Making and Breaking Boundaries: Memory Discourses and Memory Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Journalists, scholars and everyday media consumers were puzzled by the intensity of the Bosnian[113] war. What made it so hard to understand was the paradox between decades of peaceful coexistence under Tito and the sudden eruption of extreme violence. In the face of the tremendous war atrocities during the Bosnian war, many deduced that the peaceful coexistence could not have been anything than fake and that the violence now revealed was a result of ancient hatreds suppressed during Tito's rule. This explanation, however, is too simplistic and, if not content with it, one has to delve deeper into the subject of memory and forgetting. Without suggesting that ancient hatred has been passed on from generation to generation, this paper argues that memories and in particular memory politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina are crucial in order to understand processes of inclusion and exclusion. Before getting deeper into the subject of memory politics, let us first investigate what memory means in the public sphere.

MEMORY AND FORGETTING IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Memory, although it might at a first glance seem to be first and foremost connected to the past, is closely linked to the present and the future. We remember in order to give meaning to the present and thus gain power over the future. »The focus of contestation, then, is very often not conflicting accounts of what actually happened in the past so much as the question of who or what is entitled to speak for that past in the present« (Hodgkin et al., 2003, 1). It becomes a matter of representation – rather than finding out about the truth – which memories should be publicly represented and in which form and whose voice will be heard (Friedman, 1992).[114] It is a question of power who is able to lead the public discourse and decides which memories to ban and which to promote. Thus memory is not only about recollecting stored data, but it is a far more active process. »When we consider that representations of pastness – cumbersome phrase, but more exact here than 'history' - are made by persons in interaction, situated in real time and space, we can see that however modest the speaker's aim, they are purposeful social actions« (Tonkin, 1992, 3). What is remembered and what forgotten is in most cases a conscious decision.[115] Those who lead the official memory discourse thereby gain power over identity construction. To represent a nation's past is a struggle over whose memories will be preserved and institutionalised and whose repressed or forgotten (Natzmer, 2002, 161; Vidaković, 1989). Memories first have to be included into a widely shared and publicly expressed narrative before they will gain political effect (Ashplant et al., 2000, 20). Since different groups in any society have unequal access to power, the starting position for making ones own perception of the past representative in the public is not equal. In a nation building process memories are skil-

fully woven into national myths in order to achieve a sense of national belonging.[116]

We should keep in mind that memory and forgetting are inseparable and if we are talking about memory, we are at the same time talking about forgetting (or silencing). When constructing stories around memories (life stories or master narratives) the process of forgetting is at least as crucial as the process of remembering. »For every narrative depends on the suppression and repression of contrary, disruptive memories – other people's memories of the same events, as well as the unacceptable ghosts of our own pasts« (Hall, 1998, 440). Although what Hall describes here is a rather universal phenomenon, in post-war societies memory is strongly contested and therefore forgetting is crucial as one of the processes to construct the past.[117]

Michel-RolphTrouillot claims that historical narratives always include silences: »Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance)« (Trouillot, 1995, 26). Thus silences can be found in many contexts, not only in verbal discourses but also in history books, archives, commemorative practices, memorials, and museums. It is often emphasised that a nation bases its identity on its past and therefore relies on remembering and commemoration. It is important to note, however, that the identity of a nation relies just as much on forgetting.[118]

Especially in politically unstable times, memory is likely to be strictly controlled by those in power. This does not imply, though, that no other memories exist besides the official memory discourse. At least

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114 It is important to mention here that memory finds various expressions besides the verbal. Although this paper concentrates first and foremost on verbal memory discourses (with the exception of commemorative ceremonies), it is worth to take a glance at memories inscribed in the landscape. In the case of the divided town of Mostar, the city shows territorial markers that follow ethnic lines. These markers are in many cases religious symbols and were often put up during or after the war. Probably the most striking territory marker is a huge cross on the summit of the mountain Hum, overlooking Mostar. The cross is at the place from where HVO (The Army of the Republic of Croatia) artillery shelled East Mostar and its presence is seen as a provocation by the Bosniak population of Mostar. Another example is the renaming of streets in Mostar in order to show who »conquered« the territory.

