Collective Memory and Social Identity: A social psychological exploration of the memories of the disintegration of former Yugoslavia

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Abstract: Through narration of memories of events related to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, this study takes a social psychological approach and explores the generational and ethnic group differences in collective memories, social representations and social identities of peoples living in Slovenia. It represents an initial step at mapping out the differing collective memories, representations and identities of Slovenians and other former Yugoslav peoples now resident in Slovenia in relation to some of the major recent historical and political events (Tito's death, the wars in Slovenia, Bosnia and Croatia, the beginning of the war(s), and the attainment of independence of Slovenia). Eighteen semi-structured interviews with members of three ethnic communities (Bosniac and Serb minority and Slovenian majority) were conducted and are qualitatively analysed. The findings are discussed in two sections. The first illustrates the contested interpretations of the break up of the federation, whereas the second section discusses the complex changes in identification that occurred during the transition in the Slovenian context. Above all, the material reveals that contested narratives of the break up of Yugoslavia (the narratives of 'transition', 'disintegration' and 'war') are present.

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

Kolektivni spomin in socialna identiteta: socialno psihološka študija spominov na razpad nekdanje Jugoslavije

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Povzetek: Raziskava iz perspektive socialne psihologije obravnava generacijske in etnične skupinske razlike v kolektivnih spominih, socialnih predstavah ter identitetah prebivalcev Slovenije skozi naracijo spominov na dogodke ob razpadu nekdanje Jugoslavije. Predstavlja prvi korak v raziskovanju kolektivnih spominov, predstav in identitet Slovencev ter drugih pripadnikov nekdanjih Jugoslovanskih narodnosti, ki živijo v Sloveniji. Spomini, ki jih obravnava, se nanašajo na nekatere pomembne zgodovinske in politične dogodke, kot so Titova smrt, začetek vojn(e), osamosvojitev Slovenije in vojne na nekaterih področjih nekdanje Jugoslavije. S pripadniki treh etničnih skupin (Slovenci, Bošnjaki in Srbi) je bilo

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izvedenih 18 polstrukturiranih intervjujev. Kvalitativna analiza je pokazala zanimive rezultate, ki so predstavljeni v dveh sklopih. Prvi ponazarja nasprotujoče si intepretacije razpada nekdanje Jugoslavije, medtem ko se drugi sklop osredotoča na kompleksne spremembe, do katerih je v slovenskem kontekstu prišlo na področju socialnih identitet v času tranzicije. Raziskava v prvi vrsti razkriva, da obstajajo nasprotujoči si narativi razpada Jugoslavije (narativi 'tranzicije', 'razpada' ter 'vojne').

Ključne besede: kolektivni spomin, socialna identiteta, socialne predstave, narativ, razpad nekdanje Jugoslavije

Former Yugoslavia, a country of numerous ethnic communities, famous for 40 years of relatively successful and peaceful federalism, and its break-up in early 1990s represent the focal points of this study[1]. The period of concern is the post-WWII or 'Second' Yugoslavia, marked by Tito's leadership, and especially its break-up, which began with the secession of Slovenia on June 25th, 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.

During this period 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. 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). 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; Bašić-Hrvatin, 1997; Pušnik, 1999, 2003, 2004). 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 other dimensions of the 'social sphere' (Jovchelovitch, 2002). 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. Since no similar study from a social psychological perspective has been conducted in Slovenian context before, this study represents an initial step at mapping out the differing collective memories, representations and identities of Slovenians and other former Yugoslav peoples (Bosniacs and Serbians) now resident in Slovenia in relation to the disintegration of former Yugoslavia.

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[1] This article is based upon the author's Master's course project, conducted during her postgraduate studies MPhil in Social and Developmental Psychology at the University of Cambridge.

The period of the breakdown of the Yugoslav federation raises complex questions concerning contested and changing identities, collective memories, and representations of reality. Such periods of social transformation are of much interest to those who study the modification of memories and identities. 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 was promoted. 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 interpretations of history and their relation to social representation and identification.

