2022).

In Assmann's concept of memory, a cultural memory is institutionalized, preserved, passed on for many generations, and could be embedded in narratives. These narratives have the function of integrating people, they can create and organize reality and influence our way of thinking and our actions (Assmann, 2011). The

antifascist narrative in Serbia, according to which Tito's Partisans are perceived to have forced people into communist occupation, was an act of disintegrating the cultural memory and strengthening ethno-national thinking (Kirn, 2022).

Ethno-national thinking and actions are part of the communicative memory, which is brought to the fore in this paper. While the cultural memory is disembodied, the communicative memory grows in everyday communication and refers to the recent past. And while the expression of the cultural memory is fixed by elites, the "participation of a group in communicative memory is diffuse. Some people know more, some less, [...] there are no specialists [...] The knowledge communicated in everyday interaction has been acquired by the participants along with language and social competence" (Assmann, 2011, p. 19).

Considering the post-Yugoslav generation, growing up in Serbia was a little different than in Bosnia and Herzegovina, because within the territory of the rump Yugoslav state, there were no front lines until 1998. The military attack that Serbia suffered was the NATO bombing in 1999, which ended the Kosovo War and released the disputed region from the Republic. Incidentally, the Kosovo case has still not been settled to this day (Vulović, 2023).

In summary, research that uses generation as a category of analysis enables the discovery of imagined communities (Anderson, 2006) within a transregional context and spaces as well as a "fragmented memory landscape" with competing claims (Moll, 2013). It reveals intragenerational transmissions of participating in the communicative memory as well as questioning and facing the cultural memory—both in an authentic way—in communication practices.

2 Literature review

The key event that initiated most research about post-war generations is World War II, which is mirrored in the large number of studies from various disciplines (Reulecke, 2005, pp. 77–78). Then, ten years ago, the "third post-war generation" of World War II was defined and studied by a team of communication scientists. Their research interest was this generation's engagement with the Holocaust. While today's research on "Holocaust memory" focuses on its digital dimensions in the Social Web (Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Divon, 2022), their findings at that time highlighted the importance of cinematic material and TV documentaries in order to keep the memory alive as the number of contemporary witnesses decreases (Kopf-Beck et al., 2013).

This is not the case with the Yugoslav wars of secession that occurred in the 1990s. Some political positions are still held by people today who witnessed and

even took an active part in the wars. The soldiers who fought in the wars are the fathers of our interviewees. Since the 2010s, researchers from various social sciences have dealt with, and described, a post-Yugoslav present and its post-war generation.

Drnovšek Zorko (2020, p. 1323) examines narratives of rupture within the younger generation living in diaspora communities in Great Britain. She explains how the markers "before" and "after" the wars ("pre" and "post") influence their intragenerational narratives, especially in the context of migration. British-born or British-raised children with a Yugoslavian background have created their own "postness" narratives drawn from the circumstances of belonging to the diaspora. Nevertheless, they built them upon their parents' experience of uncertainty. They re-framed the narrative of rupture (flight, war, ethnic conflict) and transformed it into "hopeful narratives of future uncertainty" (Drnovšek Zorko, 2020, p. 1334), meaning that uncertainty about future prospects does not necessarily have negative consequences. Svob et al. (2016) also analyzed the intergenerational transmission of historical memories of the wars within the younger generation. Like Drnovšek Zorko, the authors refer to young people who were children during or in the aftermath of the wars as the "second generation." Svob et al. collected data on people born between 1995 and 1998 in Croatia; the research question was whether the memories of their parents who lived through a war have an impact on them today. Svob et al. conclude that war-related memories have a higher impact on members of the younger generation whose parents lived in cities and towns that were directly involved in the armed conflict or who were witnesses of ethnic cleansing, which indicates that war traumas have been transmitted. Nonetheless, all members of the post-war generation suffer from the failure to process the recent past on the official, public, and private levels.

