UNEARTHING MEMORIES:
1999 BOMBING OF FR YUGOSLAVIA
BETWEEN CRISIS, TRAUMA AND NOSTALGIA[1]

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Abstract: The text serves as an introduction to broader research on the relationship between individual and collective memory regarding the bombing of Yugoslavia (and Serbia) in 1999, among individuals of different generations. The focus lies on the memorial narratives by individuals who, at the time of the war, belonged to the teenage (13 – 19) and young adults' groups (19 – 25). Over the years, when this topic was mentioned, the author has often encountered nostalgia, or rather, a somewhat romanticized and positive recollection of these otherwise traumatic events. Some of the interviewees paradoxically emphasized that the period of bombing in 1999, although traumatic, "remained in fond memories" or was even described as "the most beautiful period of their adolescence... and life." These statements motivated the author to examine the wider and local social circumstances in which the war was perceived, primarily at the community level, as it was a plateau of the individual-state relationship. The relationship between the individual, the collective, and the state seems to have played a crucial role in how Yugoslav society, as communitas, in 1999 perceived the challenges of wartime daily life, but also, how these traumatic events were memorialized and remembered. Today, if one wants to understand the nostalgic dimension of the 1999 war memory, it appears crucial to understand the current social circumstances, as well as the positions from which the interviewees nostalgically remember these events. This memorial phenomenon not only reflects the continuity of war trauma as a negative aspect of the witnesses' lives but also provides insight into the foundations of nostalgia of the inter-

viewees whose memories potentially indicate a discontinuity of positive occurrences during the mentioned socio-political crisis of Yugoslav society.

Introduction

The adage that "adversity brings out the best and worst in people" may be considered cliché, yet, from an anthropological standpoint, crisis sometimes constitute a framework within which a society may either collapse or adapt and endure. This article is focusing on remembrance narratives regarding the war, bombing of FR Yugoslavia in 1999. Although most of my interviewees associate memories of war with fear, hopelessness and absurdity as fundamental descriptors, unexpectedly, sense of nostalgia[2] and also perpetually links some people to this period.

The focus of this paper is not solely on remembrance as a selective process, but on nostalgia, specifically the romanticization and idealization that sometimes occurs during the reconstruction and evaluation of the past expressed in the context of the present. The paper is seeking to reassess the connection of social and political factors that influenced individuals' and groups perception of reality and identity at the time of crisis, but also formed base for memorialization of the socialistic past and war. Perceived through the lens of the present, i.e., the structures, values, and challenges of past became optics for evaluation of today's post socialistic Serbian society, and *vice versa*.

I argue that, based on generational position of people and the social and political circumstances of that time could have had a substantial impact on the perception of reality through media reporting, personal opinions but also social interaction during the bombing influenced the coping mechanism, as well as formation of memories. This research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the connection between traumatic events such as war crisis, memorialization, nostalgia and social contexts of cultural, generational and individual remembrance, aiming to give deeper insights into how past events affect evaluation of present.

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[2] In the late 1600s, a Swiss doctor coined the term "nostalgia" by combining the Greek words "nostos," meaning "homecoming," and "algos," meaning "pain" or "distress." This term was created to provide a literal translation of the German word "Heimweh," which referred to the homesickness experienced by mercenary soldiers. Nowadays, nostalgia is a term used to express a complex blend of emotions associated with a bittersweet longing for the past. (Vocabulary.com Dictionary, n. d. b).

Methodological and theoretical introduction

Narratives presented in this article are fragments of conversations with people who have experienced NATO bombing of FR Yugoslavia (third Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro)[3] in 1999. Due to the complexity of the topic, I have focused on interlocutors who experienced the war in Belgrade, the capital of FR Yugoslavia. This was primarily for practical and logistic reasons, and also because wider research would require much bigger format than article.

I conducted the conversations with witnesses in various chronological, spatial, and social settings. In the last 25 years, I have talked to dozens of people reminiscing the 1999, mostly in informal and spontaneous conversations. For this research I conducted interviews with 50 people who had different experiences and recollections of the bombings. Dialogues mostly explored individual experiences, such as social surroundings in which war was spent, personal observations about family members reactions, neighborhood, interactions social and government responses to the situation, personal views of cause and development of the conflict, factors of specific social identification and cultural roles people acquired at the time, but also the comments on role of media, propaganda and group efforts as part of perception and coping. The act of testimony, being the sole means of recollecting and describing profoundly traumatic events in specific, intimate way, formed the foundation of the dia-

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[3] Yugoslavia was a country in Southeastern Europe that existed from 1918 to 1992. It was initially formed after World War I as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918, and it later became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. The country went through different political and territorial changes over the years. During World War II, Yugoslavia was occupied by Axis forces, and resistance movements emerged, leading to a complex and divisive post-war period. After the war, Josip Broz Tito, a partisan leader, became the leader of Yugoslavia. Under his leadership, the country adopted a socialist system, and the name was changed to the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia in 1946. Yugoslavia went through further transformations, ultimately becoming the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1963. The country consisted of six republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. In the early 1990s, amid rising ethnic tensions and nationalist movements, Yugoslavia faced a series of conflicts and eventually disintegrated. Slovenia and Croatia declared independence in 1991, followed by Macedonia in 1991 and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. The breakup of Yugoslavia led to a series of wars, including the Croatian War of Independence and the Bosnian War. The remnants of Yugoslavia became the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992, consisting of Serbia and Montenegro. In 2003, it was reconstituted as the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. Finally, in 2006, Montenegro declared independence, leading to the dissolution of the last vestiges of Yugoslavia. In this text, when referring to happenings from 1999. I'm talking about Yugoslavia, since that was the official and internationally recognized name of the country even though it represented the union of Serbia and Montenegro known also as Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, FR Yugoslavia, or simply Yugoslavia. I use this name because that was the name of the country me and my interlocutors lived from 1992 till 2003. Also, during 90s this union was internationally more often referred as Yugoslavia than as Serbia or Montenegro, especially in western medias (Zimmerman, 2011).

logue. This can be described as an autobiographical storytelling, where the individuals opened up about their own past, life and the world they inhabited than and today.

