

# COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF CHANGING IDENTITIES: AN EXPLORATION OF MEMORIES AND IDENTITIES RELATED TO THE DISINTEGRATION OF YUGOSLAVIA

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## ABSTRACT

### **Collective Memory of Changing Identities: An Exploration of Memories and Identities Related to the Disintegration of Yugoslavia**

Through the analysis of memories of major events related to the disintegration of Yugoslavia the differences in collective memories and social representations of various generations of Slovenians and other former Yugoslav peoples resident in Slovenia are explored. Qualitative analysis of eighteen semi-structured interviews illustrates contested interpretations or narratives of the break up, memories and representations of Tito's Yugoslavia, and the changes in social (ethnic) identification.

KEYWORDS: social/collective memory, identity, social representations, narratives, disintegration of former Yugoslavia

## IZVLEČEK

### **Kolektivni spomin spreminjajočih se identitet: Študija z razpadom Jugoslavije povezanih spominov in identitet**

Prispevek skozi analizo spominov na pomembnejše dogodke razpada Jugoslavije obravnava razlike v kolektivnih spomilih ter socialnih predstavah različnih generacij Slovencev ter drugih pripadnikov nekdanjih jugoslovanskih narodnosti, ki danes živijo v Sloveniji. Rezultati kvalitativne analize osemnajstih pol-strukturiranih intervjujev prikazujejo nasprotujoče si interpretacije razpada, spomine in predstave o Titovi Jugoslaviji ter spremembe na področju socialne (predvsem etnične) identifikacije.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: socialni/kolektivni spomin, identiteta, naracija, socialne predstave, razpad nekdanje Jugoslavije

## SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Yugoslavia, a liberal communist country, famous for its forty years of relatively successful and peaceful federalism, represented an example of unorthodox socialism and was a country of numerous ethnic communities. Of particular concern for this research<sup>2</sup> is the

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period of the post-WWII or ‘Second’ Yugoslavia, under Tito’s leadership, and especially its break-up in early 1990s. After Tito’s death in 1980, the state started to unravel as the governments of the republics began to exercise the powers that were due to them under the constitution of 1974 (Judah 1988). Initial problems ultimately resulted in the break up of the federation in 1991, which began with the secession of Slovenia on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1991, and was followed by the ‘Ten-days-war’ for independence. Shortly after, wars broke out in Croatia and Bosnia, whereas Slovenia emerged practically unharmed as the first independent state.

After June 1991, the Slovenian state began reorganizing its national symbols, renaming its public spaces and changing the way history was taught in schools (Bajt 2003). Mainstream political, historical and media discourse changed considerably and new interpretations of the past and the present emerged. For example, the teaching of official history in schools changed in 1991 when the school textbooks were altered. The media played an important role in the processes of (re)organization of collective memory and the construction of a non-Yugoslavian, Slovenian national identity in opposition to everything related to former Yugoslavia (Pušnik 2003).

The period of the breakdown of the Yugoslav federation raises complex questions concerning contested and changing identities, collective memories, and representations of reality. Periods of social transformation, like that which took place all over former Yugoslavia, are of much interest to those who study the modification of memories and identities, even if not through migration per se. During the times of the Second Yugoslavia, cultural and ethnic distinction was only somewhat acknowledged. A complex set of contested collective memories co-existed in this multiethnic and multinational state (Bajt 2003), but a common supra-national identity, based on Yugoslav brotherhood and unity as well as on the workers movement, was promoted. This Yugoslav identity was primarily formulated as an ideological narrative by the communist political elite and supported by mass rituals and commemorations (Jović 2004). The collapse of the authoritarian regime in Yugoslavia involved a change in the sphere of ‘official memories’ (Jović 2004) and a rupture in people’s private memories, representations, traditions, as well as their social and personal identities. Questions of what it means to be Slovenian or Non-Slovenian became prominent. The complexities of contemporary Slovenian society, marked by the co-existence of various ethnic communities, who used to belong to the same supra-national entity, represent a prolific research context for the exploration of potentially existing contested collective interpretations of history and their relation to social representation and identification.

## CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Memory, the main focus of this study, is seen as inherently social from a social constructivist perspective. Moreover, *collective or social memory* is understood as a process of remembering and forgetting (Wertsch 2002; Middleton & Edwards 1990; Schwartz 1982) through which we “give shape to our experience, thought and imagination in terms of past, present and future” (Brockmeier 2002: 21). Contradictorily, it is concerned with

content and process, change and stability at the same time as it refers to continuity and preservation of the past but also pertains to altering the past in order 'to fit' the present (Middleton & Edwards 1990). In this way it is considered to play a role in rhetorical and political processes related to identification, and serves as a usable past for justification and legitimisation of beliefs, attitudes, and needs of the present (Paez, Basabe & Gonzales 1997; Wertsch 2002). Although drawing on Maurice Halbwachs' (1992 [1952]) notion of the *frameworks of collective memory*, the clear-cut distinction between historical, collective (social) and autobiographical (internal, personal) memory is questioned since memory cannot exist without individuals 'carrying out' the act of remembering, consequently undermining the possibility of existence of collective memory simply 'out there'. Collective memory is hence understood as a social or collective process influenced by various factors of the social sphere, but carried out by individuals, who belong to certain social groups, which in turn circularly influence people's 'ways of remembering'. This proximity between individual and collective memory, as well as the emphasis on the process of remembering as such, can be better understood by taking into account the notions of *identification and narrative*.

*Narrative* organization proves to be particularly important due to its capacity to give shape to the temporal dimension of human experience (Brockmeier 2002). The complexities of the world cannot be dealt with 'event-by-event', they are rather framed into larger structures, frames or schemata, providing the interpretative context for the various components they encompass (Bruner 1990). Narrative is the most pervasive and important form of discourse in human communication (Bruner 1990) that provides 'conceptual' or 'mental' tools for people to engage in the processes of remembering, forgetting, representing, and identifying.

*Identification* and remembering (forgetting) are well conceptualized through the *Social Representations Theory* (SRT) (Moscovici 1973; 2000; Duveen 2000; 2001), a prominent socio-psychological theory. Social representations are systems of values, ideas and practices – collective elaborations of social objects – which help people to orient themselves in the material and social world. SRT is hence explicitly concerned with different kinds of social knowledge, communication and types of representations. It supplies a framework for exploring contested interpretations of history, studying intergroup relations between 'us' and 'other', and understanding identity (re-)construction in the contexts where potentially distinct representations of reality exist. This approach has also extended our understanding of *social identity* as part of one's self-concept, based on membership of a social group, since it emphasizes that identity is not only about identifying but is also about 'being identified' by the 'other' (Duveen 2001).

In research concerned with the narration of memories about a particular historical transition or rupture, such as the transition from socialist Yugoslavia to capitalist Slovenia, the consideration of all these concepts is essential.

## **RESEARCH FORMULATION**

Accounts of existing research on collective memory, Slovenian national identity formation, and the transition from Yugoslavia to independent Slovenia draw mainly on the media, historical and political discourses, history textbooks, and so on (Bajt 2003; Pušnik 1999; 2003; 2004; Bašić-Hrvatini 1997). How well these sources reflect the (collective) memories and representations of the larger public is difficult to tell. For such a purpose, sample interview data are essential to account for the personal or individual dimensions of the 'social sphere' (Jovchelovitch 2002). Accordingly, individuals as active interpreters of cultural material or the 'memory consumers' (Kansteiner 2002) are the focal point of this study, which is concerned with the differing collective memories and representations between Slovenians and other former Yugoslav peoples (Bosniacs and Serbs) now resident in Slovenia in relation to some of the major recent historical and political events. The focus on samples of individuals, who perform the 'act of remembering', allows for the exploration of ways in which memory relates to the processes of identification and social representation, prominent issues also in migration research.

With the aim of exploring the differences that membership of an ethnic group might exert upon people's interpretation of the past, this report focuses on memories and representations of some major events related to the disintegration of former Yugoslavia. These are Tito's death, the wars in Slovenia, Bosnia and Croatia, the beginning of the war(s), the disintegration of the federation and the attainment of Slovenian independence. Through the analysis of memories of these events, the main objective is to elaborate on the studies that explore whether, and in what ways, group membership influences memories and interpretations of people's experience. It is predicted that people would remember the break up of Yugoslavia according to the collective framework of the group they belong to. Given that the interviewees live in the same environment, and were more or less exposed to the same events, both directly and via the media, it is expected that they will all remember such major events. The significance and the influence of these events, as well as the emotions attached to them, are expected to vary. Special focus is paid to the role that identification plays in people's memories and, vice versa, how narratively structured memories relate to people's constructions of who they are.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Those of us analyzing collective remembering and other forms of human action are just as socioculturally situated as the individuals and groups we examine. (Wertsch 2002: 18)

