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Don't Forget to Remember:

Collective Memory of the Yugoslav Wars in present-day Serbia¹

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Abstract

Between the years 1991-1995, three wars were fought on the territory of former Yugoslavia, which led to the fall of the supra-national state and a newfound emphasis on ethnic and national identities. Since then, collective memories in the 'newly' created nations have undergone tremendous change in attempts to clarify 'who we were before and who we are now'. The current study looks at the present-day understandings of the past in Belgrade, Serbia. Through an analysis of history textbooks coupled with an inter-generational comparison of focus group data, the study attempts to account for both reified and lay representations of the past as well as any divergence that exists between them. The findings suggest that there is a close link between remembering and belonging, a connection that functions to frame identity in exclusive rather than inclusive terms. Through this process, where one version of the past is considered the only right one, critical attachment becomes equated with in-group detachment and attempts to acknowledge the transgressions of the in-group become silenced.

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Keywords: collective memory, Serbia, social representations of history, Yugoslavia, generational memory.

Introduction

After a war, collective memories of the past become key components in justifying the continuation of conflict or promotion of peace. These social representations of the past can promote reconciliation by allowing for mutual recognition of different 'truths', greater inclusiveness in victimhood and acknowledgement of in-group transgressions (Andrighetto et al., 2012; Bar-Tal, 2011). However, social representations of the past can also be manipulated to create beliefs in ontological differences between groups, justifying the inevitability of continuous conflict (Paez & Liu, 2011).

The present study investigates social representations of the past in Belgrade Serbia through an analysis of history textbooks and focus group data. The aim of the study is to explore the difference between reified and lay representations of the past, in an attempt to understand their role in the construction of identity. Following those who consider it fruitful to bridge the gap between social representations and social identities (Breakwell 1993; Elcheroth et al., 2011) this study argues for the important links between social representations of the past and social identities. In line with arguments put forward by Howarth (2006), I argue that reified representations of the past are afforded a privileged position in society which grants them legitimacy and power to shape the present. Unlike lay representations that might be attached to specific social groups, reified representations are extended across these groups to reach an entire nation. In reference to a study on the marginalization of 'Black history' in British schools, Howarth

explains that “particular representations, which support particular interests and identities, come to be legitimized and reified at school”, eventually becoming part of “what is socially accepted as –‘reality’.”(2006, p.74-75).

As will be discussed, these representations, functioning as ‘official’ collective memories can act as roadblocks hindering the peace process by promoting collective victimhood and inhibiting a shared understanding of the past among the countries involved in conflict. In other words, the frequent coupling of one version of collective memory with a Serbian identity can lead to individuals feeling unable to be critical of in-group transgressions without simultaneously feeling a sense of betrayal of the in-group as well.

Theoretical Rationale: Collective Memory and Social Representations

Collective Memory

Halbwachs (1992), in his writing on collective memory distinguished between historical and autobiographical memory. The former reaches individuals by way of social institutions while the latter is a memory of personal experiences, reproduced by way of social interactions with others. Thus, there is a distinction between two important sources of collective remembering; institutions and social groups. Halbwachs emphasized the social nature of memory by arguing that individual memory is part of collective memory to the extent that “it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu” (ibid, p. 53). Thus, Halbwachs was aware of the importance of social groups in shaping our memory, as these provide us with ‘social frameworks’ through which we come to

understand our world (Wagoner, 2015). Collective memory, according to Halbwachs should be understood as “a social construction shaped by the concerns of the present” (Cosser, 1992, p. 25). The past, therefore, much like any other social construct is dynamic and negotiable. As Schuman and Rodgers (2004) have noted, collective memories of old events can be kept alive through the occurrence of new events that bring them to mind. The resurrection of old collective memories with the emergence of new events would from a social representations approach be understood through the process of anchoring, where new events are anchored into old ones to make the unfamiliar familiar (Moscovici, 2000). Thus, the importance of the present for shaping collective memory is similar to the role the present plays in shaping social representations of the past (Liu & Hilton, 2005).