The generational factor is, along with past and present social and political positions of interlocutors, base for understanding experiences, recollections and presentday interpretations of the past events. From 50 people I have spoken to, 10 were very young children (age 3 – 10) and 15 people were between 20 and 45 years old at the time of the bombing. Younger age group individuals (3 – 10) barely remember these happenings, and their attitude is mostly formed by the parents, school, local community, media and popular culture through which they formed images of the past.[4] Older generation (between 25 and 45 years old in 1999) had different experiences being more involved through the possibility of being enlisted in the army, but also because most, had jobs, families, or were parents and providers at the time. For this group, uncertainty of 1999, was connected with adulthood they already were experiencing during the 90s. Interlocutors of this age group had mostly negative memories about the period, although there were some nostalgic recollections of *the 1999*. Interviewees between 13 and 19 years old in 1999 (25 persons born between 1980 – 1985) had somewhat unexpected recollections towards the bombing experience. Partly positive recollections were present in all, and nostalgia in most (although not all) conversations (22 of 25 interlocutors) within this group. Reason I had chosen to analyze narratives of this specific age group is level of nostalgia that was expressed different compared to people who were adults or children at the time of war (Fridman, 2016).[5]

The interviewees did not necessarily share ethnic, gender, ethical, ideological or critical perspective nor did they identify with the community, city, nation or the state on the same level. Of 25 interlocutors, 19 were male, and 6 females. Most (20) identify as Serbs, but also as Roma, Croatian, Syrian, Muslim and Moldavian. 23 of 25 were born in Belgrade and see themselves as

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[4] In 1999, Pscychologist Žarko Trebješanin, Nataša Hanak and Dijana Kopunović conducted a research with the goal to understand how children see the crisis such as war. The thesis of the research was that answers to complex questions like cause of war, nature or posibility of war ending would be different between two groups, preschool and school children. Younger chldren pointed out moral characteristic of enemy (evil, stupid, agressive), while older children ephesided political position of enemy (expansion) (Trebješanin, Hanak, & Kopunović, 1999, p. 129). Interstingly, children from the periphery of Belgrade (specific for procentage of migrant families caused by the previous wars) pointed out critique against enemy soldgers, while children from the center, expressed solidarity with yugoslavian soldgers. Same goes for hildren from less attacked cities (Trebješanin, Hanak, & Kopunović, 1999, p. 129). The goal of this research is to see effect of different factors on childs perception and understanding of concepts such as war and peace.

[5] Two persons of this generational group had lived through wars before 1999. One was refugee from Croatia and other child-witness of the Sarajevo siege.

citizens of than (FR) Yugoslavia they used to live until 2003 (and also SFR[6] Yugoslavia, country in which they were born) and Serbia as than republic, and state today. As for ideological or political standpoint, most of the people I talked to see themselves being center on political spectrum, with 5 identify as moderate right wing and conservative, and 5 as leftist and liberal. The phenomena that link members of this group and mostly differentiates it from people who were young children or adults in 1999, is presence of often positive or even nostalgic sentiment in recollections about the war and bombing experiences.[7] Research I conducted on these narratives was aimed to understand specific factors that shaped recollection perspectives which produced specific form of nostalgia used to describe experiences of crisis and war.[8]

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Arthur Kleinman, medical anthropologist and psychiatrist, commenting on emotional and social answers to the traumatic times of uncertainty, such as crisis and wars, states that humans and societies can employ a diverse array of strategies to contend with the profound sense of inadequacy and existential

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[6] Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

[7] *The Kosovo War* consisted of two separate armed conflicts that took place in the late 1990s, revolving around the Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija. The first conflict involved clashes between Albanian paramilitary formations ("Kosovo Liberation Army") and FR Yugoslav security forces from 1996 to 1999. In FR Yugoslavia, union of Serbia and Montenegro, KLA was recognized as terrorist organization, and the conflict was seen as war against terrorism (Boyle, 2014; Quackenbush, 2014). On the other side, conflict was seen as uprising against Milošević repression, and as way to define Kosovo as independent state. The second, wider conflict, in 1999, was a NATO-led military intervention, primarily led by the United States, which included the bombing of military and civilian targets in Kosovo and Metohija, as well as other areas in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The bombing spanned from March 24 to June 10, 1999. NATOs official position that they intervened due to severe bloodshed and ethnic cleansing of Albanians, causing a refugee crisis. International condemnation had already been expressed by organizations like the UN and NATO. The refusal of Yugoslavia to sign the Rambouillet Accords served as NATO's initial justification for military action. Attempts to secure UN Security Council approval faced opposition from China and Russia, leading NATO to proceed without it, citing humanitarian reasons. This move bypassed the UN Charter's restrictions on the use of force without Security Council authorization or self-defense against an armed attack (Boyle, 2014; Quackenbush, 2014).

[8] Many of my interlocutors are people with whom I spent the war in my own or in the part of town where my mother lived. Some interlocutors were people I didn't know in the 1999 and met in next two decades. I have chousen friends and acquaintances since it gave the privileged position in the conversation, which was based on mutual experiences, friendship and trust. In that sense I was insider based on shared experiences, but also outsider, being anthropologist (Naumović, 1998, pp. 101-120). This means that testimonies were expressed through the prism of dialogue as media of communication between sides which share similar experiences, but somewhat different recollections and possibly identities. These conversations were not perceived neither presented with a goal of finding about historical truths or facts, since they are collected and analyzed as memorial and communicative and personal interpretations of the past.

fear that arises from the constraints on our ability to exert control (Kleinman, 2006). This would be described as survival tactics[9] or coping mechanisms especially noticeable in societies which are facing some form of crisis, described as limminal or state of *communitas*. Victor Turner's notion of "communitas"[10] sheds light on the limminal state where regular social structures may be suspended and social dynamics changed in order for society to overcome the challenges of social drama (Turner, 1974). In these situations, society adopts and strive for cohesion or collapses. On individual level of such community, according to Kleinman, members react to crisis in various ways. For example, part of society resort to outright denial, adopting an air of nonchalance that conceals their inner turmoil. Others, particularly those with the means, seek refuge in a comfortable ennui intertwined with escapism, effectively choosing to "forget about life for a while" (Kleinman, 2006, p. 6). Third strive to achieve safety and survival through identification with bigger already existing or group defined by the challenges of the times (Kleinman, 2006, p. 6).

Humor and irony coming from position of *cultural intimacy* (Hercfeld, 2004)[11], are frequently employed as camouflage to maintain a psychological distance from the harsh and traumatic reality, allowing people to navigate through life while clinging to the fundamental belief that crisis will be resolved (Kleinman, 2006, p. 6). Kleinman explains these coping mechanisms stating that in a certain sense, a degree of denial regarding the chaotic and unstable nature of life may appear necessary and even healthy. Yet, over time, Kleinman states, the relentless resistance of the world and the increasing fragility of the body often compel most individuals to confront the daunting odds against them (Kleinman, 2006, p. 6). The profound experiences of catastrophe, loss, and failure become deeply unsettling when the bubble of illusion is burst, and our sense of reality is disrupted. Both of Kleinman's statements are important for understanding the way war witnesses talk about the positive aspects of war time experience of than young adults, and remembrance of the past

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[9] *Survival strategies* (or tactics) in anthropology are diverse adaptive practices used by human societies to thrive in their unique environments. These strategies vary across cultures, influenced by geography, climate, resources, social structures, and history.