Theoretical background(s)

Social or collective memory

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 (Middleton and Edwards, 1990; Schwartz, 1982; Wertsch, 2002) through which we "give shape to our experience, thought and imagination in terms of past, present and future" (Brockmeier, 2002, p. 21). Contradictorily, it is concerned with content and process or 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 and 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 and Gonzales, 1997; Wertsch, 2002).

Although this study draws partially on Halbwachs' (1992 [1952]) notion of the *frameworks of collective memory,* the distinction between historical, collective (social) and autobiographical (internal, personal) memory is not entirely accepted. Memory, namely, cannot exist without individuals 'carrying out' the act of remembering, which consequently undermines the possibility of existence of collective memory 'out there'. Thus, collective memories are collectively shared representations of the past, whereas collective frameworks provide memory cues for individuals, on the basis of which similar representations among members of a group are formed.

Social representations: between the individual and the social

Identification and remembering (forgetting) are well conceptualized through the *Social Representations Theory* (SRT) (Duveen, 2000, 2001; Moscovici, 1973, 2001), which is explicitly concerned with different kinds of social knowledge, communication and types of representations. Social representations are described as systems of shared values, ideas and practices, collective elaborations of social objects, which enable people to orient themselves in their material and social world (Moscovici, 1973). Moreover, they are also tools which enable understanding, behaving and communication and provide a sense of stability. It is important to recognize that representations often remain implicit in ordinary patterns of communication.

The SRT approach has extended our understandings of the social psychological processes involved in identity (re)construction as conceptualized by Tajfel (1981). For Tajfel *social identity* is "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). SRT understands social identity in a broader sense as a way of organizing meanings: social representations precede identities and identity pertains to their internalization (Duveen, 2001).The social representations approach is better equipped for considering the content and formation of identities since social identity is not only about identifying, but is also about 'being identified' (Duveen, 2001); it is constructed and reconstructed internally as well as externally. If identity is about the organization of meanings and social representations, it necessarily refers to the positions or locations individuals occupy within a specific social structure (Descamps, 1982) or within the world of representations. Consequently, identities enable people to function as competent social actors, provide a sense of stability, but they also represent constraints.

Representation and identification go together in a dialogical sense (Jovchelovitch, 1996); only by identifying with a group can one understand its representations, and representations determine the identifications we make. In a similar manner, collective memories and social representations are crucially interlinked. If memories are representations of the past, and if the existence of social representations somehow relies on our memories of past experience, then collective memory and social representations can, on some level, be translated into each other (László, 2001).

In the end, not only identification and remembering (forgetting) but also ruptures in representational systems and identities are well conceptualized through this approach. These ruptures are of particular interest in the present study since events related to the break up of Yugoslavia represent ruptures of varying importance. Taken together, SRT represents a framework for exploring contested interpretations of history, studying inter-group relations between 'us' and 'other', and understanding identity (re-)construction in the contexts where potentially distinct representations of reality exist.

Dialogicality between self and memory

There is an utterly dialogical relationship between the self (identity) and memory. Without memory we would not know who we are, where we are or what we are – we would be robbed of the very thing which makes us human – the ability to think. It is through memory that a sense of self is perpetuated – memory and remembering play a crucial role in one's sense of self and are thus important for personal and social identity (Bruner and Feldman, 1996; Gillis, 1994; Halbwachs, 1992[1952]; Pennebaker and Banasik, 1997). In a sense "collective memory is the active past that forms our identities" (Olick and Robins, 1998, p. 111). There are different ways in which historical events affect people's (collective) memories since there appears to be a critical period for the construction of one's identity – namely the period between twelve and twenty-five years of age (Conway, 1997; Pennebaker and Banasik, 1997; Schuman and Scott, 1989). During this period national events seem to have a stronger impact on one's memory. This also seems to be the basis for the formation of generations and hence generational memory (Mannheim, 1952). In sum, memory serves as a 'usable' past, which supports the creation and sustenance of coherent individual and group identities (Wertsch, 2002). On the other hand, what one remembers is defined by the identities one assumes (Gillis, 1994).