For the purpose of data collection, selective or theoretical sampling (Strauss 1987) was employed – deliberate selection, not aiming for representativeness but covering a good cross-section of people of different ethnicity, age, gender, educational background,

social class and so on. Eighteen (N=18) participants were recruited through various organisations, cultural societies, and acquaintances<sup>3</sup>, six from each of the three most dissimilar ethnic communities in Slovenia<sup>4</sup> – the Bosniac<sup>5</sup> and Serbian minorities and the Slovenian majority. According to the 2002 Census, Slovenia is considered a rather homogeneous state, with 83.1% of its population declaring themselves as Slovenian. However, the people from former Yugoslavia represent about 7% of the population. It is important to emphasize that they do not have a constitutionally defined minority status in the Republic of Slovenia at the moment. Many of them have lived in Slovenia for a few decades but are not considered to be autochthonous population; however, neither are they complete foreigners. Since the break up their ‘place’ is somewhere in between (Bajt 2003). The majority arrived in Slovenia as economic immigrants after World War II, or following the break up of Yugoslavia. The term ‘Non-Slovenians’ has been used to denote them. Owing to this ‘special’ status, the discrepancies between their memories of Yugoslavia and its disintegration, compared to the memories and representations of the majority population, might illuminate the fluid relationship between collective memory and social identity.

### **Interviewing, coding and analysing**

Multiple conflicting and changeable realities are assumed to exist ‘out there’ from the social constructivist standpoint taken in this research. Such a perspective is indispensable in research concerning contested interpretations of history. Individuals are considered as active interpreters of events and the researcher is perceived as participating in the processes of ‘meaning-making’. Accordingly, the semi-structured questionnaire, which consisted of 20 open-ended questions pertaining to people’s memories of specific events and their feelings of belonging to any particular group, did not aim at standardisation. Instead,

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<sup>3</sup> The Peace Institute (Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies), Society Serbian Community, and other sources.

<sup>4</sup> Due to the limits of this research, it was impossible to include other ethnic communities.

<sup>5</sup> As with other groups, it is also difficult to speak of a homogenous group of inhabitants originating from the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since May 2006, there are officially two registered Muslim religious communities in Slovenia – the Islamic community and the Slovenian Muslim Community. This speaks of the heterogeneity amongst Non-Slovenian ethnic groups in Slovenia. ‘Bosnian’, as an identity, still describes the inhabitants of Bosnia, mainly of Muslim cultural background. However, before, both Serbs and Croats from Bosnia would consider themselves Bosnian. The term ‘Muslim’ (Musliman) was introduced in the post WWII Yugoslav censuses as distinct from ‘Serb’ and ‘Croat’ as a culturally and religiously different majority group living in Bosnia and Hercegovina. ‘Muslims’ were thus constructed primarily as a cultural-ethnic group. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia the term ‘Muslim’ became more religiously determined, and the term ‘Bosniac’ (Bošnjaci) was introduced to replace it as a national identity attribution. The declaration of ‘Bosniac’ as a national category was enforced by the constitution of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1994, and is thus a new category alongside the categories of ‘Muslim’ and ‘Bosnian’. In accordance with this declaration the term ‘Bosniac’ is used in this report.

each interview took a slightly different direction and the same topics were discussed in varying order depending on the interviewee.<sup>6</sup>

Interviews took place in April 2006, lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were mostly conducted in Slovenian; however, some were in Bosnian, some in Serbian. They were tape-recorded, transcribed and translated into English. Using a blend of thematic and narrative qualitative analysis (Flick 1998; 2002; Mishler 1986), I systematically examined the obvious and implicit (or latent) meanings and content of the data.<sup>7</sup> Not to hamper the analysis by solely inductive formation of categories, the use of more open coding and categorising procedures was appropriate, such as those found in Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin 1994; Mayring 2004). Hence, a partially deductive and partially inductive procedure was employed, combining the strengths of data-driven with more deductive approaches. To increase consistency, coding took place twice with the aid of the *Atlas-ti* computer program. The program, used solely for indexing and organisation, allowed a systematic comparison of identified themes across groups and generations. Analysis was a circular process: it was essential to return to the already analyzed fragments to ensure the consistent usage of the codes.

## INTERPRETATION OF THE ANALYSIS

Above described analysis revealed four directions of interpretation. The first, with a focus on the form or structure, considers the emplotment of memories into higher level frameworks or narratives. The second concerns representations of Tito's Yugoslavia and is followed by the most interesting section on group-contested interpretations of the disintegration. The last part observes the complex changes in identification that occurred during the period of transition. All major unquestionably interrelated directions of interpretation are presented in a slightly shortened version due to the limits of this paper.

### Emplotment

The process of how elements acquire meaning through their integration into a narrative plot is described as 'emplotment' by Paul Ricoeur (1985). This represents a prolific characterisation of the processes underway in the analyzed data as specific memories are

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<sup>6</sup> In this way, the interview was an open discourse between the speakers (Mishler 1986), the atmosphere was more comfortable and the interviewees less concerned with what they could or could not say in what would ordinarily be a hierarchical encounter. I allowed the respondents to continue, even if they had digressed from the point of the question – in this way one is more likely to find stories or narratives.