[10] Viktor Turner defines social crisis as "social drama", during which the community is in a limminal space ("communitas"), until, through the resolution of tension or problems (e.g., through ritual), it returns to a desirable state, achieving social equilibrium and thus strengthening social relations (Turner, 1974).

[11] The concept of *cultural intimacy* refers to the familiarity and comfort that individuals within a particular culture experience when sharing certain aspects of their lives with others who belong to the same cultural background. Cultural intimacy plays a role in shaping how people communicate, form relationships, and interpret the world around them within their cultural context (Hercfeld, 2004).

from the now adult position which faced them with postwar era defined by divisions, challenges and individuality of life.

Experiencing the inherent limitations of life and the inescapable constraints in our daily existence does not necessarily lead to defeat or despair in ethical, religious, or aesthetic dimensions. Instead, ethical, religious, and aesthetic endeavors reshape the practicalities of ordinary life, creating new connections between values and emotions (Kleinman, 2006, p. 11). In this process, individual and collective significance, transcendence, and the perception of ultimate order, control and sense of belonging become the driving forces shaping people's identity (Kleinman, 2006, p. 11). Especially in moments of crisis, when individuals, families, or communities are confronted with threats and catastrophes, people often turn to religion or to community/state/nation identification perspective. In secular and ideologically driven societies, media as an extension of state and elite discourse could take over the role of religion. Religious and social rituals, along with relationships within communities and leaders, play a vital role in this context. They breathe new life into what truly matters. Failure, catastrophe and trauma, rather than weakening individuals and communities, can actually, for example, empower religion or state organized ideology through national myths and political propaganda. In turn, religion or political narratives empower people by helping them overcome self-doubt, fear and trauma, motivating them to take meaningful individual and collective wise actions (Kleinman, 2006, p. 11).

Much of our societal fabric is, undoubtedly, woven with the threads of a myth cantered on self-control, the mastery of our environment, the benevolence of our social order and the deliberate denial of human limitations, including the ultimate one – death (Kleinman, 2006, p. 7). This will be noticed in narratives I present, which rely on local and communal narratives, traditional motives as almost metaphysical discourse as well as political propaganda that for many people at the time of war, it seems, served as base of coping mechanism. In these times of risk, politics, religion, propaganda and the entertainment industry offer the allure of simple solutions that downplay the harsh and traumatic realities of danger and uncertainty.

However, "reality" doesn't apply in same way to all individuals which also means that different social groups don't necessarily share same experiences or remember in same way. Especially within the privileged strata of society, where individuals possess ample resources in terms of finances, education, social capital, as well as good health and emotional well-being, the protection against life's challenges and the wearisome pressures of existence fosters a reality marked by aspirations and achievements (Kleinman, 2006, p. 8). This is especially noticeable within not just economically but socially privileged groups such as for example – youth as generational and not class group. For members of this group (in 1999) whose narratives I'm analyzing in the article,

experiences are defined by deep investments of family bonds, socialization and friendships (also sense of comradery[12]), creative opportunities, and the construction of future ideals and aspirations. In that sense, Kleinman doesn't suggest that confronting genuine reality, in this case through idea of shared risk and seeking safety in numbers, involves solely perceiving the worst of experiences, as Joy, exuberance, and fulfillment are as real as the darker and more perilous moments (Kleinman, 2006, p. 8). Potential or ideal of love, cooperation and hope persist and is not diminished by loss and threat; if anything, they become better comprehended and more profoundly cherished sometimes becoming the ideal people remember and search for. For some members of this group, it becomes easy to momentarily, or even permanently forget the grim weight of threats and losses (Kleinman, 2006, p. 8), especially if they were shared and collective. However, as time progresses, the majority of individuals inevitably encounter first hand the trials that render life a profoundly serious endeavor, which can lead to development of nostalgic views of the past.

Setlana Boym emphasize the factor of crisis, as she states that the emergence of the nostalgic condition was tied to times of war. In the twentieth century, marked by global conflicts and calamities, episodes of mass nostalgia frequently surfaced in the aftermath of such disasters. Simultaneously, the encounter with widespread destruction hinders a romanticized reconstruction of the past, leading thoughtful individuals to approach retrospective contemplation with skepticism (Boym, 2001, p. 28). The application of nostalgia as a perspective for idealizing or searching of the positive in otherwise traumatic past may seem paradoxical, but it gains coherence when one comprehends the contextual factors that created coping mechanisms in a traumatic period of the past needed in uncertain reality of today. In this context, remembrance operates as an utilizer of selective memory and nostalgia, serving as instruments for the reconstruction and reinterpretation of past events through the lens of contemporary perspectives.[13] In the context of the narratives presented in this article, cause of nostalgic viewpoint might be a deficiency of positive and con-

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[12] "*Comradery* is the spirit of friendship and community in a group, like the comradery of soldiers at war who keep each other upbeat despite the difficulty of their circumstances" (Vocabulary.com Dictionary, n. d. a).

[13] "Selective memory" as a constitutive mechanism of remembering and nostalgia, can produce transcendental and transformative experiences on memorial but also identification level. Paradoxically, it can lead to different conclusions about reality and change the ontology of the present for the one selecting images and altering the present, and vice versa. "Selective memory," as noted by Todor Kuljić, is an example of negating the law of time that flows in one direction but always toward a new end (Kuljić, 2006, pp. 129-130). Through memory and remembrance, societies manage to go back through time and shape, or in the context of remembrance, comment the present (Kuljić, 2006, pp. 129-130). Memory and remembrance, as well as "forgetting" (Ože, 2005), make up important elements through which societies organize their ideas about the past, present and future, as well as about "themselves" and "others" (Todorov, 1994).

structive social elements once present but today missing from everyday lives and social surrounding of my interviewees. This evaluation of the past and present can be conducted either objectively or subjectively, but always from the current and usually subjective position of remembrance.

Krystine Irene Batcho's research in the United States revealed that, irrespective of objective economic, political, or social conditions, a majority of people perceive the past as a better time (Batcho, 1995).[14] The Batcho focuses on the outcomes of nostalgia, conceived as a complex and composite concept, in relation to four perspectives: generational, developmental, personality, and transient mood state, but always related to the judgment of the past relative to the present (Batcho, 1995, p. 131).