Narrative as the common organising principle

Last but not least, *narrative* organization is especially important, owing to its capacity to give shape to the temporal dimension of human experience (Brockmeier, 2002). Memory, social representations and identities assume narrative forms. This is the most pervasive and important form of discourse in human communication (Bruner, 1990) that helps us to make sense of our experience by playing a part in the 'meaning-making' process. The complexities of the world cannot be dealt with 'event-by-event', but are framed into larger structures, frames or schemata, providing the interpretative context for the various components they encompass (Bruner, 1990).

Narratives are made up of sequences of events and mental states with human beings as the main characters. The configuration of a plot – the construction of a whole from a sequence of events – is especially important for the narrative structure, since "it is through the plot that individual units (or smaller stories within the big story) in the narrative acquire meaning" (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000, p. 59).

Taken together, current social representations determine our memories of the past and are, at the same time, sustained by them. Memories and representations 'feed' group or social identities, but, in turn, they are also determined by people's membership of particular groups. Above all, narrative represents the most basic and ubiquitous form of organization of human experience and provides 'conceptual' or

'mental' tools for people to engage in the processes of remembering, forgetting, representing and identifying. 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 questions

With the aim of exploring the differences that membership of an ethnic group or generation might exert upon people's interpretation of the past, this study focuses on memories and representations of some major events related to the disintegration of former Yugoslavia: Tito's death, the wars in Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia, the beginning of the war(s), the disintegration of the federation and the attainment of Slovenian independence. 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 major events. The significance and the influence of these events are expected to vary.

Other important questions concern generational differences in collective memories and representations. This is of interest because the older generations were educated in the socialist regime, whereas younger generations entered the education system as the state began to unravel. Previous research showed that there are diverse ways in which historical events affect people's collective memories as there appears to be a critical period for the construction of one's identity – namely the period between 12 and 25 years of age (Conway, 1997; Pennebaker and Banasik, 1997; Schuman and Scott, 1989). During this period, national events are understood to have a stronger impact on one's memory, and this is considered to be the basis for the formation of generations and 'generational memory' (Mannheim, 1952). It is expected that there will be noticeable generational differences in the recall and significance of the events.[2]

Concerning the complex processes of identification, from a social psychological perspective, the main questions focus on people's experiences of the changes in the official sphere and how these were reflected and coped with on the individual level. "With the collapse of the regime and (even more) of the state, every individual has to ask themselves again and again: who am I now, after the change?" (Jović, 2004, p. 104) This is particularly intriguing from the perspective of various ethnic communities living in the same social environment. Following from SRT (Moscovici,

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[2] This clearly represents something that needs to be further explored as the most pronounced cohort discrepancies are only about to become salient in the coming years.

2001), such transformations at the inner psychological level are expected to influence people's conduct and, consequently, affect majority – minority relations.

Method

Epistemological stance

This study assumes a *social constructivist* approach. It is understood that there exists no one true reality 'out there'; instead, there are multiple conflicting and changeable realities. Relativist epistemological perspective is indispensable in research, which is concerned with potentially contested interpretations of history. Through this approach one can consider individuals as active interpreters of the world and the researcher is perceived as participating in the processes of meaning-making as well. This is important for the method of semi-structured interview, where the interviewer and the interviewee are considered to be engaged in a joint process of knowledge 'production'. The social constructivist approach is moreover appropriate because of its focus on language as a representational system, which functions to create and maintain social realities through the process of social exchange and shared meanings (Gergen, 1985).