115 This is not necessarily true for personal memories of traumatic experiences. Although traumatic memories are an important part of a discussion on memory, it will be beyond the scope of this paper to discuss it further.

116 In the following discussion *national myths* will be used in Anthony Smith's sense. Anthony Smith makes clear that ancient myths and the symbolism of holy places are crucial for a nation-building process. Creating nations, he argues, is an incessant process: »[...] each generation must re-fashion national institutions and stratification systems in the light of the myths, memories, values and symbols of the 'past', which can best minister to the needs and aspirations of its dominant social groups and institutions« (Smith, 1986, 206). In order to create a sense of national belonging, nationalists do not invent completely new myths but rather put separate ancient myth-motifs together to a fully elaborated mythology of origins and descent.

117 Today, after the war has been over for more than ten years, memory is still highly contested in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Cheryl Natzmer (2002) claims that the struggle over memory is especially great after a society went through ethnic conflict, civil war or state-terrorism. In these times, different groups have a strong interest in making their stories heard and become institutionalized and not silenced or forgotten.

118 In the nation-building process it is likely that major parts of the past have to be forgotten (e.g. the existence of different languages and distinct cultures) in order to establish a unified nation.

two processes within the politics of memory can be identified: »On a large scale we see the whole political process of mutual influence among shared memories, definitions of the future, and collective action. At an increased magnification, we see the contestation that surrounds every effort to create, define, or impose a common memory [...]« (Tilly, 1994, 253). Counter versions may emerge at the same time as a dominant narrative is told or after years of silence (Ochs et al., 1996, 36). Within an oppressive state, such narratives are likely to remain in the private sphere or beyond state control (e.g. in the memories of dissidents). It is tempting to view the official discourse as oppressive and negative, and discourses that contest it as the positive ones and closer to »truth«. This representation would be too simplistic, because it draws a picture of counter memories as positive resistance to the state dominated official discourse.[119] More relevant than asking about the truth of the official or counter narratives would be to ask about their relationship to each other. They are necessarily interrelated, since any counter discourse relates to the dominant discourse. As will be shown in the following, their status is not fixed: the counter discourse can become the dominant discourse and vice versa. In order to understand the use and manipulation of counter-memories by nationalist politicians in the period of the break-up of former Yugoslavia, we first have to consider Tito's memory politics from 1945 onwards.

MEMORY POLITICS DURING AND AFTER TITO'S RULE

After the Nazis were defeated, the Partisans could best present themselves as the winners of the war since they claimed to have expelled all the foreign occupation forces and to have defeated their internal enemies. »As the war unfolded the Partisans offered the clearest and most legitimating myth: that they were the only truly committed force dedicated to fighting the foreign occupation forces; the true representatives of inter-ethnic reconciliation; and the most effective champion of the radical peasant masses, who had been largely excluded from the interwar regime« (Schöpflin, 1993, 179). Tito's self-created myth was not only taken up by communists in Yugoslavia, but also internationally.

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119 In *Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal* Sherry Ortner (1995) deconstructs the idealistic presentation of resistance.