In the context of this article, motive of post socialism nostalgia or the yearning for the socialist past today, as Tanja Petrović points out, is often viewed either as a vulnerability, inducing feelings of shame and guilt, or as a coping mechanism for those deemed unsuccessful, enabling them to endure the discomfort of the present by idealizing a harmonious and selectively remembered past (Petrović, 2010, p. 127). However, recollecting socialism as a historical memory, akin to any other memory or historical legacy, profoundly influences the contemporary lives of individuals, imparting significance or referring to current social structures, values, beliefs, and actions within a society (Petrović, 2010, p. 128).

In other words, nostalgia emerges from a yearning for a different place and time seen or imagined from one's current perspective of remembrance or imagination. Viewed through a discursive lens, nostalgia is more than a mere collection of sentiments; it should be understood and interpreted as an integral part of an ideology (Petrović, 2010, p. 128). This ideology serves as a tool for individuals and groups to establish and defend their positions and status within a specific social and historical context (Petrović, 2010, p. 128). Internal and external factors of remembrance are often perplexed in spontaneous way or through political instrumentalization of memory. It could be said that historical reconstructions of the past and the creation of national mythologies as well as individual narratives are directly connected to the appearance of certain models of societies, identities and ideologies (Konerton, 2002, pp. 15-99). Through state sponsored (literature, movies, media, commemorations) but also other

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[14]There also a deeply human factor in romanticizing the past, sometimes in unexpected context and way of forming nostalgic views. I remember the example of very old man who, when asked about life in postwar era villages in Serbia, pointed out that it was better before, since there was more people and more horses that used to work on fields. Man stated that today younger generations started to bring in tractors, so everything changed (Halpern, 2006). From this perspective, objectively, tractors seem as important step forward in progress of agricultural or societies in transition, but for this man, past was better, for subjective reasons, as he was a young than, and because he has endured period and uncertainty of pre and post war era.

informal collective spaces (scene, school, neighborhood), individual experiences interact or intertwine with group ethos or state ideology to create individual and collective forms of memory and identity.

Those who articulate such discourse use nostalgia as a means to convey their perspectives, establish or uphold specific value systems, and pursue particular goals (Petrović, 2010, p. 128).[15] According to Svetlana Boym, two forms of nostalgia are identified: restorative and reflective. Restorative nostalgia emphasizes endeavors to reconstruct the lost home across different historical periods. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, thrives in the longing itself and postpones the return home—expressed wistfully, ironically, or desperately (Boym, 2001, p. 42). Restorative nostalgia sees itself not as nostalgia but as an embodiment of truth and tradition. In contrast, reflective nostalgia explores the ambivalence of human longing and belonging, confronting the contradictions of modernity (Boym, 2001, p. 42). Restorative nostalgia safeguards the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia questions and challenges it. Restorative nostalgia centered around the recall of a national past and future, gravitating towards collective symbols and oral culture and reflective nostalgia is more focused on individual and cultural memory, cherishing specific details and memorial signs. Reflective nostalgia can frequently evoke feelings of melancholy and disillusionment, creating a perception that the current moment falls short of our memories (Petrović, 2010, p. 131). In case of my interviewees, form of testimony incorporates both perspectives in one hybrid nostalgic recollection. In the context of former Yugoslav republics, restorative nostalgia is prevalent, particularly in the pursuit of pre-Yugoslav national values and the reconstruction of national identities after the delegitimization of a supranational Yugoslav identity (Petrović, 2010, p. 131). As Petrović stated, socialism and post socialism, can be understood through the relationship of uncertainty of the present, in contrast to certainty of the memorized past (Petrović, 2010, p. 128).[16] Talking to interlocutors, I had the feeling that the goal of testimony was not just reminiscence of the past, but commenting and reimagining the present from the position of idealized past (Ribeiro, 2011). Daphne Berdahl aptly suggests that nostalgia, much like other forms of remembering, is fundamentally about shaping the present rather than merely reproducing the past

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[15] The politics of remembrance, similar to nostalgia, akin to other ideologies, functions as network of perspectives and beliefs explaining and rationalizing the world people inhabit, which suggests that representations are "contestable, socially positioned, and laden with political interest" (Hill & Mannheim, 1992, pp. 381-382).

[16] Maurice Halbwachs posits that nostalgia serves as a manifestation of collective memory, providing a "zone of stability and normativity" amidst the constant flux of modern life. In this perspective, the collective frameworks of memory act as safeguards, bridging the gap between the present and the past, as well as between the self and others (Boym, 2001, p. 53). Nostalgia, as a result, emerges as a pivotal tool in shaping human memories, and its universal characteristics are undoubtedly evident in people's sentiments regarding socialist times.

(Berdahl, 1999, p. 202). In case of Berdahl study, author gives example of German society in transition after the unification. This process had its impact on life of eastern Germans who developed sense romantization of the past, as a comment of context changes, also was response to the state hegemony regarding the past and social identity discourse (Berdahl, 1999, p.196).

Today, in Serbia, there is a sense of dominance or hegemonic process of selection of images of the collective past, on outside level (Serbia: *West*) and on the inside as dialogue between individual experience and collective memory construction (nation: individual).[17] Individual memories are important part of this process, because they could be alternative or conformist in relation to *official*, dominant memories shaped by the state and the elites. But, in both cases, on individual level, experience and testimony has its role in preservation, conformation or questioning the dominant social and political ideas incorporated in memory. In that sense, individuals and groups relationship play a critical role in shaping the phenomenon known as "echoes of memory" and the transmission of cross-generational, collective trauma memorization such as wartime experiences (Matejić, 2012, pp. 79-84). Therefore, individual memorial narratives are interesting source for understanding, specific, opposite or alternative interpretation positions, in direct or indirect correlation with external and internal, marginal or dominant memorial social and political discursive positions (Bădescu, 2016).[18]

Paul Konerton states that the group often outlives the individual whose memories it transmits through the communication between the older with the younger members of a community, thus making memory collective[19] (Kon-

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[17] For example, in Serbia today there is 301 war and bombing in 1999 monuments, but their communicative and memorial position is somewhat problematic since it shows influence of current everyday political topics and conflicts: "Out of the total number of listed monuments, 34 are dedicated to civilian victims (11.30 percent), 219 monuments are dedicated to fallen fighters (72.76 percent), and 48 monuments are dedicated to soldiers and civilian war victims (15.95 percent)". Some authors seen this as political instrumentation of the victim-hood in Serbia today. Based on the conducted analysis of the collected material, Edvin Kanka Ćudić, the coordinator of the Association for Social Research and Communication, stated: "From the content and structure of the monuments, it is evident that the process of memorization in Serbia is characterized by silence, disinterest, mythologization, emphasizing Serbian victims over those of other nations, denial of crimes, and especially denial of the role of state structures in them." (Danas, 2019).