<sup>7</sup> Codes were formulated, reformulated and discarded as the grasp of the data deepened. Some focused more on the content (e.g. *'Tito's death'*, or *'life events'*), whereas others denoted more subtle structures and patterns that emerged from the data (e.g. *'interrelatedness'*, *'taken-for-granted'* etc.).

placed into broader frameworks, related to other events, and to people's mental states so as to begin to make sense and acquire meaning as well as explanatory and interpretative power for the narrator. This is congruent with the view that narrative organisation of experience is important for making sense of the past as well as for establishing the interpretative context for present and future experience (Brockmeier 2002; Bruner 1990; Mishler 1986; Jovchelovitch & Bauer 2000). On the basis of the transcripts, it is possible to distinguish between grand narratives and shorter personal stories or memories of events. The two are in some ways indiscernible, since the personal and the social are entirely interrelated. Personal narratives only acquire meaning once they are situated within some grand narrative by means of sequencing into complex nets of events. The constant interplay of personal or family memories with more social or collective level narratives or frameworks seems to be a significant indicator of emplotment. In the following sections I present what appear to be other indicators of inherent narrative emplotment of memories.

### **Sequential narratives**

The proposed grand narratives, within which personal memories acquire meaning, correspond to the narratives of the war and/or disintegration of Yugoslavia, or to the narrative of Slovenian independence – all importantly intertwined. Although there appear to be several levels, all narratives share a common characteristic – their plot is essentially sequential. This can be observed from Janez's<sup>8</sup> description of how he remembers the day when Tito died. He was only 12 years old at the time.

M.K.<sup>9</sup>: Could you tell me how you remember it [the day when Tito died]?

Janez (38): It was like this...I don't know what day and all that was, but it was during the week. I was at home. I came from school and I was doing my homework. My dad and my mom were watching TV or they were somewhere close and they called us [the children] to come and see when they saw the special news: 'Comrade Tito died'. Then we all cried.

M.K.: Really? All of you?

Janez: Yes we all cried. I don't know. Then after a couple of days, when there was the funeral, we had something organised in school so that we watched the direct transmission on TV. There were no classes and we were watching the transmission of the funeral. I remember this well. I know that there was Tomaž Terček<sup>10</sup> on TV and that there was a black band or stripe or how it was ... 'Comrade Tito died' and everyone started crying. I don't know...

Apart from the unique temporal sequence of the events, which are incorporated into

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<sup>8</sup> The names of the respondents have been changed to protect their privacy, but a group specific marker was retained.

<sup>9</sup> M.K. (Marja Kuzmanič), the author's initials.

<sup>10</sup> A former well known journalist of Ljubljana Radio Television.

the plot ('emplotted'), other characteristic aspects of narrative are noticeable from this extract, such as a clear dramatic note, organisation and familiarisation of newly encountered experience and the presence of various actors as well as the mental state of the narrator. As pointed out by the theorists of narrative organisation of human experience, the sequencing of events represents a crucial step towards their emplotment and memorization.

### **Inseparability**

Inseparability, in other words interconnectedness or interrelatedness, signifies another key aspect of emplotment and narrative organization of memory. It refers to the notion that remembered events, which are incorporated into a narrative, often become highly intertwined and sometimes indiscernible. For instance, when asked about Tito's death, people began talking about their life in Yugoslavia in general. Emira (54) answered the question about Tito's death by saying that, "the only difference is that you were safer and more secure in those times. The authorities had a bigger power...how can I say this...the police or whoever [...]". Instead of focusing on Tito's death, she referred to the change or transition which it signifies, describing the period when he was the president. Similarly, when asked about how he remembers the day of Slovenian independence a student switched the conversation to say how both of us were the first generation of pupils who were not Tito's pioneers.<sup>11</sup> These two examples are just some of many, which point to the existence of broader frameworks or narratives that incorporate all these events and render them inseparable. Focusing on particular events seems to activate a broader framework in which other related memories are also organized.

### **Dialogicality: Thinking in oppositions**

Finally, to invoke a picture or a memory of the past, the interviewees relied on the opposition between 'before' and 'after'. This indicates a formation of a narrative which encompasses the notion of time and what happened during that time. To make sense of the past, memories have to be compared to some other period which leads to the sequencing of events and to formation of grand narratives from personal accounts and stories. Not only are memories remembered through the 'before-after' opposition, at the same time, the image of the past is appropriated through the eyes of the present. My discussion of Tito's death with Breda, a 55 year old teacher, might further illustrate this point.

M.K.: So this seems to be an important event for you [Tito's death]...why so?

