7

Conclusion

At the beginning of 2006, two new graffiti messages appeared in Mostar, one was on the Bulevar, the former frontline, and one next to the rebuilt old Ottoman Bridge. Both read the same words: ETO SVEMIRICI SU SRUŠILI MOST. NLO=HVO ('Look, the aliens destroyed the bridge. UFO=HVO'). This graffiti mocks the seemingly endless ingenuity of local actors in interpreting history. It can also be seen as a statement against the manipulation of history. It implies ironically that people will not just adopt any interpretation of history that is offered to them (Fig. 7.1).[1]

In his methodological critique of memory studies, Kansteiner argues that what studies on memory have to offer is 'the opportunity to acknowledge that historical representations are negotiated, selective, present-oriented, and relative, while insisting that the experiences they reflect cannot be manipulated at will' (Kansteiner 2002: 180). I took this area of tension between historical representations in the making and

---

[1] These graffiti can be seen as a reaction to an article published in *Nacional* (a Croat weekly journal) just days before, which elaborated on the theory that the Bosniak-dominated ABiH themselves destroyed the bridge and not the Croat army HVO—as is believed by Bosniaks as well as by the majority of the 'international community'. Rogošić, Željko: "Stari most: nije srušio HVO" (HVO did not destroy the Old Bridge), in *Nacional*, 21 February 2006.

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2016

M. Palmberger, *How Generations Remember*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-45063-0_7

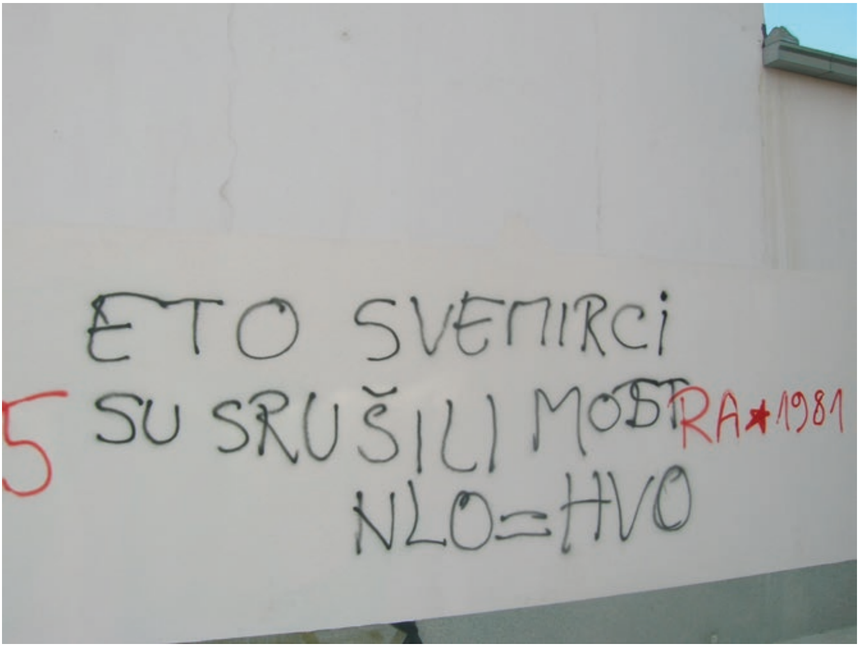

Fig. 7.1 Graffito stating: 'Look the aliens destroyed the bridge. UFO=HVO', 2006. Photo by the author

personal experiences as a point of departure when probing into questions of memory and generation in Mostar.

As shown in the book, individuals are not only exposed to changing political contexts but are also confronted by their personal past and present experiences, which serve as the backdrop against which they rethink the past in the present. By now we have become so sensitive to the idea of the flexibility of the past that we tend to forget that it rests—at least to a certain degree—on an experiential base (Irwin-Zarecka 1994: 17). Appadurai (1981) argues that the past does not offer an infinite source for interpretation but is always told within certain cultural norms and rules. In this book I have demonstrated that the past is not an unlimited resource by showing how it is genuinely influenced, not only by a predefined discursive space but also by people's personal experiences. By looking at the intersection of memory and generations, both continuities and discontinuities become apparent. By introducing the concept of 'generational positioning', this book demonstrates how the past informs the present (and thereby generates the potential for persistence) as well as how the present informs the past (and thereby creates the potential for change).