The role of collective memory in the nation-states of former Yugoslavia has been studied in various ways, mainly pertaining to the revival of old collective memories in the promotion of inter-group antagonisms in the late 1980s (Jović, 2004). Studies have shown how political manipulation of the past and historical revisionism in Serbia has led to an emphasis on a narrative of a victimized nation (MacDonald 2002; Ramet, 2007). However these studies have tended to focus on elite narratives only, disregarding the extent to which they were influential in shaping people’s everyday lives and sense of identity (Subotić, 2011). Therefore, this study emphasizes the active role of individuals in the appropriation of collective memory into their sense of self.

Social Representations Theory

Considering some of the characteristics and functions of collective memory, several similarities emerge between this concept and that of social representations. Similarly to

how Halbwachs considered social frameworks our guide to understanding the world, Moscovici (2000) conceptualized social representations as systems of shared values, ideas and practices that enable people to orient themselves in their material and social world. Both theorists rooted their concepts in the work of Durkheim, attempting to bridge the gap between the individual and the social (Wagoner, 2015). Alongside sharing similar theoretical goals, the concepts of collective memory and social representations both emphasize the role of language, the importance of a social ‘sharedness’ and the part the present plays in influencing how the past is remembered (László, 2001; Bar-Tal, 2014). In light of these similarities and for the purpose of this paper I consider collective remembering a process of social representing the past.

Just as collective memory exists as historical and autobiographical, so it is important to distinguish between professional (reified) and lay representations of history (Liu & Hilton, 2005). In essence, historical memory is parallel to reified representations of history as both concern knowledge of the past transmitted and legitimized by social institutions. In contrast, lay representations refer to the common-sense ideas that people hold and draw on in everyday conversations (Andreouli & Howarth, 2013). In the present study, reified representations are exemplified through the official version of the past found in history textbooks and lay representations are exemplified through the use of focus group data.

History textbooks as cultural tools become agents of memory whose aim it is to ensure the transmission of ‘approved knowledge’ to younger generations (Podeh, 2000, p. 66). Seeing history textbooks as state endorsed narratives of the past, the representations they carry become crucial components in forming national (and social) identities of

people. However, the transmission of historical knowledge has a two-fold function. When teaching about an in-group's past (especially the controversial parts of it) the aim of creating a sense of in-group belonging and unity is juxtaposed with the aim of teaching young people how to be critical of past in-group transgressions to better adapt and manage the challenges they face in the present (Leone & Mastrovito, 2010). Literature on Serbian history textbooks has shown a focus on the former, where in-group belonging, and consequently social identities, are built on themes of victimhood and perceived unfairness in the past while in-group wrongdoings are silenced or minimized (Crawford, 2004; Dutceac Segesten, 2011).

By considering collective memory as social representations of the past we can account for how our collective memory is not only shaped within the social groups and social frameworks which we are part of, but also *against* the social groups and social frameworks which we do not consider ourselves part of. Thus, in examining reconciliation processes, social representation theory allows us to take into account meta-knowledge (what we think other's think) in shaping our own representations, something that collective memory does not touch upon. Meta-knowledge becomes a critical part of a social representations approach as it allows us to understand how we shape our representations with, and against, others (Elcheroth et al., 2011). This concept also lets us take into account how the attachment of representations to specific identities and social groups makes us more or less likely to accept them. For example, post-conflict identities built on social representations of the past that emphasize inter-group antagonisms and divisions between 'us and them' can lead to the development of an intractable conflict and the creation of zero-sum identities (Kelman, 1999). In these scenarios, where identity

is built on in-group values as well as its enmity of others, separation between groups due to their incompatibility is justified through an ‘ideology of antagonism’ (Staub, 1989).

Method

This study sought to investigate generational differences in collective memory through exploring the impact of reified as well as lay representations of the past on their identities.

Employing a qualitative analysis, the data reported here was collected from five history textbooks and six focus groups with a total of 33 participants. All data was collected during spring 2014 in Belgrade, Serbia. The textbook corpus consisted of five history textbooks used in 8th grade of Elementary School and 2nd grade of High School, distributed from four different publishers; Zavod, Klett, BIGZ and Freska. Purposive sampling was used as books were chosen based on information given during interviews with currently employed history teachers in Serbia. From the books, modules were selected based on their relevance to the topic of the Yugoslav wars and whole modules were included rather than selected pages in order to not bias the content. To ensure homogeneity of the corpus, any images or homework sections were excluded from the analysis.