Not only do they struggle with transmitted war narratives that are neither organized nor explained by official politics, but they have also grown up in nationalistic contexts and, in some cases, hostile surroundings. This is the opinion of the older generations, as the outcome of Palmberger's (2016) research shows. She carried out her research in Bosnia and Herzegovina and refers to the last generation examined as "the post-Yugoslavs," because of their lack of experiences in pre-war Yugoslavia. This generation consider themselves a "we" group, as her findings show. Their members are convinced that they can break with transmitted conflicts between ethnic parties, but their parents and grandparents cannot.

The latest study about the post-war generation was published in 2021 by Jovanović and Bermúdez, who conducted in-depth interviews with young people from Serbia. Although the territory that today is Serbia was turned into a battlefield by the international community in 1999, at the end of the wars, its war narratives are complex, starting with Kosovo. The political and military fight with the Croatian state

over Krajina is another example, along with Serbia's involvement in the Bosnian War by supporting Republika Srpska. Hence, the research team asked about historical narratives that circulate among the post-war generation in Serbia, who did not have first-hand experiences from the 1990s, and how they understand the meaning of these. They detected a high degree of self-victimization among them, complemented by narratives about disregarding violence committed by their militaries and delegitimizing other ethnic communities. These results do not offer hopeful prospects for the future. In particular, the knowledge about Kosovo seems influenced by nationalistic propaganda, but the results also underline a fact that other studies have shown: a lack of knowledge among younger generations in the successor states of Yugoslavia regarding the history of the wars in the 1990s. Nevertheless, Jovanović and Bermúdez (2021) underline that only a "few studies focus specifically on young people's knowledge and attitudes" (p. 4) about the recent past in post-Yugoslavia, even though the successor states are not considered to be reconciled.

Another example is the study by Obradović (2016). She studied two generations in Serbia to learn about their collective memory of the wars. She discovered that communicating about the wars opens up an internal conflict; they see the wars as a "burden" but, at the same time, as the "glue of a nation" (p. 15). In particular the younger generation, born during or after the wars, generated a "we" identity in the focus groups when talking about the recent past. Similarly to Svob et al., Obradović concluded that the younger generation is able to look towards the future, despite having the common sense to not forget what happened. She sees a potential for reconciliation within the younger generation if their voices are treated seriously, which is the starting point of this paper.

Methodological steps: Post-Yugoslavs' life stories

Authenticity is defined as a conscious act in reference to another subject and as critical reflection (Bronner, 2020, p. 106); it is thus placed at the center of the analysis of the life-story interviews with fifteen young adults from post-Yugoslavia.

Talking about the wars and about the "Others" or the former enemy is a highly sensitive topic in communication research. Hence, the life-story interviews needed to take into account the interviewees' needs, also in terms of time needed to tell their story, breaks, and aftercare. As a result, the interviews differentiated in length, structure, and topics, although all of them contained biographical narrations, especially childhood experiences. For analyzing these interviews, I decided to start with a small sample of interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the terms used, biographical milestones, and explanatory patterns towards war-related topics. With the support of my colleagues, I supervised three sequence analysis sessions. After-

wards, the findings were reconnected to twelve other interviews according to the methodological framework of life-course analysis.

In sum, a total of fifteen life-story interviews were selected for this paper out of sixty interviews conducted during the field trips. I excluded the semi-structured interviews we had conducted and, while preserving regional balance, I chose the life-stories of interviewees with whom our team had built up the closest relationships. These contained the most intense debate about the wars as a biographical cornerstone. My corpus consists of six interviews from Bosnia and Herzegovina, five from Serbia, three from Kosovo, and one from Montenegro.

Though generation is understood "as a category of collective self-description of processing experience," the life-story interview approach was the most suitable method for the topic of dealing with the past and reconciliation (Jureit, 2017). Between 2016 and 2020, a research team, including myself, assembled data on numerous field trips, interviewing young adults in former Yugoslavia who were born in the mid and late 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, focusing on this generation's recent history and the impact it has had on them. In total, we conducted over sixty interviews, some of them in English and others in the local languages of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. Montenegro. Generally, we used a stimulus of asking about their life in their hometown (Asboth and Griesbeck, 2024). All quotations from members of the post-Yugoslav generation in this paper are from the corpus that was collected during these field trips and have been anonymized.