Sample and sampling considerations

Selective or theoretical sampling (Strauss, 1987) was employed – deliberate selection to cover a good cross-section of people of different ethnicity, age, gender, educational background, social class, and so on. The sample was chosen purpose-fully; the interviewees were recruited with the so-called snowball technique through various organisations, cultural societies and acquaintances.[3] It was decided to focus on members of three probably most dissimilar former Yugoslav ethnic communities in Slovenia – the Bosniac and Serb 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. There are two officially recognized minorities, Italians and Hungarians, and a further group with recognized special rights, the Roma. Other ethnic communities – predominantly people from former Yugoslavia – officially represent about 7% of the population, but do not have a constitutionally defined special status. They have lived in Slovenia for a few decades and are not considered to be an autochthonous population; however, they are not complete foreigners either. Since the break up their 'place' is somewhere in between (Bajt, 2003). The majority of the current members of these ethnic

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[3] Amongst them: Peace Institute (Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies), Society Serbian Community, etc.

groups arrived in Slovenia as economic immigrants after World War II as well as following the break up. The term Non-Slovenians has been used to denote them.

There are about 39,000 Serbians, 36,000 Croatians and 40,000 people who declare themselves as Bosniacs, Muslims or Bosnians.[4] They represent the largest ethnic communities and were therefore considered for inclusion in this research. Due to the time and space limits, Croats, who are culturally seen as the closest to the Slovenes, were not included.[5]

Data collection

One of the first steps of the research process was the construction of a semi-structured questionnaire which was piloted and improved accordingly. Participants were first asked some basic demographic questions, which were followed by about twenty open ended questions pertaining to their memories of specific events (Tito's death, the wars in Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia, the beginning of the war(s), the disintegration of the federation and the attainment of Slovenian independence) and feelings of belonging. I carried out 18 interviews: six with people from each of the three communities. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Respondents' ages ranged from a 22 to 82, with an average of 45. Ten interviewees were male and eight female, and all but one had Slovenian citizenship. Most of the interviews were conducted in Slovenian; however, some were in Bosnian or Serbian. I was often introduced to the participants through someone they were acquainted with. For a table with more detailed demographic information about the sample see Appendix.

Interviewing took place in Slovenia in April 2006. It was conducted individually either in quiet rooms set aside for the purpose of conducting research, or in people's homes, where it was ensured that we would not be disturbed. All interviews were tape-recorded and participants' consent was obtained orally prior to the commencement. My aim was not standardisation, instead, each interview took a slightly different direction; the same topics were discussed in varying order depending on the

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[4] It is impossible to speak of a homogenous group of inhabitants originating from the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since May 8th 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. Before, both Serbs and Croats from Bosnia would consider themselves as Bosnian. The term 'Muslim' was introduced in the post WWII Yugoslav censuses to distinguish them from Serbs and Croats as a culturally and religiously different majority group living in Bosnia. 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' was introduced to replace it. 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 the 1994 declaration, the term 'Bosniac' is used in the remainder or this report.

[5] Croatians are predominantly Catholic (87.8%) like Slovenians (57.8 % in 2002), they use the same Latin alphabet and are considered to share a common history with the Slovenians under the Habsburg Empire.

interviewee. In this way, the interview was an open discourse between the speakers (Mishler, 1986). I believe that this rendered the atmosphere relaxed and the interviewees were less concerned about what they could or could not say in what would ordinarily be a hierarchical encounter. Following Mishler, I allowed the respondents to continue answering even if they had digressed from the point of the question – only in this way are we likely to find stories or narratives which construct their understanding of experience.

Interviews were transcribed and translated into English. I strove to produce quality transcripts not only focusing on the content but also on more subtle aspects, such as retaining the original syntactic structure, denoting pauses, and indicating raised or lowered tones of voice if significant. This was done in order to minimise the fact that the transcription is a small departure from the 'reality' of the interview – an interpretation or a 'translation' (Bourdieu, 1999; Kvale, 1996). Transcription to a certain extent eradicates body language, gestures, demeanour, mimicry and looks, silences, innuendoes, and slips of the tongue (Bourdieu, 1999). On the other hand, this 'double translation' helped me to get a good grasp of the material and supplied me with initial ideas for the analysis and interpretation. As such it represented the first step of the analysis. It also played an important objectifying role (Bourdieu, 1999), as it allowed me to distance myself from the interviews and enabled me to reflect on the process of the interview itself.