Focus groups were chosen as the most suitable method for examining lay representations of the past. By centring on dialogue and interaction, group discussions allow for an analysis of “the processes and products by means of which individuals and groups build up and interpret their world and their lives” (Jodelet, 2000, p. 9-10).

A quota sampling strategy was used for the focus groups as specific age groups were targeted. Each group consisted of 5-6 members, with a total of 33 participants (N=33). The first subgroup (referred to as the 'older generation' or 'OG') included individuals born between 1971-1976, who experienced the war during early adulthood (between 1991-1995), a time when events are thought to be most memorable for each generation and their sense of identity (Schuman & Scott, 1989). The second subgroup (referred to as the 'younger generation, or 'YG') included those born between 1993-1996, a time when the war was occurring/ending and thereby not having any direct experiences to the events themselves. This generation will have shaped its understandings of the past from stories told by friends and family, as well as media and other cultural tools. Thus, a generational comparison allowed for an examination of which sources have a greater influence on our collective memories; social institutions or social groups.

The textbook data was analysed through a summative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). First, the data was processed through Alceste, a frequency recognition program. This resulted in the generation of six classes based on frequency of words and their co-occurrence in context. From these six classes, two were removed prior to thematic analysis because they were considered unrelated to the topic ('Industrialization' and 'Pop Culture'). Secondly, the data was analysed thematically using NVivo 10. Coding led to the emergence of nine codes, four of which were expanded and coded on a latent level. This was considered necessary in order to get a sense of how the same code, for example 'Causalities', was treated differently in discussions of Serbian losses compared to those of other Ex-Yu nations. The latent analysis also allowed for an

examination of how the language and structure of a text could be part of creating a specific perspective of the past.

The focus group data was analysed thematically as well, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. Each focus group was coded separately before being merged into generation-specific codebooks. Because the topic guides were the same for both sub-groups similar codes emerged and the two codebooks were collapsed into one before themes were extracted. Coding was both theory and data driven, with the theme 'collective victimhood' emerging from literature on Serbian collective memory (Ramet, 2007) and the theme of 'othering identity' emerging from literature on social representations of history (Liu & Hilton, 2005). The findings from each data set will be discussed separately.

Findings

History textbooks

Unlike the literature suggested, the results from the present analysis showed a move towards a more subtle portrayal of in-group victimhood. Rather than explicitly emphasizing out-group blame and highlighting the horrors done towards the in-group, victimhood was constructed through the structuring of history. Drawing on links between a distant past and the events of the Yugoslav wars, fear was evoked throughout the textbooks and victimhood was claimed through narratives of unequal suffering and 'us vs. them' distinctions.

Fear was drawn on when discussing the immediate pre-war situation, both explicitly; "The unilateral decision [to become independent] of Ljubljana, and Zagreb in particular, scared the Serbs" (Becić, 2007, p.165), and implicitly; "the emergence of

Croatian nationalism upset the Serbs” (Đurić & Pavlović, 2010, p.182). Victimhood was also emphasized through examples of being placed in inferior positions vis-à-vis other nationalities; “from being the constituent people, Serbs became a minority, without the right to self-determination” (Vajagić & Stošić, 2011, p.194). This way of portraying the pre-war situation allowed for the war and the involvement of Serbia to be seen as defensive, acting from a position of fear rather than aggression. This argument was further highlighted through the findings from the in-vivo coding of the word ‘terror’, where all eight instances referred to terror *against* Serbs. An emotionally loaded language was thereby employed to emphasize the hardships faced by Serbs compared to those of others.

Fear was also drawn on when linking past events to present, creating a sense of historical repetition. Examples like “the increase in inter-ethnic hatred and publicly express nationalism awakened worries and memories of the Ustasha [Croatian] crimes during World War II” (Đurić & Pavlović, 2010, p.184) link memories of WWII fears to fears during the pre-war period in Yugoslavia, creating a continuity of conflict between Serbs and Croats and an inevitability of a future clash. Past-present links were also evident in discussions of the involvement of the international powers. Their involvement was positioned as pro-other/anti-Serbian (in 15/19 references this was the case) which was considered unjust through sentences like “[a]s much as in previous wars, the ‘international community’, led by the United States, fully supported the Albanian terrorists” (Ljusić & Dimić, 2010, p.240). This kind of narrative extended Serbian victimhood beyond the Yugoslav context to one of international status.