Tito was often credited for having brought peace and reconciliation to the region. Thus his admirers closed their eyes to Tito's aspirations for power and the war crimes he and his followers committed at the end of World War II. In the period between 1945 and 1946 up to 250,000 people died in Tito's detention camps, death marches, and mass shootings. One event that is still remembered today (mainly by Croats) is the tragedy of Bleiburg. When the Partisans met the British troops in Austria in April 1945, the British handed over more than 18,000 former members of various anti-Partisan forces (Slovene home guards, Ustaša soldiers, as well as Serb and Muslim Četniks) who had sought refuge in Allied-controlled Austria. Most of them were massacred when they reached Yugoslavia (Malcolm, 2002, 193). These war crimes were one of the best kept secrets and it was taboo to talk about what happened in the years of 1945 and 1946. The same was true for the civil wars during World War II. »As Communist rule entailed ideological control over the representation of the past, those horrifying events that would disrupt interethnic cooperation were not to be mentioned, except in collective categories, all 'victims of fascism' on one side, and all 'foreign occupiers and domestic traitors' on the other side« (Denich, 1994, 370). The Yugoslav people were presented as brave communist Partisan fighters who defeated the evil fascists. This image of the heroic Yugoslavs was excessively repeated in schoolbooks and in movies (e.g. in *The Battle of Neretva*) (Jäger, 2001, 357). All this was an act of memory politics that attempted to stop any further antagonism between the ethnic groups and aimed to create a single identity in a unified state through a single memory. *Brotherhood and Unity* (*Bratstvo i Jedinstvo*) was the ideology upon which the Titoist state claimed to be founded.

Although it was not allowed to discuss memories of oppression and war crimes other than those committed by the Germans in public, they continued to exist as counter-memories and were recounted in the private sphere. Nationalist warlords then skilfully used these secret memories in the last decades of the twentieth century in order to create an exclusionary nationalist identity. But let us stress once again, that not memories themselves, but the way memories were dealt with stirred hate. Memories were misused to further fuel mistrust between Croats, Bosniaks, and Serbs without any attempt to reappraise the past (Mosser, 2002). At this stage the Titoist era became increasingly associated with suppression and crime in the public discourse, which was

shaped by the nationalist media.[120] »[...] This replacement of communism with nationalism must itself create a new secret history of the communist movement and period of rule. Indeed, to succeed, the new official history must convert the 'social memory'« (Hayden, 1994, 168). The Croats only saw the domination of Serbs in both Yugoslavias and the Serbs perceived themselves as disadvantaged by Tito, since they had two autonomous regions (Kosovo and Vojvodina) associated with their republic. Some Muslims on the other hand claimed that their religion was suppressed, ever since the Ottoman Empire had broken apart.

On top of all these memories were the dividing memories of World War II, which were misused in the 1980s and 1990s: intellectuals, religious leaders and nationalist politicians on each side came up with evidence of suppression and crimes which were committed against their ethnic group (e.g. by making the public aware of mass graves), but they themselves did nothing to assure the other ethnic groups that they condemned the atrocities they themselves were accused for. On the contrary, they revitalized old symbols of hate and saw no need to apologize for the war crimes they committed. To give an example, the Serbs revived their memories of the cruel and systematic actions of the Ustaše, especially those of Jasenovac (the biggest of several detention camps that were erected by the Ustaše during WWII). The mass media (already under Milošević's control) frequently covered Ustaša mass graves in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina and the reburials of Serbian victims under the guidance of the Orthodox Church. The documentaries had a twofold political effect, first they discredited the communist regime and second they increased mistrust against Croats. When Tudjman refused to apologize and spoke of the crimes committed by Ustaše as necessary steps towards an independent nation state he recreated the past and further fuelled the already existing fears. The most effective myths were the narratives about victimization and threat, which linked the present with the past and projected onto the future. This one-sided presentation fuelled hate and subsequently served to legitimate the use of violence. It became increasingly difficult for all those who defined their identity along other criteria. In the upcoming war individuals who did not join the nationalist discourse, were likely to become the first victims.

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120 For a detailed discussion of the role of the media in memory politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina see Price 2002.