To interpret the life-story interviews, I conducted a sequence analysis based on Froschauer and Lueger (2003). They rely strongly on the theories of the founder of this methodological approach, Ulrich Oevermann, and suggest that the person who interprets the sequence of the interview should not know about the content beforehand. Therefore, I organized three interpretation sessions and asked my two colleagues to prepare small text segments from life-story interviews of their choice. We then conducted a "line-by-line analysis of textual microstructures of narrative units [...] to better understand difficult experiences and argumentative commentaries by which the interviewees explain or legitimize their assessments" (Hollstein, 2019, p. 6).

We tried to extract the implicit knowledge about war-related topics that—partly unconsciously—gives meaning to post-Yugoslavs and organizes the way they communicate about their (countries') history. In the sessions, we analyzed the life stories of Lejla, Tarik, and Dino, because each of us had a special connection to one of these life stories. These sessions were organized like a workshop, in which we discussed extensively the chosen sequences and the biographical impact they showed (Sieder, 1999, p. 204). We created several interpretations out of one sequence.

The sequence analysis helped me "to decipher in particular the text's latent structures of meaning" and to reconstruct collective action orientations, which are

central aims of hermeneutic methods (Rosenthal, 2004, p. 55; see also Hollstein, 2019). By exposing the ways in which a post-Yugoslav generation communicates about the recent wars (Craig, 2006, p. 39) and the role "their" and "Other" communities play, I gained several formulating interpretations that needed to be tested and structured by the next steps.

The results of the exhaustively interpreted sequences were reflected on, and compared to, twelve other interviews that had been selected based on the interview quality as well as regional, age, and gender balance. Therefore, I scrutinized the twelve transcripts along autobiographical (childhood) narrations and analyzed if and how similar topics from the other three interviews were framed and elaborated. Are there similar explanatory patterns towards war-related topics? It emerged during the sequence analysis that the histories of the successor states were intermingled with the analyzed biographies and vice versa (Sieder, 1999, p. 196). Within this step, I detected several elements of consensus that the post-Yugoslavs form as an intragenerational response to the past, which I used to elaborate a model of how they organize their communication practices about the recent wars and the history of their new country.

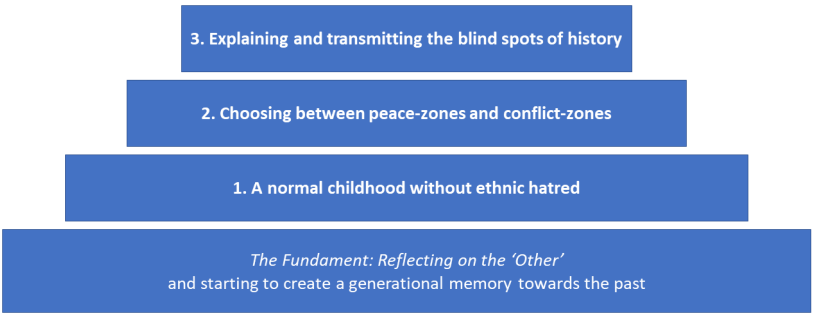

Figure 1: Model of a post-war generation's communication system.

The foundation of the model: Reflecting on the "Other"

The process of "Othering," which is also an anthropological need within societies, has a huge impact on the post-Yugoslav generation. First, the visibility that we, as Austrian researchers, created for the post-Yugoslav generation was much appreciated by them. All the interviewees were eager to talk to us and shared their personal and even intimate experiences with us. In fact, they wanted us to understand what it is like to live in a post-war country with an unresolved history.

Second, and regarding the Western notion of the ancient hatreds between ethnic groups in Yugoslavia, the analysis of the life stories gave rise to an important question: At which life stage did the post-Yugoslav generation become aware of the "Others"? When and how did they realize that they live in a country with majorities and minorities, and that an armed conflict occurred between those groups?