The realization of the abovementioned pre-war worries was found in the textbooks during discussions of causalities. Counting the number of references for Serbian (12), non-Serbian (4) and neutral causalities (7) showed an over-emphasis on Serbian victims compared to that of others. Unequal suffering was further portrayed using linguistic tactics. First, this was done through a nationalizing of Serbian victims (“in Podrinja around 3500 Serbs died”) (Đurić & Pavlović, 2010, p. 185) while omitting specific nationalization of victims in other nations (“the total number of victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina is estimated at around 100,000 and in Croatia 20,000”) (Đurić & Pavlović, 2010, p.185). It is important to note here the impact of omitting victim nationality. Yugoslavia, before the outbreak of war as well as during, was a multi-ethnic, multi-national state with people of all different nationalities living spread out within the state borders. Thus, the omission of victim nationalization within Bosnia and Croatia allows for the presence of victims of all possible nationalities, including Serbs. This then gives greater presence to Serbian victims. Further, when causalities of others were mentioned, the accuracy of their estimates was sometimes questioned (“According to some, about 8,000 people were killed, but for others these numbers are evaluated as an exaggeration”) (Đurić & Pavlović, 2010, p.185).

These examples show that in the history textbooks, it was the specific use of language, the re-organization of contents, the removal or repetition of certain material that shapes the representations of the past. Thus, we see a move away from an explicit positioning of self as victim, to a reliance on the narratives of events to make this connection (László et al., 2010).

Focus Groups

The focus group data showed a tension between remembering and forgetting, where the past was considered both a burden as well as the glue of a nation. Two global themes emerged which positioned self as either a victim of the past or an agent of the future. Within these two frameworks, collective memory functioned to either emphasize or minimize the role of the past for the present. For purposes of clarity, each generation will be discussed separately.

Older Generations: We should remember, but I want to forget.

Within the older generation discussions it became clear that the war period was experienced as a rupture. When asked what first came to mind when remembering the past, participants tended to focus on the losses of everyday certainty and stability through stories of economic hardship, influxes of migrants and the disruption of inter-ethnic relationships. These associations also focused on the psychological consequences of the wars, which mainly pertained to collective losses of identity, norms and values.

Nada: Yes, but I still believe that there is always a personal choice –

Tanja: I don't think so, because I have two children that I am raising here currently and I think that however much effort I put into raising them ... and bring them on the right path, even if my children are conscious and good students... there still is, how do I put this, there still is something that we have lost. That value system.

(OG-FG3)

An adherence to a Yugoslav identity was present among OG's which made the war period all the more painful as it entailed a loss of social membership. This identity confusion was not resolved in the post-war period but rather it accompanied OGs into their present lives, with several participants making remarks similar to that of Milan; “[w]e Serbs have no clue who we are and what we are.” (OG-FG2). Because of this, the representations OGs had of the pre-war period were somewhat idyllic, feeling that they were the last generation to embody the good, pre-rupture, values. Participants considered their nation as “more cultured before the 90s” (Nebojsa, OG-FG1) and frequently drew comparisons between themselves and younger people to illustrate this. This sense of discontinuity of a ‘good’ people made its way into comments about the knowledge and interest of younger generations about their history. The unawareness of youths was quickly linked to the consequences of collective forgetting;

Jovan: But I mean generally, the level of interest [among younger Serbs] is...

Sima: ...extremely small.

Jovan: It is.

Sima: and whatever you tell them, they claim that we are the ones who [caused the war].

But keep in mind those are not kids anymore. They are twenty, twenty-two years old, and according to them, Serbia ruined Yugoslavia. And we can't make them think differently.

(OG-FG2)

Among older generations, forgetting was framed as damaging to the collective unity of Serbia as it would turn younger generations against their in-group. The link between

remembering the past and being part of the in-group was further solidified by equating collective forgetting with self-blaming. However, though remembering was emphasized on a collective level, it was juxtaposed by the desire to personally forget and move beyond the past. A sense of reluctance to the topic was coupled with a suppression of memories, justified through arguments of the past being something they were “ashamed of” and did not want to “burden their children” with (Tanja, OG-FG3; Igor, OG-FG1). Negotiating the tension between a desire to forget and a need to remember was most evident in discussions of how to raise one’s children;

Igor: I don’t think that I’ll ever feel a need to tell him [son] about it, ever. I just don’t see why he has to know.