Breda (55): I mean everything changed and it became worse because before it wasn't so bad. The majority, everyone...whoever wanted to work could work,

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<sup>11</sup> At around the age of seven all Yugoslav children were accepted among Tito's pioneers and later they became members of the Socialist Youth Association.



we had jobs, we had enough money. In those times I didn't have to check what I will and won't buy in the supermarket. I went to the supermarket, threw everything into the trolley, bought it and went home. And I even had money left at the end. Even at the end of the month I had money in my account.

M.K.: So there is a big economic or material difference...

Breda: Yes, very much so.

M.K.: Aha.

Breda: I also didn't check the electricity...how much it was. I never looked at the bills. How much is this, how much is that. I always had some money left. And I had a teacher's salary and a bit of supplement for the difficulty of my work.

In many ways this is a very telling extract<sup>12</sup> epitomizing several themes taken up in the analysis and interpretation. The interviewee makes a distinction between 'before' and 'after', concerning Tito's death – an event she mentioned as the most important national or political event, signifying the time when things began to change radically. No matter which event is perceived as a turning point, no matter how much of a rupture it represents for the interviewee, everyone employs the 'before-after' distinction to frame their experience and talk about how they remember it.

Returning to the above example, Tito's death is not important in itself, but because it reminds the interviewee of the past times which seem to be better in comparison with today. This is not an unusual point of view in former Yugoslav countries, nor in other post-communist countries. In this example, the content that is taken for granted is of particular interest. By saying how 'before' Tito died she did not have to worry about how much money she was spending, she is invoking the 'before-after' distinction and inferring that today she is probably hardly able to make ends meet. It is taken as common knowledge (i.e. representation) that being a teacher was not a particularly lucrative profession at the time, yet she was living well. However, if her status had changed in a positive manner, her representations and memories of those times would surely be different – according to the present. Thus, the memories are always seen from today's perspective in accordance with unique social, cultural, and political circumstances or, as emphasized by Halbwachs (1992 [1952]) and others, re-constructed in order to fit the present situation.

### **Memories and representations of Tito's Yugoslavia**

This section is explicitly concerned with the 'before' and as such represents the point of departure for the discussion of the 'after', which refers to the memories of the break up and will be discussed shortly. Although there were no specific questions in the questionnaires aiming at people's representations of Yugoslavia as such, this emerged as one of the most salient themes. The former Yugoslavia is conceptualized in relation to the representations of the communist or socialist ideology. These are sometimes given

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<sup>12</sup> As valuable as many of those that regrettably could not be included in this report.

directly, people describe them openly, but they are also expressed indirectly in their narratives of specific events corresponding to Serge Moscovici's (2000) notion of social representations as most commonly taken for granted or implicit.

By means of talking about 'before' and 'after' or 'now' this representation of Yugoslavia is contrasted with today's situation. Contested or polemical representations of Yugoslavia are present, which do not vary much between interviewees but within their accounts. There are common threads or themes around which representations and memories evolve; however, there is no common pattern in which members of different ethnic groups would differ in their representations of Yugoslavia – signifying that there are perhaps collectively shared representations among most members of Slovenian society.

Representations of former Yugoslavia cluster mainly around two poles, negative and positive. Among the later are especially those, to which the interviewees referred when talking about how life was better 'before', such as social security, safety, equality, prosperity, indiscrimination, and freedom. These are all conceptualized in comparison to the situation in Slovenia today.

Jožica (74): The feeling of safety for people was much higher. . . Today someone can be lying behind the road and no one will look at him, whereas they used to take care of every person. That was really a social state and today we have the market economy and everyone is just trying to get more money.

Samo (33): When we lived in Yugoslavia, everyone was equally poor.

Suzana (38): You could stop wherever you wanted, you slept wherever you wanted. No one asked you what are you or where are you or why are you here. It was more free.

These examples convey positive representations of the former state and explicitly or implicitly talk about the present. The past and the present are importantly contrasted and intertwined - one contributes to the definition the other and vice versa.

The above views are often, but not always, accompanied with a representation of the system as totalitarian, a form of dictatorship. Socialist ideas and the system are considered to be 'implanted' or 'imposed' into people's minds, forced upon them mainly through education. Again these views are contrasted with today, implying that now one is able to take a more objective viewpoint and look at the past. However, our opinions, memories and representations of the past are framed through today's collective frameworks. Even as a researcher, who exercises maximum reflexivity, one remains within the same cultural or social frameworks.

M.K.: So did Tito mean anything to you...since you cried when he died?

Janez (38): I don't know. At the time it was..., it was implanted so that he was supposed to mean something. I don't know... If I think about it today, I don't think he meant much to us.