Data analysis

Transcripts were analysed with the help of computer programme Atlas-ti. They were coded twice at different occasions to increase consistency. It is important to emphasize that coding is an ongoing or circular process, during which returning back to the already analysed fragments of data is an essential part of ensuring that the researcher is using the codes in the same manner. A number of codes were reformulated or discarded as the understanding of the data deepened. Some focused more on the content (e.g. *'Tito's death'* or *'life events'*), whereas others denoted more subtle styles and patterns that emerged from the data (e.g. *'interrelatedness', 'taken-for-granted'* etc.). In this manner the face value of what was said was as important as how it was communicated. The most important themes and sub-themes were identified and their functions and interrelatedness was explored. The research questions were very open and hence the analysis would be hampered by solely inductive formation of categories. More open coding and categorising procedures seemed to be appropriate, such as those found in grounded theory (Mayring, 2004). Accordingly, coding was a partially deductive and partially inductive procedure to combine the strengths of data-driven approaches with the more deductive ones. Atlas-ti was used for indexing and organisation of the material and served the function of systematic comparison of identified themes across ethnic groups and generations.

Using of a blend of thematic and narrative analysis (Flick, 1998, 2002; Mishler, 1986) this study systematically examined the obvious but also the more implicit or latent meanings and content of the data. Narrative analysis treats responses to interview questions as stories (Mishler, 1986) and, accordingly, special focus was paid to the structure of narratives as one of the most important forms of human communication and memory organisation (Bruner, 1990). Although the data collection technique was not explicitly a narrative interview, many stories assumed exactly the specific narrative shape.

Analysis and interpretation

Analysis revealed four major interrelated directions of interpretation, of which only two are presented in this report. The first considers the group-contested interpretations of the disintegration, whereas the second concerns the processes related to social identity by focusing on the complex changes in identification, differentiation and discrimination that occurred during the period of transition. The sections concerning the representations of Tito's Yugoslavia and the form or structure of narratives had to be omitted due to the space limits and were published elsewhere.[6]

Contested narratives of the break up of Yugoslavia

By focusing on the form or structure of people's responses, the analysis of 'emplotment' (Ricoeur, 1985) of memories established that memories of the events are 'emplotted' or incorporated into various overarching collective frameworks or grand narratives. After Ricoeur 'emplotment' is defined as the process of how elements acquire meaning through their integration into a narrative plot. Several indicators of narrative emplotment were identified during the analysis: personal vs. grand narratives, sequential narratives, inseparability and thinking in oppositions (dialogicality).[7] What is conceptualized as a grand narrative is the prevalent pattern of interpretation of the break up of Yugoslavia.[8] In other words, it is concerned with how the interviewees mainly remember this period. Grand narratives are established in relation to the events that preceded the break up of Yugoslavia and as such are related to people's memories and representations of the former state.

Three kinds of grand narratives according to which people talk about the events related to the break up of Yugoslavia were identified by means of rigorous qualitative

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[6] See Kuzmanić (2008).

[7] For further discussion see Kuzmanić (2008).

[8] During the process of analyzing and writing this report I realized that most commonly I, myself, referred to this process as 'disintegration'; hence, this appeared to be the most salient part of the experience for me. Being aware of how language can convey my own representations, I would like to stress that I am referring to the period as a whole and not emphasizing any of its aspects.

analysis: (a) narrative of transition or change, (b) narrative of disintegration, and (c) narrative of war. Although difficult to say with certainty, it is possible to identify a trend, where members of different groups focus on a particular narrative depending on the aspect that was more salient for them.

Transition or change

The theme of transition or change is the narrative which encompasses a rupture of a least disruptive character. Consequently, 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 transition from the communist and socialist ideology to democracy, capitalism and the era of independent Slovenia.