Alen: But okay, I think that it was an experience from which you learned something

Lela: Not personally.

Igor: I don’t know, personally it didn’t teach me anything. What would it have taught me? You tell me. That man is an animal?

Alen: That man is an animal and he cannot survive –

Igor: But why? It’s like the example of when I’m teaching my child not to touch the stovetop if he sees that the burner is hot. He doesn’t have to touch it to see that he would get burned. He doesn’t. I mean, if I -

Nebojsa: You got burned. But you should teach him that you got burned. So that tomorrow, he does not make the same mistakes.

Lela: What mistake? What mistake did we make? What did we do?

(OG-FG1)

In their discussions of the past, older generations emphasize both a need to remember and a desire to forget. Social representations of the past thus become framed through two opposite themes; the past as an educational resource vs. the past as a burden. The attempt to have their cake and eat it too becomes achievable by creating a division between a public and private context of memory. Thus, the social context and the positioning of self as in-group member determines which representations are drawn on. Because of this, we see a reluctance to acknowledge past wrongdoings in contexts where one is positioned as part of the blamed in-group. This way, remembering becomes a public duty that should exist 'out there' distanced from the self, while forgetting becomes a private choice. This choice is justified by the wishes to protect one's family from the stigmatizing mark that the past has left on oneself.

Younger Generations: Learning from the past, both the good and the bad.

For younger participants, associations related to the war period were significantly fewer compared to older generations – a natural outcome of their different relations to that time period. Unlike older participants who discussed the past from a personal point of view, younger participants looked at the greater context in which the wars occurred.

Nevertheless, similar themes arose as those found within the older generation discussions, where topics of losses, injustices and present-day consequences were mentioned.

However, an important difference was noticeable. When discussing the Yugoslav war period, YGs, though barely born when the war started, spoke more frequently using 'we', showing attachment and inclusion into the history of their nation. Surprisingly this attachment was often critical. Alongside topics of in-group consequences, discussions

centered on topics of political corruption, collective passivity and the negative sentiments attached to Serbian patriotism. Younger participants tended to view the past with a mix of both pride and resentment, often blaming older generations for their social inertia.

Filip: I think that in regards to these concrete stories of how Serbian patriotism and nationalism was suppressed in Yugoslavia, I agree, that is true.

Suzana: It was intentionally suppressed.

Filip: However, if there had existed a stronger collective will, so that we, as a people, had opposed that [suppression], no one would have been able to deny us the right to a national identity, just as no one was able to deny other nations that right when they collectively resisted.

(YG-FG2)

Younger participants also exhibited knowledge into the complexities involved in understanding the past, moving beyond a belief in the existence of ‘one’ official version. They showed awareness of the dynamic nature of history as a subject, voicing criticism over the way that history was being taught in schools, arguing that teacher’s taught history “the way they are told to, and not the way it is” (Dragana, YG-FG1). Alongside school as a source of information, YGs mentioned the lack of discussion of the past in their families, stating that at home “we don’t talk about it, only if I ask something but I rarely ever do.” (Ana, YG-FG3). The presence of an uncertainty towards the past and what really happened was noticeable in all YG focus groups, which often led to conclusions similar as the one made below by Relja, a 22 year old law student.

Relja: The number of nations we have is the number of pasts that exist. Meaning, that's how many versions we have of one and the same past. So, first we have to voice one past and then we can work on that, to try to overcome it.

(YG-FG2)

Younger generations, more so than older ones seemed preoccupied with discussing how to move forward and get over the past. However this was not equated with forgetting the past. Similarly to how OGs considered collective forgetting a threat to in-group unity, so did YGs. However they placed this occurrence not with present generations, but future ones.

Petar: There's going to come a generation, it doesn't have to be the next one, or a second or third, but there's going to come a fifth generation that is completely going to forget [the past]. They won't know how big our nation was nor what was taken from us. [...] And because they are not informed they won't know -

Ana: how to defend themselves.