It is highly probable that young adults recognized the different communities in their neighborhood or their country as "Others" in their teenage years or during adolescence (Palmberger, 2016, p. 207), and this is when the kaleidoscope of an unresolved past surfaced. One young woman, who was born in 1994 and grew up in Pristina, started to think about her childhood in a different way during her adolescent years, when she became aware of the two different communities living in her city: "Kindergarten […] I remember we had only this small part, like a park, for us. And the other side was like a big, beautiful garden for the Serbs" (Sara, born in 1994 in Pristina). Sara said she knows now why they were not allowed to play in what looked to her the bigger and more beautiful part of the park. By the time of the interview, she was 22 years old and still puzzling over her childhood memories and the tangled interrelations to the Serbian community.

"Are the Serbs the worst?", Radenka was thinking when she followed the news in her adolescent years. When she started her studies and moved from a Serbian town to the capital city, she fought against the notion that Serbs were responsible for the wars. In doing so, she denied that Srebrenica was a genocide, in accordance with the far-right communicative memory in her country (Ristić, 2023). However, after only one year of university, many discussions and new encounters, she "updated" her knowledge and started advocating a commemoration event for Srebrenica in Belgrade. She argues that her "conservative" childhood surrounding made it difficult to take on different perspectives, which is why her relationship with her father has been troubled since she became involved in reconciliation activities (Radenka, born in 1992 in Čačak). Being framed as someone from the other side is the constant reference to the different nationalities and ethnic groups that facilitates the misconstrued cultural memory (Moll, 2013), which weighs heavily on the post-Yugoslav generation.

Communication practice 1: A normal childhood without ethnic hatred

Our respondents spent their childhood and, in some cases, their adolescence without any contact with the "Others," which means they were socialized in a mono-ethnic community. They said that, for a long time, they did not realize the labels "Orthodox Serb," "Catholic Croat," and "Muslim Bosniak" had a far-reaching meaning in the sense that they had a negative impact on an encounter or relationship. Palmberger

(2016, pp. 205–210) argues that these forms of the post-Yugoslav generation's biographical communication culture are "distancing" and "normalizing"; they keep the memories of war times vague and encounter them at a distance. This distancing and normalization of past and current personal situations (mono-ethnic schools, divided cities) makes it easier for them not to frame their own childhood and life in the context of the wars. I detected similar biographical explanations: The interviewees gave us the impression that they were protected by their parents, so much so that they did not notice that an armed or unarmed conflict or war was going on.

Even young adults who lost someone during the wars, who had to flee their hometown, or who suffered because of war damage in the aftermath, depicted their childhood as "normal" or "lucky" (Branković, 2017; Palmberger, 2016). In retrospect, they felt lucky that they had only very few bad memories or experiences, always in comparison to their peers, who they imagined having lived through a worse time. Bojan started his life story as follows:

> My name is Bojan [anonymized], I was born in Srebrenica in 1994. I came here to Sarajevo when I was 9 months old with my mum. My father, my uncles, my grandfather, they were killed, so my family wasn't here when we arrived, so it was kind of hard to establish anything because we had no money, we didn't have anything […]. So, what about my life story? I don't like to, you know, to make it [the fact that he lost many people due to the Srebrenica genocide] special, let's say. Because it is the same story as many others here, I'm just one of many who lost something, you know. (Bojan, born in 1994 in Srebrenica)

The comparison with peers helps them to create a "normal" or even a "lucky" childhood. The narrative of a normal childhood—compared to others—is not only a communication pattern, but also a cultural one, because more than one member of the post-Yugoslav generation can identify with it. Although their biographies consist of individual experiences, this master narrative within their communication memory dominates and structures their remembering and communication of past violent or wartime events, of flight and uncertainty. Remembering a normal and lucky childhood became a full story of the collective that excludes individual memories. These are not needed anymore because the master narrative organizes the memories and associated emotions as well as the expectations of the audience (Sieder, 1999, p. 199).