[18] The traumatic nature of the war and its aftermath has resulted in divergent views and interpretations of the events, causing tensions and disagreements among different groups and stakeholders in Serbian society. The process of deciding how to memorialize the war involves various factors, including political interests, differing historical narratives, and emotional attachments to the past (Mandić, 2016).

[19] The idea of "collective memory" was initially introduced by Hugo Von Hofmannsthal in the early 20th century. Subsequently, many authors embarked on the exploration of collective memory and its role in shaping social memory and remembrance. Scholars such as Maurice

erton, 2002, pp. 15-99). On the other hand, as Krisztina Rácz pointed out: "the public dimension of memory is weak… it is strongly shaped by the personal experiences of those who remember (Rácz, 2016, p. 542). However, scattered, these experiential memory fragments are important elements of both individual and collective identities though, for it is not only public commemorations and official discourses that influence private ones; vernacular memories and their articulations also affect official ways of remembering" (Rácz, 2016, p. 542).

Individual memory as well as identity is always constructed and performed in wider, collective, social context and sometimes it's aimed to adopt or be incorporated by dominant or hegemonic memory discourse of the collective, but also represents influence of storytellers social and cultural surroundings (Radović, 2006; Tatum, 2000).[20] By delving into these individual narratives, the article endeavors to unveil the cognitive processes and cultural frameworks that contribute to the paradoxical nature of nostalgic remembrance midst the backdrop of wartime trauma and current societal conditions seen as base for autobiographical memorial perspective[21] as media of communicating

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Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, Paul Connerton, James Young, and others extensively delved into the intricacies of this concept (Klein, 2000, p. 127; Stevanović, 2009, p. 102).

[20] The position of Porter Abbott is that a narrative consists of specific events and narrative discourse, i.e., the positions of interpretation and presentation of these events (Abot, 2009, p. 37). Porter emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between events and their representation, i.e., the distinction between the story (events or a series of events) and narrative discourse, i.e., the interpretation (explication) of the given events (Abot, 2009, p. 37). The way motifs are used in the construction of a narrative tells us a lot about the social context or the author behind the stories, both in terms of reflection and presentation, as well as motivation or the aspirations hidden behind the storytelling. In this case, bombing represents wider context, contributing to the core of the story, not as the essential theme but as a starting concept that seeks to change the ontology of experience, the narration and reception. Major events are necessary for the existence of a story, forming the core around which the narrative is built, while satellites or catalysts function as supplements to the story, although not essential (Abot, 2009, p. 37). The main story, as it seems is in details which can be found in wider story about the war, but I think strive to point out elements of happening crucial for individual memorialisation represented though culturally intimate nostalgia, not for war, but for good or constructive or cohesive elements such as comradery, collectively, altruism and spite, as phenomena's which emerged in the time of crisis.

[21] Autobiographical narratives or testimonies represents selection of images of events that, through communication, convey constructions of reality directed towards others but also towards oneself (Kuljić, 2006, pp. 56-68). The foundation of constructing this type of memory is a detail or a series of details around which the story constructs a defined relationship of memory, imagination, and feelings. Position of recollection is essential for evaluation of the past events, in the same way current position is crucial for way we think about the future, which is always constructed and interpreted based on current historical, social and political climate and position of person which recollects or imagines future (Stajić, 2014; 2020). Autobiographical memorial narratives are, therefore, a complex, multidimensional form of constructing images of reality and self. Specific details, marked as essential, often reappear in further communication, providing an emotional foundation and facilitating the storytelling process (Stajić, 2014; 2020). The narrative structure reflects the choice of content that defines

about (social) reality in specific context of reception.[22] This goes beyond the explicit messages conveyed through the storytelling communication process regarding the past; it also unveils latent messages concerning the present stance in evaluating the past.[23] Through examining autobiographical narratives, we seek to gain insight into how individuals articulate their recollections and communicate about past war events, crisis, and trauma, all while offering commentary on the present-day social reality reformative potentials.[24]

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an individual's memories and motivations for contemplating reality and their place in it, in a given context (Radojčić & Stefanović-Banović, 2017, p. 171). In context of this text, it allows storyteller to evaluate the present based on Imaginate state of the past happenings according to persons generational, ideological, social and cultural position that dictates selection of memory images crating specific remembrance.

[22] Slobodan Naumović introduces a categorization of communication elements based on their information orientation. This categorization encompasses various aspects, including the identity, attitude, and goal of the sender (first category), the content and form of the message (second category), and the recipient's identity and the consequences of communication (fourth category). The third category deals with communication context, considering factors like the communication channel and surrounding conditions. Naumović's framework emphasizes the interconnections and mutual influence of all these communication elements (Naumović, 1995, p. 45). This classification becomes crucial in understanding political communication through the lens of memory culture, memorial narratives, and commemorations, as these serve as channels for transmitting political information and achieving political objectives. By recognizing these elements, one gains insights into the intricate ways in which political communication functions and how it shapes collective memory and public perception of events and historical narratives.

[23] Abbott emphasizes the existence of a certain hierarchy between the main and the secondary motifs, where the "main" occupies a higher position on the hierarchical scale compared to the "secondary" (Abbott, 2009, p. 326). However, the author points out that erasing the "core" or even the "catalyst" can significantly impact the structure of the story, i.e., the narrative discourse. Abbott highlights that, although there is a clear division between the main and the secondary, precisely the "secondary" can have an extremely significant role in the "meaning of the story and the overall impression it leaves" (Abot, 2009, p. 54). Therefore, even elements that may seem less important or secondary can contribute to a deeper understanding and overall experience of the story. It is emphasized that every part of the story, regardless of its hierarchical position, has the potential to shape the meaning and experience of the entire narrative. In this sense, the "comradery" or "spite" (as culturally intimate concepts) are catalysts or satellites, an auxiliary tool in building the structure of the narrative (Abot, 2009, p. 52), while the concept of "war" with its logical background, additionally contributes to the goal of redefining the broader context of interpretation, re-examining the past and present that the narrator seems to be trying to interpretate by current criteria and remember through nostalgia.