Mitar: [...] and now after this [the Yugoslav wars], all that happened before it is going to be forgotten. And that's the way it is. And no matter what we do, we will always be the guilty ones. When everything is forgotten, we are still guilty.

(YG-FG3)

We see how meta-knowledge influences in-group perceptions, as ‘not being informed’ leads to an inability to ‘defend themselves’. This link implicitly assumes an image of Serbia through the eyes of the international community as the main perpetrator of the Yugoslav wars. Being aware of the negative images attached to their nation’s past, younger generations emphasize remembering as a way to resist stigmatization. Thus remembering was a way to learn from the past and move forward, not a way to remain stuck in the past.

Suzana: We can forgive and move on, but to forget we can’t, because if we forget every time what has been done to us, each subsequent time we will have the same thing happen or worse.

(YG-FG1)

This link between forgetting and repetition provides powerful incentives for collective remembering as it warns of future threats by drawing on the past. Remembering becomes a key ingredient in maintaining a historical ‘we’ that serves to educate the in-group about its past as well as its inter-group relations. However among younger participants, this was not used to justify a continuation of conflict, but rather to ensure the future turns out different from the past.

Discussion: History, Identity and Memory

The qualitative study showed a difference between reified and lay representations of the past, with the role of personal experience, exposure to specific representations and

legitimacy determining to what extent these came to influence individuals' identity construction.

In the present study, reified representations of the Yugoslav wars emphasized an image of Serbia as a historical victim, a nation constantly in a defensive mode trying to protect itself from the diverse threats outside of its borders. Because textbooks function as official agents of memory they serve to educate new generations about their past but also shape contemporary patriotism and in-group belonging (Hein & Selden, 2000; Podeh, 2000). In order to do so it requires that the past and the identity project it carries "be presented as non-contingent, as self-evident, as not one version among many but as the only possible version" (Reicher, 2004, p.938). This kind of narrative was more prevalent among older generations who framed the past in terms of victimhood by drawing on stories of cultural, moral and identity losses alongside discussions of the unjust blame placed on Serbia by both the outside world as well as younger in-group members. The greater similarity between the reified representations and the lay representations of older participants can be explained by time and exposure.

Reified representations are granted legitimacy as social reality and reach larger audiences by their incorporation into social institutions like schools (Howarth, 2006). Because of this they become more accessible to the representational repertoire of participants and greater exposure increases the likelihood that these representations will become incorporated into a group's social identity (Breakwell, 1993). Older participants constantly exposed to a victimhood narrative "have internalized a certain ritual of remembering the national tragedy that transformed it from a remote historical event into a vivid, present and powerful trauma." (Dutceac Segesten 2011, p. 115). This narrative

supports the personal experiences OGs have of the war-period, leading to an easier incorporation of reified representations into their sense of selves. In contrast, younger participants who are exposed to several different version of the past in their public spheres (through politics, international media and institutions) and no discussion of the past in their private spheres end up having a less concise picture of history.

The implications of a victimhood narrative is that it hinders any attempts at reconciling over the past by giving it continuity in the present, where violence committed by the ‘victims’ in the present or future becomes justified through drawing on themes of historical suffering (Crawford, 2004; Stojanović, 2013). There are identity consequences to the acceptance of a collective memory of victimhood as these representations imply a lack (or low level) of agency on the part of the in-group. Promoting passivity among the in-group “may weaken their responsibility for their fate and the realistic appraisal of their current situation.” (Laszlo et al, 2010, p.39). In doing so, social representations of the past that portray in-group members as having low levels of agency in history become part of constructing identities that are vulnerable and instable (ibid). Ironically, in trying to rid themselves of this vulnerability, older participants emphasize the importance of remembering the past for a sense of stability.

Among OGs, collective remembering refers to the process of remembering the past according to ‘our’ perspective, which plays a key role in explaining the present (Halbwachs, 1952). By linking a specific version of the past to the present through the process of remembering, individuals are invited to become part of a continuing historical ‘we’, making collective memory a fundamental part of collective identity (Bar-Tal, 2014). This causes problems for younger generations as the attempt to approach the past from an

alternative angle comes to threaten their status as in-group members.