> Gaja (22)[9]: *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.*

> Sanel (22): *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 well the manner in which Slovenian independence, as a part of the break up of Yugoslavia, is often viewed. What remains is the question of how prevalent such a view is in any particular interview. 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. It is understood in opposition to the previous period and incorporated into a greater narrative.

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 on the fact that the country disintegrated, and this is what represents the moment of

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[9] The names of the respondents have been changed to protect their privacy. However, a group specific marker was retained in their names. See Appendix I for more information about the interviewees.

rupture for them. The following are just a few examples of many referring to this.

> 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 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. 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 6th 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 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[10], 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. In the

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[10] There are two exceptions; one moved from Slovenia to Serbia and Montenegro in 1992, whereas one moved to Ljubljana, Slovenia from Sarajevo in the same year.

following extract, Jasmin, a Bosniac student, talks about the period during the war, when he and his family were taking care of their fellow family members who came as refugees from Bosnia.

> Jasmin (28): *And it wasn't so easy to grow up with this because it wasn't all the same to me … I mean concerning what was going on, like the suffering of the close relatives. I think it influenced me in the sense that perhaps in that period I was maybe a bit more lost and depressed.*

The war appears to be a much more salient aspect for Bosniacs, whereas people with a Serbian ethnic background refer to it more often as 'disintegration'. Slovenians and the younger interviewees view this period more in terms of change and transition, and hence less of a rupture. However, this last aspect is almost equally salient for everyone, perhaps because currently they all live in Slovenia. How people conceptualize the period of the break up as a whole is related to how much, and in what ways the war(s), independence or the disintegration in general influenced them and to how they were socially located as well as emotionally involved. The analysis clearly revealed that for the interviewees with Bosniac ethnic background the war was much more tangible as they had relatives who were either victims or fighters in the war or refugees who commonly sought shelter with their families in Slovenia. On the other hand, most of the Slovenian majority had almost no immediate experience with the war and hence the interviewees remembered the period with more emphasis on the transition and change for the better and less as on the rupture.

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, which was 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 in the interviews is the emergence of new identities and the 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 (Duveen, 2000). This is less prevalent for Slovenian respondents, who still recognize the transition from 'no differentiation' to 'differentiation'. The emergence of a new social order in Slovenia is inherently conceptualized within an overarching narrative of the break up. Finally, the emergence of differentiation is reflected in the memories and practices of discrimination as conceptualized by the Social Representations Theory.

From no differentiation to differentiation

From 'no differentiation' to 'differentiation' is a theme which defines the period studied through the emergence, reconstruction or accentuation of a variety of identities. 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. As such it indicated a rupture in identities, the creation of a space where new social representations emerged (Duveen, 2000). Newly established representations and identities make the unfamiliar familiar, help the people to cope with the rupture, and to restore stability. The following examples illustrate how some of the respondents referred to this transition in identification.

> M.K[11].: *Do you remember a specific moment when the war in Yugoslavia started?*

> Janez (38): *It was like this ... I was just serving in the army in 1990. It was down in Rijeka and at that time there were for the first time some tensions down in Knin. I had no idea what was going on because I didn't distinguish these ... nations ... these religions ... that they had down there. Before going to the army I didn't feel that something can go wrong in Yugoslavia. Only in the army I started to become aware of where who belongs and all that .... before I didn't think about this.*

Anther woman remembered:

> Marjeta (50): *Only when the war started did we start asking 'what is he' ... 'oh he is a Muslim, he is Bosnian' and it was all unclear because before this was a homogeneous society ... I mean this was in the work environment but wherever you came everyone accepted you and you realized that all of them were from different backgrounds ... but I would never think that some of them might be intolerant against each other.*

In relation to this, 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 considering themselves 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.*

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[11] The author's initials.