[24] Autobiographical memories consist of a collection of images and events that form narratives communicated both to others and to oneself (Kuljić, 2006, pp. 56-68). Specific details, deemed significant, are often emphasized in subsequent communication, providing an emotional foundation and facilitating the storytelling process (Kuljić, 2006, pp. 56-68). The construction of this type of memory is rooted in the relationship between imagination and emotions and also between individual and collective, so we can't these memories as historical through but interpretations of the past. The structure of the narrative is influenced by the

The central thesis of the article proposes that, during the war, the relationship between the individual and the collective, shaped by state-sponsored media and local communities, for parts of specific generational groups (such as children and young adults), established a specific culturally intimate social framework of reality interpretation seen as base for survival tactics characterized by unity and camaraderie, while downplaying internal tensions during periods of collective crisis, risk, or pressure. This phenomenon, I argue, contributed to the construction of remembrance of war era, defined by selective memory which produced nostalgia focused on sense of camaraderie or *militant middle ground*[25], seen as positive social phenomena's, absent in post-war and present-day Serbia's seemingly dis-harmonic society. The group of interlocutors, back in the 1999. teenagers or young adults and now adults and parents, present narratives about bombing experience which represent unique individual ideas about the past, but also possible framework for revaluation of presence through imagined ideals[26] enhanced through nostalgic perspective. By the nostalgic perspective, today, we can notice notions of ideals of classless collectivism essential for overcoming challenges of times of crisis such as wars, also seen as, for some, values absent but needed in todays polarized and dis-harmonic Serbian society.

This paper seeks to explore several key questions. Firstly, it delves into the generational factor of experience, that is, impact of being children or young adults at the time of the bombing on the feeling of todays "nostalgia." Secondly, it examines whether a similar mindset was prevalent among the parents' generation, who were primarily focused on the challenges of everyday survival. Additionally, the paper explores the attitudes of the informants toward the causes of the bombing within a social and political context, describing views on external and internal causes for the conflict. At the end, answers of my interlocutors will reflect their view about hierarchical position of the 1999 events in modern day Serbia's institutionalized and vernacular memory, and therefore its correlation with today's collective and national identity.

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choice of content, while the narratives themselves shape autobiographical memory (Radojčić & Stefanović-Banović, 2017, p. 171).

[25] Collective and individual memory overlapping process based on the "militant middle ground" idea (Hercfeld, 2004, p. 267) can play a significant role in shaping of specific forms of identification between individua, group and nation. This concept implies relative marginalization of existing inner conflicts and division, as result of wider, often external collective threat.

[26] Yugoslavia social ideology was based on ideal of collectivism and classless society, but in practice this was not the case. Many of older group interviewees stated this while commenting younger generation nostalgic views about SFRY.

Experience, memorization and testimony of 1999

In this section of the text represents recollection of the bombardment of than SR Yugoslavia and the city where I live. By presenting my and interviewees memories it may be easier to understand the specific and nostalgic portrayal of the past construction.

At the time I was 13 and attending 7th grade of elementary school. On the day the war began (24. 3. 1999), my classmates and I were sitting in the classroom discussing the possibility of bombing. This was intriguing topic because it felt absurd. That evening, I visited my neighbor. Around 8:00 PM, we heard the sirens for the first time. Speechless, we just looked at each other. My father was waiting at the door of our apartment. The initial reaction wasn't panic, but it was undoubtedly a shock. We didn't know what to do in such circumstances. Father turned on the television and confirmed that it had started.

In front of the building, we saw that almost the entire neighborhood had gathered. The first feeling was helplessness because we were aware there weren't enough shelters in our block. Few people panicked, while others discussed potential scenarios with a great passion. Father didn't like the atmosphere outside, so we went back to our apartment and spent the first night glued to the television. That, as well as other nights, we observed from the terrace a surreal scene of the night sky intersected by red dashed lines – the trails of rockets fired from the ground towards NATO planes.

During the initial part of the bombing, I stayed with my father in New Belgrade's blocks, while the later I was with my mother in an apartment on the other side of city. When I was in the blocks, the time between air raids was spent playing around the buildings. The sirens signaled the beginning or end of the assaults, and for us, "the kids", playing time or return home. Later on, we played football or "explored" the block, sometimes even during air raids. There was a feeling of freedom, but also of the vacuum which defined reality unlike any other.

For the three months, television was a "window of reality". Every morning, we would hear about the last night's destruction but also about the achievements of our army. For us, children, television was also a crucial part of the bombing because certain TV stations aired cartoons or movies from morning till noon. Due to the sanctions, we were already accustomed that these TV stations didn't have copyright for that content but could still play newest Western movies and cartoons with no problem. Tv program was mostly marked by the production of music videos with themes of patriotism and invincibility of our nation, also intended to ridicule and demonize key figures in NATO and Western administrations. Apart from the song "We Love You, Our Homeland," I vividly remember the "Target" music compilation and songs from Indeksovo Radio-

Pozorište. [27] Also, there was always someone in the neighborhood who had certain (unverified) information or theories about the situation development.

Television was crucial for constructing idea that "we are not alone," since we learned about protests against the bombing of Yugoslavia organized in countries like Greece, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Canada or the United States. All of this contributed to a sense of unity based on an internationally shared idea of unjust war, that created feeling that ranged from helplessness to pride and defiance, artificially binding the whole neighborhood together. Important factor of unification was the idea of stereotypes constructed by western medias which represented all "Serbs" or Yugoslavian citizens as barbaric and almost inhuman entities. The representation of "imaginary Serb" was already present in the 90s (Longinović, 2011) and so surreal for common folk in FRY that many identified with the stereotype though prism of humor or caricature, just to show that "if west represents civilization – we are happy to be barbarians (to outsiders)". [28] In this period, I could notice atmosphere of community or patriotism even with people who were against the FR Yugoslavia government and especially Slobodan Milošević.

Atmosphere in neighborhood eventually changed when the Chinese embassy in New Belgrade, and then the local heating plant only a few hundred meters away from my building, was hit. At that point, I was sent to my mother's place located in another part of the city. I remember how stressful it was to cross the bridge connecting the two parts of the city, as many bridges across Serbia had already been destroyed. In my mother's neighborhood, the atmosphere was somewhat different because it was closer to the city center, and there was the basement. During the nights, I played various board games with the other children in the building, listened to stories from the older folks and slept on a mattress on the basement floor. In both places, New Belgrade and the city center, there was a sense of unity and excitement as we, at least for the time, all bonded together. People helped each other, and as children, we were always cared for and spent this period in play. I remember the feeling of ultimate protection. After a month or two, the situation became almost normal, at least from child's perspective, as there was a feeling that this state of affairs could last forever. Of course, this was product of, as I will realize later, because my family members and most people we knew were not directly involved in war.

However, one day, on June 10, 1999, the war ended. I don't remember the end of the war nearly as vividly as I remember its beginning. The only thing I remember is that there was a sigh of relief and excitement, but also a fear of what

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[27] "Indexovci", used the music to mock certain NATO characters while also humorously describing *positive* personas like Boris Yeltsin or the representatives of Chinese government, supporters of Yugoslavia.