Of course, there are different stories from children who experienced violence and war crimes. Even after a traumatic childhood, the young people wanted to assure us that their childhood could have been worse and that they felt protected by their families.

The self-created notion of a normal childhood indicates that these young adults did not grow up with a perception that their neighboring country might be a threat. Being born during or shortly after the war meant that the "Other" was made invis-

ible, either by parents, the political system (schools), or the collective generational memories.

However, interviewees agreed that the tensions between communities persisted beyond the 1990s. Today, the question is not whether traces of the legacy transmitted by their ancestors prevail. Instead, the post-Yugoslav generation had, at some point in their life, to acknowledge that they "have no choice but to be responsive to, and take responsibility for, the history they inherit, no matter on which side of the divide they were born", as Lacapra (2018, p. 87) argues, like Bronner. The post-war generation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia can "feel" the war traumas of their parents and older relatives. Milica made it very explicit:

> I'm talking about the nineties, how it stayed in my memory. About the bombing in 1999. [...] When I passed through the city and past some buildings, my mother and grandmother used to tell me that the building was destroyed in the bombing. [...] I do not talk much about it, but I know generally from the family and people close to me what fear there was in that period, how uncertain it was what would happen tomorrow, what could happen, which part could be bombed, where the bomb might fall. (Milica, born in 1997 in Bar, Montenegro)

When it comes to talking about the war with family or community members, they can feel the harm and loss as well as the taboos of the preceding generation, who do not want to speak about it. Instead, some family and community narratives come to the forefront that provide the post-Yugoslavs with basic knowledge about the past. But these transmissions of knowledge do not help them understand why ethnic cleansing occurred and why they must resolve problems between their own and another community, primarily because of the predominant narratives' inauthenticity.

However, the young adults were strongly affected by the stories they recollect their parents sharing with them. They see their parents as war heroes and survivors, and this made it quite impossible for them to challenge their parents' heroic narratives (Yordanova, 2015). Only in Serbia, we recorded a few life stories from post-Yugoslavs who distance themselves from their family's position and have sometimes even split up with them. Nevertheless, most members of the post-Yugoslav generation remained close to their parents. Hence, they elaborated a communication practice to explain their childhood memories to us and to themselves as well as to place their parents' actions in an honorable light. The generation we interviewed were convinced that their parents never taught them to hate anybody, which fits into their collective notion of a normal childhood. "We do not hate" is the collective answer that the post-Yugoslav respondents gave us. This statement often comes in the context of a description of a normal childhood, underlining the argument that growing up during or shortly after the wars had no impact on the way they were raised. Eden, a young man who grew up in post-war Sarajevo, remem-

bers that when he was a child, they "never spread hate in my home [...] I didn't know anything about [ethnic hatred], I was too small to know what really happened. I learned later on in my life, but when I was young, I didn't know anything and I learned nothing at home" (Eden, born in 2000 in Sarajevo).

These kinds of memories appeared in almost every life-story interview and can be interpreted as a strongly adopted position among young adults. The communication practice "We are not like this, we do not hate anybody" reveals an invisible connectivity that characterizes these young people as a generation in response to the recent past of their countries as well as to the accusation they feel is being made by Western states. In fact, the young people argue that they are "less affected by negative feelings caused by the war" (Palmberger, 2016, p. 202) but need to manage the invisible conflicts as a legacy of the wars in present times. How do they accomplish this task?

Communication practice 2: Choosing between peace zones and conflict zones

As mentioned before, the post-Yugoslavs feel that they inherited a conflict that should have remained in the 1990s. Furthermore, I would argue that the post-Yugoslavs have a similar (low) level of knowledge about the wars. However, knowledge about the past is necessary to reflect on the "Other"; it is "knowledge of a certain sort and quality" to remain in an authentic argumentation (Bronner, 2020, p. 110). For the post-war generation, it is important to admit that things could be better after so many years since the wars took place and the peace was settled. The "consequences are being felt. [...] Certainly, the war is present even today" (Dino, born in 1999 in Goražde, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The second layer of the communication system is an action-oriented practice. Whenever war-related topics are discussed, members of the post-Yugoslav generation talk about them according to their talking partners. With some people, they do not talk about the wars at all, but rather choose the practice of non-communication (e.g., Radenka and her father).