What I have argued in this book is that generational positioning has a crucial impact on the way individuals relate to the past, as well as on how they draw on the dominant public discourses of present and past and make use of pre-existing interpretative templates. I revealed generational commonalities across nations in a city which, to a large extent, is still segregated along national lines. This is yet another indicator of the significance of generational positioning in studies of memory, particularly but not only in places that have experienced severe socio-economic transformations and/or war. The nuanced presentation of different generations and of the interplay between public dominant discourses and personal narratives by unravelling different positions as well as commonalities, provides a profound insight into ongoing societal processes in a society that has been in recent memory torn apart by conflict and war.

Between Nation and Generation

I have followed a two-fold aim throughout this book. Firstly, I analysed differences related to generational positioning by considering people's personal experiences of different historico-political periods, and the life situations the narrators were confronted with at the time of narrating the events, as well as at the time of the narrated event or period itself. Secondly, I sought to illustrate how personal narratives of the recent past deviate from present 'official' national narratives in terms of their content and nature. This aim could only be achieved by investigating both the dominant national public discourses and individuals' narratives, two realms that I separated analytically but which in practice are closely interlinked.

My research revealed that there is a difference in the nature of the 'stratagems' found in the official (Bosniak and Croat) national narratives and in people's personal narratives. Using de Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics as a starting point, I referred to the former as 'discursive strategies' and to the latter as 'discursive tactics'. Individuals are not only exposed to changing political contexts but are also confronted by their personal past experiences, even if the two do not always fit together neatly. For this reason individuals' reconstructions of the past have to remain more flexible and situational than the official national history. While the latter presents a goal-oriented narrative, the former can be better described as target-seeking.

In order to explore the dominant public discourses, I analysed how history is currently taught to students in Mostar. The main focus was on representations of the local past by history professors at the respective Bosniak- and Croat-dominated universities. My analysis revealed that while the representations of the past (as well as the imagined future) presented by Croat and Bosniak historians are antithetical, the discursive strategies they draw on are not. This is particularly true in the way the historians connect different historical periods in order to achieve a coherent national narrative and in how the respective historiography is objectified. Thereby 'the past' strongly serves national claims and political aspirations for the future in present-day BiH. In this endeavour, history is taught as a coherent narrative as if recent history, including the 1990s war, was predetermined by preceding historical events and as if there was only one future suited to ensure the respective nations' existence.

One discursive strategy employed in linking different historical periods I paid particular attention to was the connection between WWII and the recent war, which was most prominent in the dominant Bosniak public discourse. In this discourse the Bosniak-dominated army ABiH, which fought in the 1992–1995 war, is equated with the Partisans, while simultaneously the Croat army, HVO, is equated with the fascists of WWII. As I have shown, this linking strategy can be found not only in the Bosniak national narrative but also in the personal narratives of the First Yugoslavs, the generation that holds personal memories of WWII. WWII—the first war for this generation that took place early in their lives—constitutes a formative experience and is central in the life narratives of the First Yugoslavs. The war in the 1990s is interpreted in relation to it, whereby WWII serves as the core interpretative template for explaining the recent war. The image of the good Partisans fighting against the evil Nazis was powerfully nurtured by Tito and still serves as an interpretative template today for many First Yugoslavs. In the case of the First Yugoslavs, the linking of the two wars is strongly connected to their personal experiences and serves to give meaning to their lives, whereby meta-narratives of suffering and loss as well as of a continuing fight against fascism are central. I found this discursive strategy of linking the two wars in personal narratives among both Bosniaks and Croats.

Unlike the First Yugoslavs, who were in a later stage of their lives when the 1990s war began, the Last Yugoslavs were in the middle of their lives and faced very different life situations and challenges. Although the recent war and its subsequent political, societal and economic changes had a crucial impact on the lives of all my informants regardless of their generational positioning, the Last Yugoslavs experienced the war differently in terms of the rupture it caused in their lives. While the war forced everyone to position themselves in relation to Yugoslavia, to the war itself and to contemporary politics, the Last Yugoslav generation, who as young adults had just started life away from their parental homes or were just about to do so, experienced the war as an extreme disruption to their life course.

Depending on their political orientation, members of this generation draw on the dominant national public discourses to a greater or lesser degree. Interestingly, however, even those Last Yugoslavs who strongly believe in the current national project still rely on interpretative templates from Yugoslav times. Thus the predominant discursive tactics of the Last Yugoslavs are characterised by an oscillation between different—often opposing—discourses, old and new. This is also expressed in the non-conclusiveness of the Last Yugoslavs' narratives, which is tightly bound to the rupture in the expected life course this generation experienced due to the war in the 1990s.