A Slovenian woman remembers how she and the people around her were disinterested in what was going on in the wars in other parts of Yugoslavia. She describes her feelings and thoughts at the time:

> Breda (50): *Like I said … I remember more some segments because it went on for so many years and that perhaps you … I don't know … we lived more in 'now it's Slovenia' and it has to become independent and recognized, that we achieve some identity after independence. Perhaps these were the things we were preoccupied with, busy with ourselves.*

Regardless of the social group to which the interviewees belong, all attested the transition from 'no differentiation' to 'differentiation', but Slovenians experienced it in the least disruptive fashion. The people who lived in the republics in which they represented minorities suddenly became foreigners in what used to be their home-land. This can partly be explained by noting that one could no longer 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 also explained by the socio-political processes occurring across Yugoslavia throughout the 1980s and 1990s – some form of ethno-national mobilization or rising of national consciousness. Therefore, the theme of changing identities is important for everyone, but the memories carry significantly different meanings depending on how people were socially located 'before' and 'after'. This is not solely related to how they identify themselves, but, perhaps even more importantly, how they are seen in the eyes of others. Identification is hence seen as a two-way process: of identifying and being identified.

> 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 it was less important where one is from, in the eyes of some Slovenians people from 'the South' were 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, which was a part of a strong 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). Above extracts clearly convey that some respondents felt uncomfortable during these times, especially in terms of how they were seen and treated by the members of the majority.

From differentiation to discrimination

The emergence or 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. Although only seven years old in 1991, a student of Bosnian Serb parents remembers the war in Slovenia and the independence which resulted as an unpleasant period.

> M.K.: *Well … you were quite young at the time but do you perhaps remember a specific moment when the war started or when they told you so?*

> Nenad (23): *I remember that we were watching TV and there were tanks somewhere close to Maribor or somewhere close to the border. Everyone was watching TV … we had guests and they were all saying something … bla, bla, bla … I asked what is going on and they said that there is war and I said 'what war'? I didn't know who or what or anything … some war …*

> M.K.: *Ok, so this is how you remember that moment … do you know when this was?*

> Nenad: *Well … I'm not sure … 1990, 1991 …*

> M.K.: *Aha, but you don't know exactly?*

> Nenad: *No … in 1991 but I don't know when exactly.*

> M.K.: *Sure … it's normal; we were kids at the time. Did the war and the disintegration of Yugoslavia influence your life or the life or your family and relatives?*

> Nenad: *No. Probably at the time in school there was more of this … discrimination.*

> M.K.: *Yes …*

> Nenad: *Because of this 'Bosanc' or 'Čefur' and I don't know what else … afterwards this spread. And then the refugees that came, they were special*

anyway, they were on a lower level of behaviour, but they stereotypically marked all others as 'Balkance'. So in school they were teasing us and if you allowed it you did, if you didn't you didn't.

M.K.: *So you really felt this difference?*

Nenad: *Yes. This was because of the parents ... parents were saying Yugoslavia this, Yugoslavia that, and then the kids hear that and they take it to school.*

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 seems to have been transposed to a more concrete interpersonal level. Not only did these 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. Many of them still feel this way today.

Taken together, 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. It also reflects the themes dealt with in the previous section, rendering it almost impossible to understand the dynamics of memory without considering social representations and identity and vice versa. Lastly, it represents a key point where the phenomena of collective memory and social representations are enacted on a more tangible interpersonal level.

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 to enable the reader to evaluate the research process. 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, p. 615). Rather than eliminating the effects of the interviewer, I tried to control them, and 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).

Several possible limitations to the study at hand were identified, such as the nature of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, other possible effects of the interviewer and the situation, small sample size, and the difficulty to identify and compare coherent ethnic groups.

A further constraint, especially in relation to the study of collective memory and social representations is the fact that only one dimension of the social space was considered – namely the individuals as recipients and active elaborators of the information presented through, amongst other, the media, political and historical discourse. An important step towards a better understanding of the phenomenon of collective memory formation and social representation in post-socialist Slovenia would entail examining other social dimensions: analysis of various media sources, history books and textbooks as well as political speeches could contribute sizably to the insights of such research and it represents a possible future advancement.