The peace zones in which non-communication takes place give the post-Yugoslavs the possibility to collect some family narratives but not to challenge them. It means that they stop asking questions about the war to those relatives who do not want to share personal experiences. The analysis shows that talking to parents and grandparents about the wars is different from and more sensitive than talking with their peers. Either they are told that they are too young to discuss this topic (Palmberger, 2016, p. 208), or they do not want to upset their family members, or they have the feeling that a discussion about war-related topics would only bring up

painful memories or cause a useless fight, so they choose non-communication. In some cases, the younger generation wants to protect their parents or grandparents by not talking about the wars.

Elisa from Belgrade told us that she has an "unspoken deal" with her parents not to talk about politics, after we asked her how supportive her family has been in her reconciliation-related NGO activities. This deal applies to friends from her childhood, too. Elisa decided to create a peace zone with her parents or close friends whenever they talk about the wars, because she knew nothing would change her mother's viewpoint and she did not want to risk their good relationship. Most of the young people we talked to remained skeptical that their elderly family members would change their opinions and memories of war-related topics and move on from the invisible war.

In contrast to the peace zones, the post-Yugoslav generation is eager to enter the conflict zone whenever they find a possibility to talk authentically about the 1990s and the downfall of the Socialist Federal Republic (Palmberger, 2016, p. 209). Elisa continues explaining with whom and where she talks about the wars; at the faculty of her university, she "pretty much" engages in difficult discussions on war-related topics and firmly defends her perspective. "I don't really care about what my colleagues think about that" (Elisa, born in 1994 in Belgrade). Luka, too, is eager to confront other people with war-related topics in discussions: "I would like to talk about [the war] just to hear other opinions, especially the Serbians [...] like what they think about the war, what is their perception of it" (Luka, born in 2001 in Sarajevo).

It seems that they are gathering all the information, especially personal experiences from their peers and childhood memories, in order to be able to better structure and understand the past and present times. Two young women told me on one of my field trips that the first thing you asked your peers when you got to know them was where and how they spent the wartime. The members of the post-Yugoslav generation either aim to deliver and test their own story in a conflict zone or want to gain knowledge outside their family and community narratives. In conflict zones, the post-Yugoslavs try to defend their narratives but leave the opportunity open to modify them or to add a new one.

As their lives progressed and they started gathering new information in conflict zones, the young adults further developed their own narratives about the past. This elaborated communication practice guides the post-Yugoslav generation in communicating with multiple people. When they do not want to argue with their relatives, they turn to a peace zone, and whenever they are ready to pursue positions, narratives, and sensitive topics, they consciously enter the conflict zone. However, not all our interviewees were ready for the conflict zones (yet) (Stefan, born in 2002 in Požarevac).

This example of an action-oriented practice highlights the importance of understanding how a post-war generation recalls the conflicts and the aftermath as well as interpreting the transmitted narratives collectively, thus being able to form their own generational communication culture in relation to the previous ones (Koleva, 2009, pp. 201–202).

Communication practice 3: Explaining and transmitting the blind spots of history

Many politically instrumented narratives include nationalism, ethnic division, or other elements that exclude minorities in the successor states of Yugoslavia and have been circulating since the 1990s and before (Jovanović and Bermúdez, 2021, p. 6). On the field trips, I heard many stories that are based on World War II events, for example, when the Serbian "Chetniks" fought against the Croatian "Ustaše." As Luka told us, this topic would immediately bring up conflict in his family. It is no surprise that the flood of narratives that were re-activated in the 1990s and that still influence family discussions are followed with interest by the younger generation.