IMPERSONALISING SOCIAL MEMORY

From what we have discussed so far we learned that painful individual memories were shifted into the public sphere, i.e. previous personal memory discourses were transformed into public discourses. This is one way how individual and social memories are interconnected. But public memory discourses can also become incorporated into the personal memory discourse. In some cases historical accounts, which the speaker has not experienced himself or herself, but has been told about by older compatriots, are remembered and retold as if the speaker had witnessed the events in question. Jacob Climo calls this phenomenon vicarious memory: »[...] a memory that an individual holds with great personal and emotional commitment yet it is a memory of an event or experience that the individual has not experienced directly« (Climo, 2002, 118). These vicarious memories are often about traumatic events, such as genocide or a great defeat. A recent study by Francesca Cappelletto illustrates this phenomenon very well. Her research concentrates on two Tuscan villages where mass killings took place by German SS storm troops as acts of reprisal against Italian partisans. During her fieldwork she encountered a fusion of autobiographical and historical memory »[...] so that the story with all its descriptive minutiae can be recounted by those who were not witnesses as if its events had been experienced by them in person« (Cappelletto, 2003, 243). This implies that events, which were significant for a society, can be incorporated into personal memory although they have not been experienced personally. Such »impersonalised« events may have taken place only a generation ago, as in Cappelletto's case, or they can be much more ancient, as I will show in the case of Mostar. It is less important when the event took place, than first how important it was for society (or parts of it) and its self-perception and second how far the event was actively promoted by those in power. Even where personal memories do exist, events that took place before the lifetime of an individual are crucial for understanding or categorizing the experience. »Even the 'eyewitness' memory of war, then, is constructed both from personal experience and in relation to pre-existing cultural templates [...]. The memory of heroic victory or suffering endured in a previous war may act as the template through which later conflicts are understood« (Ash-

plant et al., 2000, 34).[121] Events are also more likely to be remembered when they fit into already existing forms of group narratives (Fentress et al., 1992, 88). In a similar way, Hodgkin et al. (2003, 5) argue that memory, although often perceived as very personal, always has to be seen in its wider cultural context and that it draws on larger cultural narratives. This again shows that individual and social memory cannot be studied separately.[122]

In the case of former Yugoslavia, an obvious example for a vicarious memory is the Battle of Kosovo. But let us look at another example, which at the first glance may not seem so obvious since it is not about a traumatic experience. Instead it deals with the old bridge (*stari most*) of Mostar, in the town where my fieldwork has been conducted. Armen, an elderly Bosniak from Mostar, has vivid memories not only of the old town including the bridge before it was destroyed in the recent war, but also of the time when the bridge was constructed. Although the bridge was built in the sixteenth century, when Armen tells the story of the master builder and all the Bosnians who were involved in the construction of the bridge, it sounds as he had gotten this information first hand, as if his grandfather had been one of the construction workers. In Armen's eyes the reconstructed bridge does not meet the standards of the Ottomoman's original work, which he obviously admires. In his narratives the Ottomans are portrayed rather as diligent and honest people than as occupiers. When listening to Armen, one realizes that the Ottoman period is an important part of his self-perception as a Bosniak. We have to be aware, however, that historical events can vary in their importance over time. National narratives are recreated especially when the national identity is thought to be strengthened. Something that has always been known but was never important for one's self-understanding suddenly becomes meaningful. To refer to the case just described, the Ottoman history, although always known about, became crucial for fostering a Bosniak identity in the last decades of the twentieth century. After we have learned that the role of historical events may vary over time, let us now explore how such events, though never completely forgotten, can suddenly become meaningful.

In order to create an official discourse that supports the existing power structures, leaders are likely to take advantage of commemorative ceremonies, such as the reburial of the dead. In commemorative ceremonies »[...] a community is reminded of its identity as represented by and told in a master narrative« (Connerton, 1989, 70). These ceremonies are likely to be held when the group identity is in question and when those in power have an interest in strengthening it. Such public rituals are one way of giving meaning to an event that occured decades or even centuries ago. This was the case when in the years before the secession of Yugoslavia public reburials of famous historical figures took place. One example is the reburial of Prince Lazar, the Serbian national hero who died in the Battle of Kosovo. For its six hundreds anniversary ceremony, Lazar's bones were buried in Kosovo after they had been carried through monasteries in all those places, which Milošević claimed to be Serbian territory, including parts of Bosnia. This was clearly a ceremony used for nationalist purposes. Nevertheless, as Katherine Verdery (1999) shows, these nationalist actions built on local practices of kinship. People at the same time perceived Prince Lazar as their ancestor and the tradition spells out to bury ancestors on home soil. Moreover, the ceremony of reburial shows how space and time became reconfigured. By reburying the fathers of the nation on their home soil territory is marked. Time, on the other hand, is compressed when something that happened as long ago as the Battle of Kosovo is perceived like an event that took place only a few days ago. But also after the war is over, rituals for strengthening an exclusionary nationalist identity are practiced. On 18 November 2005, Croats in West Mostar commemorated the fourteenth anniversary of the foundation of Herceg Bosna[123] and its leading figure Mate Boban. Accompanied by festive music, groups of people contributed wreaths and candles. Afterwards a Catholic priest lead a prayer and in the end the assembly crossed themselves before they left. In this case we can see how an already existing Catholic commemorative ritual is used to commemorate a nationalist figure and a nationalist dream.