Even if there seems to be a consensus in the literature that individuals aim to 'connect disparate parts into a coherent, meaningful whole' (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 28; see also Becker et al. 2000; Roseman 1995; Zerubavel 2003), I have shown in my work that this is not always possible. After great political and societal rupture and economic transformations—periods that are perceived as chaotic and insecure—people seek to remake order by rethinking the past with respect to the changing present situation and their future prospects. Memory work is thus expected to become most prominent in times of crisis (Cave and Sloan 2014). But as Pierre Nora (1989) argues, memory not only enables people to maintain a sense of continuity, but also illuminates discontinuity. This is evident in the Last Yugoslavs' narratives, the generation who experienced the war and the transformations that came with it, as a deep rupture in their biographies. Their narratives oscillate between a discourse of exclusive nationalism and fond memories of a multi-ethnic and secure past. This indicates that in situations in which an entire population is affected by war and great political-economic transformations, generational differences exist regarding the extent to which people experience these events as disruptions to their lives. In addition, I have shown through the case of the youngest generation confronted by different and sometimes conflicting narratives of the local past (communicated by parents, grandparents, teachers and through textbooks and the media) that individuals can cope with inconsistencies and discrepancies while simultaneously being confronted with silences.

The Post-Yugoslavs, the youngest generation, who were children during the 1990s war, possess only limited, if any, memories of pre-war times. For that reason, and because they grew up during a period of extreme nationalism and war, they are perceived by the older population as a distinct and often also 'spoilt' generation. In conversation with Post-Yugoslavs, however, it became clear that they adamantly reject this negative portrayal. On the contrary, they perceive themselves as the 'unspoilt' generation because, they argue, they were too young to have really experienced the war. In their narratives, the Post-Yugoslavs present their young age and limited war memories as a gift, rather than as a fault, which they said allows them to be more impartial and less burdened by mistrust and hatred. Their discursive tactics are thus strongly characterised by a dissociation of their lives from the war and its aftermath. They do not subordinate their lives to the dominant national public discourses of victimisation but at the same time have not yet found a meta-narrative in which to situate their experiences of war and post-war time.

This was already noticeable during my revisits (2010 and 2014) in Mostar when I had the chance to catch up with my interlocutors two and four years after my fieldwork period (2005–2008). When I asked them what was new in Mostar, most of them were quick to assure me that ‘nothing has changed’, only to add, ‘it only got worse!’. But some things, as I learned in the ensuing conversations, had changed, even if only small in scope and mostly concerning private matters. This became most evident when catching up with my Post-Yugoslav interlocutors such as Emina. When we met in 2010 in one of Mostar’s new fancy cafés I was most surprised when I learned that she had moved away from Mostar to study abroad. At the end of my fieldwork in 2008, Emina was finishing secondary school. At that time I lived in Mostar and had regular contact with Emina; she always defended her hometown and told me that she could never imagine leaving Mostar and living anywhere else. She never said things were ideal in Mostar, but she always kept a certain distance from Mostar’s politics and the way they affected her life, as did many others of the Post-Yugoslav generation. At our 2010 meeting she shared many critical observations of her hometown with me, and the discursive tactic of ‘distancing’ and ‘normalising’, so prominent only two years previously, no longer dominated Emina’s narrative. In 2014 I met Emina again in my own hometown, Vienna, where she had started work on her PhD, only to move to Asia for a job shortly thereafter.

Between Sharing and Silencing the Past

Individuals’ narratives are never solely personal memories but always include a social component, a wider social framework in which the memories are placed and are told. Once past experiences are verbalised, personal memories are no longer exclusive and can be exchanged, corrected, disputed, confirmed and even appropriated (Assmann 2008: 50; see also Tonkin 1992). Moreover, in endeavouring to make the past meaningful, individuals do not draw strict distinctions between ‘historical facts’ and ‘personal experiences’; the two are closely interwoven in people’s narratives. Moreover, the personal history that allows people to develop a sense of individual identity is socially contextualised in wider frameworks and is always constructed in relation, even in opposition, to others, since ‘people live in, and deal with, a world that extends beyond themselves’ (Middleton and Edwards 1990: 7). By examining the role of generational positioning in this book, it was precisely the intersections of the private and public and of the individual and the social that came to the fore. Memories are created, manifested, but also contested in social fields, through direct or indirect exchange, but also through (individual and collective) silences. As became clear in the analysis of Mostar's generations, different modes of silences and forgetting exist and 'neither silence nor forgetting are necessarily pathological "symptoms"' (Shaw 2010: 255).