There are numerous other examples where interviewees refer to the ways in which the socialist ideology was promulgated and express a less favourable view of former country.

## **CONTESTED NARRATIVES OF THE BREAK UP OF YUGOSLAVIA**

Three kinds of grand narratives according to which people talk about the events related to the break up of Yugoslavia were identified: (a) narrative of transition or change, (b) narrative of disintegration, and (c) narrative of war.

### **Transition or change**

The theme of transition or change is the narrative which encompasses a rupture of a least disruptive character. It comes as no surprise that those who understand the break up mainly in terms of transition are mostly members of the Slovenian majority. Others give some attention to the transition, but these are mainly those who did not experience highly disturbing events, especially the younger individuals. Transition or change encompasses several different themes, but pertains especially to the transformation from the former to the current political system and is recognized by the accentuation of the primarily positive alterations brought by the era of independent Slovenia.

Gaja (22): I think that after the attainment of independence Slovenia came into a sort of a transition period, when it had to prove to itself and to others that this is a country capable of being independent and that it can be economically successful, etc. [...] I think that this influenced our life very much. How I see this today, it seems to me that it had a positive impact, right. This is probably also important. If I think about myself and my family, I think that I have better opportunities now than I would have had before. What do I know... I still feel today that it had an important influence.

Sanel (25): It is actually a start of a completely new... a change ... a process of change begun in that way. Since then so many things changed that remained the same before. Many many things...

These two extracts communicate the manner in which Slovenian independence, as a part of the break up of Yugoslavia, is often viewed. For Slovenian interviewees especially, this is a period of change marked less by an identity crisis and described as something exciting – a period of new opportunities.

## Disintegration

Present explicitly or implicitly among the interviewees of the newly formed minorities in Slovenia is the sense of having lost a homeland, of becoming a foreigner in their own country. There appear to be different ways in which these people experienced the period of late 1980s and early 1990s, depending on how much the war and related events influenced their lives. The interviewees of Serbian ancestry focus more on the fact that the country disintegrated – what represents the moment of rupture for them.

Slavica (55): For me a very horrible and sad event - so to speak - was when Yugoslavia disintegrated. That was also shocking for me because I was brought up in such a way that there is only one homeland and I thought I was in my homeland and that I won't need two citizenships...and I don't have one.

Nikola (60): The third [important event] and what hurt me the most is the break up of ex-Yugoslavia. We lived in some ideals, in brotherhood and unity, we lived this and we believed in it and then it all disintegrated overnight. So...I'm speaking emotionally, I feel this very deeply.

These people found themselves in a peculiar situation. For them, the most salient aspect was the fact that the common homeland, where they used to be the majority population, suddenly disappeared. In this sense, the disintegration is often related to the establishment of borders between countries, and in many cases interviewees talked about how new borders impeded them from travelling to visit their families in Serbia and/or Bosnia.

## War(s)

The analysis shows that there exists a common pattern in which people mention the war as the most important event in their life. They often refer to the 'War in Yugoslavia' as a single entity, but also to the 'War in Bosnia' in particular.<sup>13</sup> Sanel, a 22 year old student, answered my introductory question about the most important events in his life:

I mostly remember a part of my childhood that I spent in Bosnia, then my 6<sup>th</sup> birthday because I got a horse from my grandfather. Then the most important event is the war in Bosnia.

Overall, there were five interviewees who mentioned the war straight away, all of

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<sup>13</sup> There is no one 'war in Yugoslavia' in the memories of the interviewees, although sometimes the interviewees and the interviewer referred to the whole period in this way. Instead, there is 'war in Slovenia', 'war in Bosnia', and 'war in Croatia'. There are also different views as to when the war began, although most of the interviewees speak about the events after June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1991, as the beginning of 'everything'.

them Bosniacs. This is not to say that the others find the war irrelevant, but points to the importance this experience played in people's lives and the role it still plays in their memories, identity and thought. For this group, the importance of the war is more personal and intimate; it represents a greater rupture in their lives, selves and identities. Although almost all of the interviewees lived in Slovenia during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia<sup>14</sup>, they experienced and memorized those years differently depending on their distinct situation or social location. Not only did these people mention the war straight away, but often interviews as a whole evolved in the same tone – within the same grand narrative or framework of collective memory.

## CHANGING IDENTITIES

With the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Slovenian attainment of independence, the social environment in which people understood 'who they are' transformed considerably. Depending on their unique circumstances, people experienced a certain rupture in their identities, followed by coping, construction and re-construction of social representations, redefinition of certain group identities and re-establishment of what is acceptable and what is not. Such complex shifts are related to how and what people remember, as well as how this becomes structured narratively. A prominent theme that surfaced during the analysis is this emergence of new and reformulation of old identities.