Members of the post-Yugoslav generation have accepted the fact that they lack knowledge, facts, memories, and explanations about the 1990s, but they gather information passively and actively at the family dinner table and intentionally at youth exchanges. For Sartre, the ideal of authenticity of "Being" was to embrace knowledge to achieve self-awareness (Palti, 2021, p. 26), which for the post-Yugoslavs is the best option in order to face their historical legacy. Obradović (2016, p. 16) offers another argument for incomplete or meta-knowledge by stating that "not being informed" leads to an inability to defend one's own position. Strengthening one's own position is the last practice of the communication system, by empowering the generation through knowledge. While members of the post-Yugoslav generation have accepted that they can never fully understand the inherited conflict that is much more than thirty years old (Kalemaj and Lleshi, 2020, pp. 155, 166), they aim to bridge this gap by producing their own versions.

The third communication practice presents the transmission of re-narrations from the post-Yugoslav generation to their metaphorical younger siblings. Re-narrations are defined as adopted knowledge based on narratives that come from the cultural and communicative memory and on the post-Yugoslav generation's experiences and biographies. They aim to fill some blind spots of history and are intended to guide the following generation through the fragmented image that they discovered in their adolescent years. This third practice of the communication system has not yet been reached by all our interviewees and perhaps never will be. Not all of them show the motivation to work on the perceived blind spots of history for

a better understanding of the present, and not all of them want to teach younger generations about it.

Like many of our other interviewees and members of this generation (Palmberger, 2016, p. 218), Nedim works at an NGO that organizes peace-building workshops for young people in their home countries. He is convinced that it is time to stimulate a reconciliation process, which the following generations will need to continue. He describes his work and his motivation: Through "shaking up [their] realities," the young people should realize that "they are not living in a time of peace, and it is their responsibility to change things" (Nedim, born in 1988 in Sarajevo). In his case and in many others, the inner fracture functioned as motivation for their NGO engagement.

Tarik (born in 1986) from Pristina became active in civic engagement, too. After spending some time in the NGO sector, he met like-minded peers from Serbia and Kosovo. Together, they organized a project on the topic of the wars with the idea that people younger than themselves are informed by them. In his life-story interview, Tarik explained that the goal of the project is to connect young people from Southeast Europe with each other in order to dismantle the prejudices that still prevail. Within the younger generations, whether they are meeting privately or within the scope of an NGO activity, they are looking for "civilized conversation," which it seems they cannot have with older generations.

Members of the post-Yugoslav generation who gave up talking to their parents about war-related topics have found somebody else to talk to. They have learned whom they can influence with their adapted narratives and the perspectives they have gained. Lejla (born in 1990 in Visoko), who is also engaging in NGO activities, aims to create "this atmosphere where they [young people who want to learn about the war] are safe to tell their perspective. You also have to be aware that someone might cry." She sees herself as a "facilitator" who provides the structures for talking about the wars, war memories, and persistent consequences of the wars. Lejla, who herself experienced the Bosnian War as a child, also provides emotional caretaking.

The members of the post-Yugoslav generation who engage in the third communication practice appear to believe that the older generations are not able or do not want to change their attitudes towards the past, especially towards other communities. This point of view has become another master narrative within this generation's communication practice. They seem to almost give up when talking to elderly relatives, which, as a cultural pattern, limits their scope of action (Sieder, 1999, p. 191) and enlarges the inner fracture. As a coping communication practice, some post-Yugoslavs target the subsequent generation with their narratives and positions. This seems to function as a balancing act, closing the gap caused by inheriting a conflict they are neither responsible for nor fully understand.

The members of the post-Yugoslav generation that we interviewed showed a general interest in the history of their countries, although they realized that they would never achieve the full picture of it—as is always the case with history. However, the links between the past and the present were strongly detectable in their life stories, which could be a reason for their great interest. One of the last interviews we were able to conduct, as the coronavirus pandemic limited our travels, even incorporated the new experiences that were gained during the pandemic (October 2020):

> History does not bore me, and when I learned about the history [of the wars], I was not bored, I was interested in it. Especially if I heard some things from my family, and I went to consult a book, then it would be strange to me how they told me something, and how the book describes what happened. That's what I'm telling you, it's different when someone goes through it and when they experience it, and when someone writes a book and writes about history. I always come back to this Covid situation, maybe I will tell my children one version of the story, and someone else will tell them a completely different one. It probably depends on the person, and it is always interesting for me to listen and read about it. (Milica, born in 1997 in Bar)

This quote is an example of the intermingling of the model's different layers.