Framing remembering as a source of belonging while simultaneously contrasting this with the argument that forgetting the past means taking the wrongful perspective of out-group was a strategy frequently used among older participants, occurring only once in YG focus groups. Placing in-group guilt as a perspective held by out-groups hinders in-group criticism by positioning those who engage in it as 'other'. This strategy allows societies to suppress alternative narratives as "a change in the collective memory that questions the national narrative is viewed as weakening the ability to withstand the enemy" (Bar-Tal, 2014, p. 5.17). Reified representations, by promoting a narrative of victimhood, further limit the extent to which individuals can acknowledge in-group transgressions without shedding their ties to the past. However, this might not prove the best approach when attempting to promote and further reconciliation processes as it promotes a continuation of conflict by considering past enemies as present enemies.

This either/or approach further puts younger generations in an uncomfortable situation as any attempts to be critical of their in-group are often juxtaposed with simultaneous feelings of betrayal. Younger generations dissolve this problem by consistently using the self-inclusive term 'we' when discussing the past, even when criticizing it. While including themselves in the ongoing drama of history, they also make sure to include themselves in any responsibility or blame attached to their in-group. The official historical memory found in history textbooks seem to have little influence on the attitudes and beliefs of younger participants and they frequently commented on the lack of truth in these 'historical' records and the teachers who narrated them. This doubt in the accuracy of reified representations could be explained by the socio-political context in

which this information is being transmitted. A noticeable distrust of political leaders, the government and other institutional authorities was present within the younger generation focus groups. By affording little legitimacy to the institutions and people within them, it is no surprise that younger generations look in other directions for answers. In reference to the past, it seems as if young Serbs are aware that there is more than one side to the story. This is a crucial step in the process of peace building.

Studies have suggested that a move towards the acknowledgement of in-group wrongdoings is an essential psychological change that needs to occur in order to limit the renewal of violence and begin the process of reconciliation (Brown & Cehajic, 2008; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). Though we see the beginnings of in-group criticism emerging among the younger generations, this process will require more than one generation (Leone & Mastrovito, 2010). It also requires dialogue rather than suppression of the past. This is because communication is crucial in the process of making social representations shared. It is through communication that “opinion is transformed into social fact through the achievement of common interpretations of shared experiences” (Elcheroth et al, 2011, p. 737).

The fact that both generational groups blame each other for forgetting the past and accepting in-group guilt speaks to the lack of inter-generational dialogue concerning this topic. The reluctance of parents to tell their children about the past because they consider it burdensome, coupled with a presumed lack of interest among younger generations to learn about it, seem to contradict the emphasis both generations placed on remembering. It would seem as though collective remembering is attached to a community ‘out there’ which individuals distance themselves from. This speaks to the importance of time in

order to properly deal with in-group transgressions (Leone & Mastrovito, 2010). However, the consistent coupling of the past with the present makes it harder for individuals to psychologically distance themselves from the Yugoslav wars and it will make it harder for the Serbs of tomorrow to show critical attachment to their in-group for the purpose of making the future better.

Conclusion

The past is an important part of a nation's collective identity as it provides origins, legacy, continuity and uniqueness to a people. However, when this identity is built around a history of conflict, victimhood and rejection of out-groups, any hopes for reconciliation in the present seem to be lost. Social representations of collective memory should not only function to create unity, but also to create awareness of times without conflict and times of cooperation between so-called enemies. As much as negative propaganda is used for the purpose of mobilizing support for action so should positive propaganda be considered in processes of overcoming conflict and opening up for dialogue and reconciliation.

What is needed is to move beyond this either/or framing of collective memory where in-group belonging becomes an outcome of the dual process of in-group acceptance and out-group rejection. Therefore, in order to promote reconciliation and intergroup dialogue, in-group criticism has to stop being equated with in-group betrayal. Critical attachment, or the ability to acknowledge in-group atrocities, will not occur if this is negatively correlated with in-group belonging. Though it is a process that requires time and support – both on an institutional as well as social level – we see the beginnings

of in-group criticism emerging among younger participants. By granting legitimacy to the voices of these younger generations, space is also opened up for the re-negotiation of social representations of the past, hopefully moving towards a peace building process.

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