The most common practice for keeping memories alive is to share them with others, for example, with schoolmates, colleagues and friends. In many cases this is not possible for people in Mostar (at least not on a regular basis and face-to-face) owing to the tremendous population changes that accompanied the war. Even in the cases where contact had been maintained, the nature of the relationship had often changed. Thus, we can say that, in Mostar, the intimate space required for keeping shared experiences alive has been lost for many. This also concerns the material space to which memories are bound. The houses and flats people inhabited and the personal objects they treasured, which have been identified as a valuable pillar for nurturing memories (see Bahloul 1992; Morton 2007; Parkin 1999), often had to be left behind during the war. As I have shown, the First Yugoslavs were the generation most keen to return to their pre-war houses whenever they could and at the same time to (re-)establish spaces for cherishing a shared past. These intimate spaces enabled them to freely and often nostalgically remember the past with others of their generation.

Even while there is most room for nostalgia for Yugoslavia among First Yugoslavs, it cross-cuts all the generations; still, the phenomenon has different meanings for individuals of different generations. The nostalgia of the First Yugoslav generation is first and foremost related to fond memories of Tito, but also to memories of an intact family and neighbourhood. For the Last Yugoslavs, nostalgia for Yugoslavia is highly connected to the loss of future prospects they experienced with the outbreak of war, while nostalgic expressions for Yugoslavia among the youngest generation, the Post-Yugoslavs, have at times at least a rather utopian character connected to a longing for a better future (see Palmberger 2008). We thus can speak of generation-specific nostalgias.

Generations and the Life Course

Silences concerning the war in the 1990s in BiH were especially prominent in the analysis of the Post-Yugoslav generation, including silences in the narratives of Post-Yugoslavs themselves, as well as the silences of older generations with which the Post Yugoslavs were confronted. I noticed a general tendency for war experiences to be shared among those of the same generation and often also of the same gender, such as in the case of veterans. This dynamic most affected the youngest as many of them faced a disturbing silence about the war, especially among their parents. Parents justified their silence by stating that they did not want to burden their children with war stories, but at the same time they made clear that they expected the young to be grateful to them. After all, it was they who had fought for a better future for their children. This can be seen as an act of demarcation between generational groups in which hierarchies are created by defining who is eligible to speak for the past. Secrecy about the past and the selective disclosure of only parts of it is a privilege of power of those who hold personal experiences of the past in question. It is in their hands which parts and versions of the past to transmit to younger generations (Berliner 2010).

Importantly, however, this does not mean that silences in the transmission of memories down the generations necessarily result in forgetting. The ‘charged silences’ transmitted to younger generations, as Filippucci shows in the case of memory of war destruction in Argonne (France), bring the war into the lives of the younger generations despite silences around personal war experiences ‘as a gap to be filled by imagination and emotion’ (Filippucci 2010: 171). In a similar, although different, vein, Kidron (2009) analyses this phenomenon in the case of Israeli Holocaust survivors. As Kidron learned, while the Holocaust is silenced in the family context, it takes on a ‘copresence’ in the everyday life of the family. The children of Holocaust survivors whom Kidron interviewed thus did not experience an absence of the past but rather a ‘silent matrix of Holocaust presence’ that Kidron analyses as a ‘silent transmission’. Like Kidron, I suggest refraining from any overhasty interpretation of silences as pathological. This would not do justice to the multiple silences I encountered in my interviewees’ narratives nor to the silences my interlocutors encountered within their families.

Since people's representations of the past and the importance they give to past events are likely to change during the course of their lives, not only because of changing political contexts but also because of the different life situations people face, longitudinal studies are needed to generate more rigorous theorising. Other than in ambitious studies of generational memory of the Holocaust, which seek to analyse changes in public and autobiographical memory discourses over a period of more than 60 years (see, e.g., Hirsch 2012; Welzer 2007), a long time frame is not available when analysing memories of recent conflicts and wars, such as those presented here.