Interviewees engage in remembering the period of the break up and the attainment of Slovenian independence in terms of what could be characterized as a rupture in people's sense of self, a transition from 'no differentiation to differentiation'. Many of the interviewees talked about how 'before' people were not aware of where others come from; ethnic identity or ethnicity was not of any particular importance in that society. This changed with the disintegration and independence. Slovenians, and especially 'Non-Slovenians' remember this as a period when Slovenian national identity was emerging. Some of them describe how suddenly they felt differently, perhaps as foreigners, in what used to be 'their own' country.

Jasmin (28): Of this 'consciousness raising' I remember that as a member of a minority in Slovenia you could feel some pressure especially during the time when this Slovenian national consciousness was on the rise. We, as a minority in Slovenia, were at the time perhaps in an awkward position. Probably the same would happen if the roles were reversed.

Regardless of the ethnic group to which the interviewees belong, all attested the transition from 'no differentiation to differentiation', but Slovenians experienced it in the least disruptive fashion. This can partly be explained by noting that one could no longer

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<sup>14</sup> There are two exceptions; one moved from Slovenia to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992, whereas one moved to Ljubljana, Slovenia from Sarajevo in the same year.

be a Yugoslav in an ethnic, legal or political sense. According to Sekulić, Massey and Hodson (1994), persons from minority nationalities in their republic, urban residents, youths, and those from mixed-nationality parentage were among those who were most likely to identify themselves as Yugoslavs. Moreover, it can be related to the socio-political processes occurring across Yugoslavia throughout the 1980s and 1990s – some form of ethno-national mobilization and/or rising of national consciousness. The theme of changing identities is salient across interviewees' accounts, but the memories carry significantly different meanings depending on how people were socially located 'before' and 'after' the disintegration. This is not solely related to how they identify themselves, but, perhaps even more importantly, how they are seen in the eyes of others.

Jožica (74): Sometimes there used to be many Southerners around here, but they were all 'Bosnians' for us. Understand? We never knew anything...Serbs, Croats, Muslims, and those...we always had good relations with all of them.

Whilst it may be true that prior to disintegration it was less important where one is from, in the eyes of some Slovenians people from 'the South' were (and still are) often considered as one entity (the 'Southerners'), as in the abstract above. This intensified after the disintegration and through the 'building' of Slovenian national consciousness or identity. During this process, promulgated mainly by the political and media discourse campaign, people from other republics of the former Yugoslavia began to signify 'the other' – that which is not Slovenian (Pušnik 2003). Since a social group appears only to acquire significance if juxtaposed to another group or 'the other' (Deschamps 1982), for the Slovenians the people from the other republics became this 'other'. The tendency to define everyone as 'Bosnian' or 'Southerner' is congruent with Deschamps' (1982) characterization of dominant and dominated groups, where the dominant members of a society perceive other 'entities' as being composed of undifferentiated elements, who are not unique. It is argued that both dominant and dominated define themselves in relation to the same norm. The dominated are assigned a particular position or location and as such their identity entails both – processes of identification and of being identified (Duveen 2000).

In the following, some important points of discussion are considered before turning to the conclusion.

## **DISCUSSION**

What is said during an interview is always communicated to a particular 'other', and it might take different directions depending on how the listener is perceived and represented. High levels of reflexivity and transparency of the analytical procedures were sought. However, although attempts at awareness and reflection were constantly made, one should not think that, simply by virtue of reflexivity, the researcher "can ever completely

control the multiple and complex effects of the interview relationship” (Bourdieu 1999: 615). Rather than eliminating the effects of the interviewer, I tried to control them and also to reduce the ‘symbolic violence’ as well as to enhance the conditions of ‘non-violent communication’ by allowing each interview to take its own direction and by establishing rapport (Bourdieu 1999).

Not only because of the small size of the sample, but also because the interviewees come from very different parts of the former state<sup>15</sup>, ethnic groups, whose accounts this study compared, were not homogenous as expected at first. In fact, they were quite heterogeneous, but still some group differences appear to be present. The data revealed clearly that perceived ethnic or national identities are thoroughly intertwined with who and what people are as workers, students, or family members. This is related to the fact that age, sex, ethnicity and social position assign people a specific location within a society (Deschamps 1982), which, in turn, influences their social identity. Everyone possesses a unique blend of identities and memories, rendering it difficult to identify memories that vary according to one’s affiliation with a certain social group.

## CONCLUSION

By initiating research in collective memory this study represents a snapshot of 21<sup>st</sup> century Slovenian realities. The main questions pertained to how the processes of remembering and identification are shaped or organized and what is the nature of the relationship between the two. The article observed whether there are systematic ways in which certain people in contemporary Slovenian context remember the period of disintegration of Yugoslavia.