As expected, really homogeneous ethnic groups, whose accounts were to be compared, could not be identified. Not only because of the small size of the sample, but also because the interviewees come from very different parts of the former state.[12] Moreover, 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, and moreover, "those of us analyzing collective remembering and other forms of human action are just as socio-culturally situated as the individuals and groups we examine" (Wertsch, 2002, p. 18). The socio-cultural embeddedness of the author is another potential limitation. It undoubtedly influenced the outcomes of the study. On the other hand, without such 'situated-ness' I would not be equipped for social life and, consequently, social research.

Conclusion

As pointed out in the introductory part, research endeavours concerning collective memory, social identity and transition from socialist Yugoslavia to capitalist Slovenia have so far focused mostly on the social and less no more personal or individual discourses. The present study adds to this body of literature by attempting to capture ordinary people's experiences and memories of the studies period of transition. In such a way it possesses the advantage of incorporating personal accounts or narratives, which can in many ways be more telling than other approaches to collective memory, such as those based on other dimensions of the 'social sphere'. On the other hand, precisely because of such methodological focus the study suffers from important drawbacks discussed above.

By initiating research in collective memory of the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the Slovenian context this study represents a snapshot of contemporary Slovenian

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[12] 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.

realities and an attempt to observe the transition from the social psychological perspective. Following from the analysis, the disintegration represents an event which radically interrupted people's everyday life, and is viewed as a rupture – often perceived as a rupture in people's sense of self. There appear to be systematic ways in how it 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 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.

Apart from this inherent dialogicality between memory and identity, a particularly interesting contribution of this study seems to be the fact that for all of the interviewees the war(s), disintegration, and Slovenian independence appear to be so important that they, to some extent, override the generational memories in the sense that these do not follow a regular pattern in the ways in which historical events are supposed to affect people's collective memories according to their age. Contrary to the expectations, the analysis did not reveal noticeable generational differences in the recall and significance of the events. The reason for this finding perhaps being the overall importance and salience of events, which speaks of the true significance of this period for the members of Slovenian society, the importance it plays in our interpretations of reality today and, finally, the key role it will play in the future. However, this is only a speculation and we have to aim for further, more specifically generational research in the future in order to explore generational differences in memories of these events in more detail.

By examining one dimension of the social sphere through the medium of people's memories of specific events, this study has shown how narratively organized memories serve as a usable past for the elaboration of identities and as sustenance for social representations. Above all, 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, as this research has shown, 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. In the end, the complex phenomena of collective memory, identity and representation are dialogically related and always involve active individuals performing the act of remembering, rather than simply having memories 'imprinted' onto their minds. In the midst of such discussions, one should never

forget that "identities and memories are not things we think about, but [*more than anything else*] things we think with" (Gillis, 1994, p. 3).

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Appendix

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Ethnic group[*]
Sanel	Male	22	Secondary school	Student	Bosniac
Mirza	Male	23	Secondary school	Student	Bosniac
Jasmin	Male	28	University diploma	Information technician	Bosniac
Mehmed	Male	53	Secondary school	Warehouseman	Bosniac
Emira	Female	54	Primary school	Mechanic, electrician	Bosniac
Alija	Male	67	Secondary school	Retired	Bosniac
Nenad	Male	23	Secondary school	Student	Serbian
Goran	Male	33	Secondary school	Hospital nurse	Serbian
Suzana	Female	38	Primary school	Unemployed	Serbian
Slavica	Female	55	Secondary school	Retired	Serbian
Nikola	Male	60	Secondary school	Independent entrepreneur	Serbian
Mirjana	Female	82	Secondary school	Retired	Serbian
Gaja	Female	22	Secondary school	Student	Slovenian
Samo	Male	33	Secondary school	Network manager	Slovenian
Janez	Male	38	Secondary school	Driver	Slovenian
Marjeta	Female	50	University diploma	Assistant director	Slovenian
Breda	Female	55	University diploma	Teacher	Slovenian
Jožica	Female	74	Secondary school	Retired	Slovenian

[*] Participants were classified into groups prior to the interview but none of them disagreed with how they were categorized.