[28] One of examples of humorist instrumentation of negative stereotypes constructed by western medias was song "We Are the Serbs" by Nista Ali Logopedi (1998). The band used western stereotypes about "Serbs" in a way that cultural, political and racial characteristics constructed by western medias were used to enhance the absurd idea of *Balkan* or *Serbian inhuman nature*, in this case shown as a straight not weakness.

was to come. Thanks to the television program, propaganda and the attitude in the neighborhood, some of war spectators had the feeling that army is doing a good defensive job and that despite the great destruction and even civilian casualties, end of the war represented both, defeat, and a symbolic victory. Like many others, I felt like a victim, but in some way also a participant in collective defiance. It's not that people around me massively supported Slobodan Milosevic, but the war was, from the civilian perspective, often seen as attack not on his government but on „us", regardless the individual, prewar political views.

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It's important to point out that not all my interlocutors shared similar experiences or memories. This was expected. For example, people who spent the bombing in home isolation, as opposed to ones whose socializing activity was incised during the war, remembered this as period of fear and loneliness.[29]

> It seems like I was significantly restricted (by parents) compared to other children when it comes to all outdoor activities… the only way of getting information for me was through television… I lost three months of my life spent in the basement and shelter. Miloš, who was 14 in 1999.[30]

The experience of direct endangerment was also important. Most of *nostalgic interlocutors* pointed out that they didn't know anyone who fought or died and that there wasn't realistic possibility for them personally to be enlisted in war. Slightly older generation, people about 19 and 20 at 1999, also socialized, but had different point of view. Some of them said that this period was defined by increase in socialization but also waiting as there was possibility that they will end up on the battlefield of some sort. Among interlocutors who knew somebody who was endangered there were remembrance about some positive happenings, but the overall memory of bombing was negative and traumatic. This was also the factor, in both cases, of being faced with danger directly opposed to being aware of danger, but as a spectator. For most people I talked to, crisis was represented through medias, but everyday life danger was too surreal to comprehend. Almost all of interlocutors gained their information using TV and radio but level of nostalgia is higher with people that used medias as "window to reality" more than narratives of people who had direct experience of war. For example, brother of my friend was enlisted in Kosovo war during the 1999. He returned as a different person. For him and his family, war or bombing recollections couldn't have any nostalgic moments.

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[29] Some of people chouse not to go out or interact more outside of the home or shelter, especially younger generation whose interaction was orchestrated by parents.

[30] The identities of the interlocutors have been altered to preserve their anonymity.

Those who were in neighborhood or home had less traumatic memory than people who were away from home (students or working people in another city, for example). Part of my generation had sense of protection coming firstly from parents and then local and wider community. In most cases, interlocutors' surroundings expressed shock and fear but often right away a support. Some of people spent bombing at home, in shelters or both, but highlighted this period as era of increased level of socialization. Depending on age group, space of interaction was connected with the neighborhood or sub cultural activity in the city center. Social interaction for younger generation (10 – 15 years, at the time) implied playing sports or board games, while the persons of older generation (16 – 25) spent their time attending social gatherings such as concerts, house parties, antiwar protests, gatherings on the bridges or were interacting in neighborhoods.

All interlocutors emphasize the idea that after first few weeks of the bombing there was enhanced feeling of unity and collectivism *atypical for the time before,* and more important*, after this war*. Even though society was in war or conflict mode for years, war experience of biggest part of SRY population was indirect, before 1999. In the time of collective war experience, as interlocutors pointed out, *something changed*, for worst in most aspects but also for the better, especially on local community level.

> People became closer because more time was spent in the hood… (there was) nurturance among people; the whole building had lunch together in the courtyard! That was impossible in a normal situation... People surprisingly helped each other"; We went to the shelter often. It quickly became one of the social hubs in the neighborhood, so after that, we went more for the need to socialize rather than the fear of bombs; It was the best time, the whole neighborhood socialized… all generations. I began to appreciate life and people in the surroundings more. Miroslav, 13 years old in 1999.

> I remember a vibrant atmosphere in the city; I was skating with people and playing on central city square at antiwar rally, there were great concerts and matiness; all my friends I saw much more often at that time because we didn't have anything smarter to do. Aleksa, who was about 24 in 1999.

> In this moment of time, for some of my interlocutors, society seemed equal: "it didn't matter if someone was rich or not, healthy or sick, we all went through the same experience and somehow lived as one. The war influenced people to take action, to start socializing, to empathize with others!". Jelena, who was about 20 in 1999.

FR Yugoslavia society in 1999 was example of *communitas*, where surreal reality started to become hub of cooperative coexistence thanks to "militant middle ground"[31] as base for idea of unification of people with different social,

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[31] The concept of the "militant middle ground" in the context of cultural intimacy refers to a strategic position taken by individuals or groups to negotiate their cultural identity. It in-

cultural, ethnic and economic but also ideological and political background, surrounded by the very similar challenges (emotional and symbolic connection; Hercfeld, 2004, p. 267).Concept of nation became dominant (not only one, though) hub of identification, not just because increased socialization or shared risk, but also because of the feeling of generalization and therefore national level of endangerment coming from above – by external, "dominant enemy".

On the inside, through medias, nation wasn't defined only by ethical key but also as unified collective of endangered masses. Some of people even changed their political position, at the time. For example, some of non-Serbian, Muslim and far-left interlocutors, saw war as crime against people and not (just) government, and identified themselves with the concept of endangered nation:

> I stopped being a vegetarian because the reasons for vegetarianism were that we, as sentient beings, have responsibility and awareness. And I was shown the opposite and punished because I belong to a nation that was attacked by bombing. These were words by person born and raised in Belgrade in family of non-Serbian decent and leftist views. Dado, 24 years old in 1999.

Boundary Maintenance, aspect of cultural intimacy was projected through defining the boundaries between one's own cultural group ("us") and "others", in this case, society versus *the enemy* (principle of inclusion/exclusion). Television, in this period of isolation was, as Aleksandar Staničić argues, media of connecting parts of society, place of public debate or, in fucoidan sense, symbolic „window to reality" (Staničić, 2021; Stajić, 2021). This was the way to downgrade tensions and accomplish *emotional connection* through creating positive stereotypes about „us", on national level. The concept emphasized the effective attachment that individuals experience towards their own culture. It entails a profound sense of belonging, emotional connectedness, and a strong sense of pride in cultural heritage and animosity to *repressive outsiders* also defined by the state medias (state control; Hercfeld, 2004, p. 267).