The war (or disintegration) represents an event which radically interrupted people’s everyday life, and is viewed as a rupture. There appear to be systematic ways in how this rupture is remembered and interpreted. Although the ethnic groups of the participants were not homogeneous, the analysis indicated that there exist varying interpretations of reality, frameworks of collective memory or grand narratives: the narratives of ‘transition’, ‘disintegration’ and ‘war’. The extent to which the interviewees focused on a particular aspect of the experience relating to the break up of Yugoslavia speaks of the differential influence and significance that these events exerted upon various communities in Slovenia. This is related to the notion that one’s memories are influenced by the social location one occupies, or by the social representations and identities one assumes within a particular social order. However, representations and identities only come into existence through the human capacity to remember, which is, in turn, contingent on people’s ability to structure their experience narratively.

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<sup>15</sup> Some of the ethnic Serbs are originally Bosnian Serbs, whereas others (or their parents) come from Serbia (and Montenegro). Likewise, the samples of Slovenians, as well as Bosniacs, were very heterogeneous.

By examining one dimension of the social sphere through the medium of people's memories of specific events, this study has shown how the period is also conceptualized through the changes that occurred in terms of identity (re)construction. The theme of changing identities signifies a period of instability, when people's basic sense of 'who they are' was under attack and when they had to re-situate themselves in the newly emerging social order. This reformulation of different social identities seems to have penetrated various segments of Slovenian society. As a consequence, some people experienced it in rather disturbing ways. Taken together, social representations do not only enable communication and understanding, but also serve as a guide for people's behaviour. What occurred on the abstract representational level of identification seems to have been transposed to a more concrete interpersonal level. Not only did people, who moved to Slovenia before the war or who were born to 'Non-Slovenian' parents, suddenly become foreigners in their own country, they became disliked and often discriminated against.

Above all, this report reflects two important things. It is a fact that the processes of 'construction' of collective memory are constantly underway and that contemporary political, historical and media discourses shape which events are being remembered and commemorated, and select which ones are to fall into historic oblivion. Yet, individuals are active interpreters of the information that is presented to them, and, hence, collective memories always embody unique blends of various influences and interpretations. When the respondents were critical about the present situation, the representations of the past served the purpose of denoting better times. However, negative views of the past, made sense of or justified the present system or situation. In the end, although it appears that group membership might afford people access to different narrative or collective frameworks and that the complex phenomena of collective memory, identity and representation are dialogically related, these all represent processes which involve active individuals performing the act of remembering, rather than simply having memories 'imprinted' onto their minds.

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## POVZETEK

### KOLEKTIVNI SPOMIN SPREMINJAJOČIH SE IDENTITET: ŠTUDIJA Z RAZPADOM JUGOSLAVIJE POVEZANIH SPOMINOV IN IDENTITET

Marja Kuzmanić

Prispevek predstavlja začetni korak v raziskovanju organizacije ter medsebojne povezanosti kolektivnega spomina, socialnih predstav ter identifikacije v sodobnem slovenskem postsocialističnem prostoru. Skozi analizo spominov na pomembnejše dogodke razpada Jugoslavije, kot so denimo Titova smrt, začetek vojn(e), vojne na nekaterih področjih nekdanje Jugoslavije ter osamosvojitve Republike Slovenije, obravnava razlike v kolektivnih spominih ter socialnih predstavah različnih generacij Slovencev ter drugih pripadnikov nekdanjih jugoslovanskih narodnosti, ki danes živijo v Sloveniji.

S pripadniki treh etničnih skupin (Slovenci, Bošnjaki in Srbi) je bilo izvedenih osemnajst pol-strukturiranih intervjujev. Rezultati kvalitativne analize, utemeljene na socialno-konstruktivistični raziskovalni paradigmi, so obravnavani preko t.i. 'vzgodbljanja' [v izvirniku emplotment] spominov na posamezne dogodke v zaporedne narativne strukture – procesov pozabljanja ter spominjanja. Prispevek prikazuje nasprotujoče si interpretacije razpada nekdanje Jugoslavije (narativne 'tranzicije', 'razpada' in 'vojne'), spomine in predstave o Titovi Jugoslaviji ter zapletene spremembe, do katerih je v Sloveniji prišlo v času tranzicije na področju socialne (predvsem etnične) identifikacije. Te spremembe so pomembno povezane z vprašanjem, kako postanejo dostopni različni narativni oziroma kolektivni okvirji na podlagi posameznikove identifikacije s socialnimi ali kulturnimi skupinami.