In the case of Mostar a longitudinal study could, for example, follow the lives of the Post-Yugoslavs and their changing representations of the recent local past throughout the course of their lives to, for example, investigate the way they position themselves vis-à-vis the recent war and Yugoslavia. Will they keep their defensive position about the effect the war had on their lives? Will they break the silence about the war, with which they were confronted by their parents? And how will they attempt to transmit their past experiences of war and its aftermath on to their children? We cannot yet predict how the Post-Yugoslav generation will narrate their autobiographical memories at a later point in their lives and which memories they will pass on to their children and grandchildren. But we can assume that narratives will change during the course of the lives of my interlocutors, due to political-societal changes and changes in the historiography of the local past and due to their progressing age and the different life situations they will find themselves in over time. Longitudinal research, moreover, would have the potential to further explore the role trust plays in the processes of the generational transmission of past experiences. When and why do individuals of different generations decide to pass on their memories and to whom; and whose narratives are perceived as trustworthy?

Bibliography

Appadurai, Arjun. 1981. The Past as a Scarce Resource. *Man* 16(2): 201–219.

Assmann, Aleida. 2008. Transformations between History and Memory. *Social Research* 75(1): 49–72.

Bahloul, Joëlle. 1992. *The Architecture of Memory. A Jewish-Muslim Household in Colonical Algeria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Becker, Gay, Yewoubdar Beyene, and Pauline Ken. 2000. Memory, Trauma, and Embodied Distress: The Management of Disruption in the Stories of Cambodians in Exile. *Ethos* 28(3): 320–345.

Berliner, David. 2010. Memories of Initation Violence: Rememberd Pain and Religious Transmission among the Bulongic (Guinea, Conakry). In *Remembering Violence. Anthropological Perspectives on Intergenerational Transmission*, eds. N. Argenti and K. Schramm, 83–102. New York, NY: Berghahn.

Cave, Mark, and Stephen Sloan. 2014. *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Filippucci, Paola. 2010. In a Ruined Country: Place and the Memory of War Destruction in Argonne (France). In *Remembering Violence: Anthropological Perspectives on Intergenerational Transmission*, eds. N. Argenti and K. Schramm, 165–189. New York: Berghahn.

Hirsch, Marianne. 2012. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Holstein, James A., and Jaber F. Gubrium. 1995. *The Active Interview, Sage University Paper*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Irwin-Zarecka, Iwona. 1994. *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Kansteiner, Wolf. 2002. Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies. *History and Theory* 41(2): 179–197.

Kidron, Carol A. 2009. Toward an Ethnography of Silence: The Lived Presence of the Past in the Everyday Life of Holocaust Trauma Survivors and Their Descendants in Israel. *Current Anthropology* 50(1): 5–27.

Middleton, David, and Derek Edwards. 1990. *Collective Remembering, Inquiries in Social Construction*. London: Sage.

Morton, Christopher. 2007. Remembering the House. Memory and Materiality in Northern Botswana. *Journal of Material Culture* 12(2): 157–179.

Nora, Pierre. 1989. Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. *Representations* 26: 7–24.

Palmberger, Monika. 2008. Nostalgia Matters: Nostalgia for Yugoslavia as Potential Vision for a Better Future? *Sociologija. Časopis za sociologiju, socijalnu psihologiju i socijalnu antropologiju* 50(4): 355–370.

Parkin, David. 1999. Mementoes as Transitional Objects in Human Displacement. *Journal of Material Culture* 4(3): 303–320.

Roseman, Mark. 1995. *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany 1770–1968*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shaw, Rosalind. 2010. Afterword: Violence and the Generation of Memory. In *Remembering Violence. Anthropological Perspectives on Intergenerational Transmission*, eds. N. Argenti and K. Schramm, 251–260. New York, NY: Berghahn.

Tonkin, Elizabeth. 1992. *Narrating Our Past: The Social Construction of Oral History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Welzer, Harald. 2007. *Der Krieg der Erinnerung: Holocaust, Kollaboration und Widerstand im europäischen Gedächtnis*. Frankfurt/Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag.

Zerubavel, Eviatar. 2003. *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Open Access This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, duplication, adaptation, distribution, and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, a link is provided to the Creative Commons license, and any changes made are indicated.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the work's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in the credit line; if such material is not included in the work's Creative Commons license and the respective action is not permitted by statutory regulation, users will need to obtain permission from the license holder to duplicate, adapt or reproduce the material.