Authentic conflicts about the invisible

In this paper, I argue that members of the post-Yugoslav generation who are dealing with the past in their everyday situations share common communication practices, no matter in which successor state they grew up and live in; at the same time, they all join the discourse with a high degree of authenticity. Facing the history of one's own country and family in the context of the "Other" is an important step in building self-awareness but also self-protection, as some examples have shown. It connects the "self" more strongly with history, which is not only the case for individuals but also for collectives, such as the post-Yugoslav generation. In particular, the narrative of a long-lasting hatred between their communities and others was applied to their own history and/or story, so that the members of the post-Yugoslav generation were able to reflect on the "Other" in their life and were thus able to create an authentic response to the unsolved conflict, often described as "invisible."

As Bronner (2020, p. 107) explains, authenticity is not about finding the truth or the correct action within a discourse but rather about looking for a translation to put potentiality into actuality. This model of the post-Yugoslav generation's communication practices presents a generation's translational function, which transformed individual and collective experiences into cultural capital (Jureit, 2017). This is therefore an authentic conflict that takes place in the present but with roots

in the past. The communication practices seen as cultural capital reflect the implementation of personal experiences and expectations that are then again attached to the present and an outcome of the confrontation with each other in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia.

The model of the post-Yugoslav generation's communication system shows the different layers that the members of this generation can achieve and have achieved, which address a heterogeneous audience. The foundation for the three communication practices is the reflection on the "Other," because it sets the preconditions for an authentic generational response to the wars in the 1990s. It describes facing the minority or majority communities within their countries, which were depicted as the "Others" during the wars and as former enemies afterwards. At the same time, however, our research team was considered to be from the outside, so we were addressed in a certain way that must be acknowledged as a form of co-production of all three communication practices. The contacts the post-Yugoslavs have built with peers from different (ethnic) communities made them realize that they must counter the overall notion of ancient hatred. Thus, our interviewees first strengthened their attitude of not hating anybody, as the first communication practice elaborates. As they emphasized, their childhood was as normal as it could be under the circumstances. With the aid of the second communication practice, the members of the post-Yugoslav generation are able to amend and adapt their corpus of narratives and perspectives. In "conflict zones" they challenge their family or community memory, while in "peace zones" they tend to use the "discursive tactics [...] of silencing and distancing" (Palmberger, 2016, p. 215). As Palmberger (2016) points out, the distancing of the post-Yugoslav generation from the former one seems to be an act of self-protection, which she recognizes as a way to "make room for reconciliation" as well as "for one's future" (p. 216). The act of self-protection and the protection of friends, relatives, and even foreigners can be found in each of those communication practices. The third practice touches upon the invisibility that is evident throughout all the life stories—invisible borders and wars, or blind spots in history, knowledge, and explanations. Challenging the unsatisfying and fragmented memory as well as the competing cultural memory, some post-Yugoslavs show the communication practice of trying to explain these blind spots themselves and pass on their knowledge to the next generation.

In conclusion, the analysis of communication practices of post-war generations helps us reconstruct the way that narratives about the past bring about change within forthcoming generations, but it also shows how and why communicating about such narratives is part of their everyday life, decisions, actions, and transregional communicative memory. Subsequently, further research on the post-Yugoslav's memory landscape and communication practices is needed. The interplay of historical narrative stored in the cultural memory and intragenerational narra-

tives that are negotiated and present in everyday situations needs further scholarly attention, taking into consideration current wars and political conflicts in Europe and worldwide. In the post-Yugoslavia context, the rather fragmented memories need to be taken seriously, especially the participation of post-war generations in the communicative memory, since they shape the future of this and coming generations as well as their countries, which have been granted EU candidate status.

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