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121 As early as 1932 Frederic Bartlett argued that memory recollections are shaped by already existing schemas (Barlett, 1932).
122 Maurice Halbwachs (1992) successfully revealed the interconnectedness of individual and social memory already in the 1940s when he argued that memory is always embedded in a wider social context.

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123 Croatian nationalists have the dream of Herceg Bosna, a Croat state in Bosnia and Herzegovina with Mostar as its capital and based upon ethno-religious purity.

CONCLUSION

In order to succeed politicians with the support of intellectuals, the media, and the church did not only have to mobilize arms but also memory. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina one can clearly see how a change in power demanded a new memory discourse. This paper identified different processes that were crucial in strengthening exclusive nationalist identities. All of them indicate that personal and social memories are in steady interconnection with each other. Memories are likely to shift from the private into the public, from the position of counter-memories into dominant memory discourses and vice versa. If one analyses memories and memory politics more closely the ancient hatred theory for the outbreak of the Bosnian war cannot be held any longer. Nevertheless, we have to acknowledge that hurtful experiences existed which were not dealt with under Tito's period of rule. When war crimes but also crimes committed under Tito finally were brought up in the public, it was not done to reappraise the past but to use painful memories for stirring up mistrust in the present and to legitimate taking up arms against »the others«. Commemorative ceremonies were used to revive past events so that they gained meaning in the present. These events, which the individual did not experience directly in some cases even reached the status of autobiographical memory. At the same time, when previous painful memories were introduced into the public sphere, memories of good neighbourliness in Bosnia and Herzegovina were banned from the public. After the war, Bosnians were confronted with conflicting memories: positive memories of peaceful coexistence and memories of painful experiences made during the war between 1992 and 1995. These new memories are in most cases such of fear and betrayal by former neighbours. It is not yet decided what will happen with the new painful memories whether they will again be misused for stirring up further mistrust or if the past will be reappraised in ways for a reconciliation process to have a chance. Up to date, the memories of good neighbourliness have little voice in the public nationalist discourse.

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New Symbolic Values of Some of the Antique and Modern Bosnia and Herzegovina's Bridges

ANTONIO VIOLANTE

BRIDGES ARE AMBIGUOUS SYMBOLS

Among the characteristics of a symbol there is the semantic variability, and this means that by leaving a margin of an unexpressed meaning, it can easily be the object of sometimes discordant interpretations. This ambiguity is being manifested at two levels: at the diachronic one and at the level of the perception. In the first case, this is because of the fact that the value of a symbol can evolve in time and can always receive new connotations. In the second case, it is because the mentality and the culture of who any symbol represents can be not quite the same for everyone and consequently different values can be attributed to it. The symbol also has the property to allow relations, and in this way it develops a »bridge« function between opposite elements (Chevalier, 2003, 67). So, the bridge can be considered as »The« symbolic object par excellence, because it is able to establish relations not only in a metaphoric way, but also in the physical one. In fact, by bonding the two shores in a material way it doesn't only join human paths on the ground, but also represents the victory of the man's spirit over the bizarre things in nature, together with the need of

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