All of interlocutors mentioned, with different level of nostalgia, music videos aimed to unify, raise patriotism and moral of the nation. Most of the people remembered and mentioned song "Homeland, we love you". These songs as soundtracks of the times, as well as government-organized concerts had goal to moralize or unify society on mass level (Atanasovski, 2016). At the time, this and many more songs and Tv program used romanticism or humor as mediating tools of communication between state policies and attitude of society:

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volves balancing adaptation to dominant cultures while preserving essential cultural values, asserting identity, and mitigating conflicts between different cultural groups. This approach fosters resilience and innovative cultural hybrid, contributing to a dynamic and harmonious cultural coexistence (Hercfeld, 2004, p. 267).

The state propaganda was in the style of "NATO villains hate all freedom-loving nations… and there were frequent reports on how many enemy planes and missiles we had shot down… some TV channels showed many foreign films that were hits at that time and were new in cinemas there (in the West). Not only did it make the program more interesting, but it was also a kind of "small revenge." Petar, 13 years old in 1999.

There were also sub cultural gatherings with antiwar theme, but on wider scale, television and government organized events were key space for social activism, rituals and identification. Cultural intimacy was also projected through *everyday Practices* such as public display of defiance such as "defending" of bridges every night in almost carnival atmosphere, with the goal of promoting the idea of "Serbian spite" performed in surreal context. Part of society attended these happenings, while others thought it was reserved for the sympathizers of the ruling party.

I didn't go to bridges, squares, or concerts, nor do I remember anyone from my surroundings going, but I liked the idea, and I did somewhat identify with all of it, probably due to the strong integrative effect it had on a larger part of society.

This was said by Sonja who was 23 at the time, and already had strong political, anti-government position. Younger interlocutors (13-18) but also people of older generations didn't often point out political motives behind participating in government concerts in the city, as for them collective anti-war and anti-NATO sentiment was stronger than any existing ideological positions. In case of younger generations, going to antiwar protests or gatherings was supported or banned by their parents. But ideology of defiance was stronger unifying factor than political positions that previously made social divisions.

For most people I talked to, "target", was symbolizing "ideology of defiance", seen as description of state of crisis but also society which included everybody regardless of ethnic, social or political background. "Target" was a graphic symbol that many carried as a sign of shared collective risk and unification based and expressed through mindset of the gesture of defiance aimed at the NATO[32] (Atanasovski, 2016, pp. 498-499). On the other hand, some people refused to wear it as it was seen as a sign of conformity: "I remember (target)… I didn't see it as some special symbol, more like a standard Serbian defiance" (Milan 17 years old in 1999). Even though these practices or symbols of collectivism were not adopted by whole society, defiance as survival tactic or symbol of national and social identity was exploited in the medias and

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[32] Some of the people I have spoken to have seen „target" as symbol of indoctrination under government. As Bojan said: „I only wore what came from the Resistance, I didn't wear any regime insignia or materials". „Resistance" symbol, on the other hand, belonged to the organization who was, before and after the 1999 leading political campaign against Slobodan Milošević government.

praise in the neighborhoods that were constructing public, which was also helping with dealing with crisis on psychological and emotional level.

The idea of unity, at first glance, erased inner class, ethnic or political differences, based on idea of collective endangerment as implication of shared risk, which resonated through the concept of *imagined communities*[33] enhancing the idea of belonging. This sometimes resulted in higher level of (local and general) patriotism or nationalism on different levels, from idea of neighborhood or city to the nations a cognitive center of identification:

> We had an enemy that became the center of everything, diverting attention from all else (internal conflicts). Patriotism awakened! It was a period when we demonstrated that we could be united, despite facing a much stronger adversary and having little chance of victory. We showed how brave and somewhat crazy we were… and that made fact that your area part of the nation's- impressive! Marko, 16 years old in 1999.

As I pointed out, younger persons didn't really have strong political standpoints, apart from their parents influence or dominant perspectives adopted in the neighborhood, which were easily marginalized during the war. Number of my interlocutors, especially older ones (25 – 45 years old at the time of war), pointed out that, at the time, they were still against the Serbian government, but ware not vocal about it... "since it was specific situation… and society was in need for unification in order to survive" (Miodrag, 45 years old in 1999). Few of these interlocutors mentioned political activity of political oppositions during the war, even of "resistance" ("Otpor") one of most popular anti-Milosevic organizations, had lower level of activity. Key for unification on surface level, implied marginalization of inner conflicts or tensions and focusing on the source of collective endangerment express though negative stereotypes about "the enemy" and positive sense of comradery (negotiation and resilience). Sense of comradery wasn't the same as, for example, comradery between soldiers at the front, but collective cooperative experience within the city was seen as space of shared risk experience.

"Terrorists" but especially NATO were memorized as main enemies, but the cause of wars was also seen in politics of the state and addressed to leading Yugoslavian politicians, government and Slobodan Milošević. Almost all of people I talked were identifying as victims, but part of them also see themselves as participants in collective defiance. Witnesses, in biggest percentage see themselves not as fighters or heroes, and especially not aggressors, but participants and survivors, mostly victims of NATO and western but also do-

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[33] The concept of *imagined communities* refers to the idea that nations, as social and political entities, are not simply natural or objective entities but are constructed and imagined by their members. Anderson argues that a nation is an "imagined community" because its members, even though they may never meet or interact with the vast majority of their fellow citizens, share a common sense of belonging and identification with each other (Anderson, 1983).

mestic governments political power struggle (Rácz, 2016, pp. 542-543). When asked about end of the war, most of the people I talked to expressed sad impressions. It was seen as defeat for most, and for some, symbolic victory.[34] Teodora, 18 years old in 1999, said: "Unfortunately, it was a defeat, and we were aware of that at the time... but from a moral standpoint, we emerged as winners... we were going down, but looking upwards!".

This era was described as extraordinary, "bigger than life" happening, but it also represented trauma for those who had to live through it. Most people who I had dialog with didn't accent the feeling of trauma, which was also product of cultural intimacy, since point of the experience as well as testimony was to accent defiance and bravery, not fear. Almost all (24 of 25) people pointed out changes that followed war aftermath. After the end of the war, inner polarization re-emerged since there wasn't collective crisis and common enemy or feeling of collective endangerment by abstract external enemy. Focus was, once more, on internal enemy and tensions defined before and as well after the 1999. Question about the political decisions which led to escalation and war on Kosovo and later, bombing, stated to be addressed to the historical and political happenings from deep or recent past (from Middle Ages to communist era), and in most recent terms, Serbian and Montenegrin political actors. Some of people highlighted the responsibility of "the West" but also "domestic government", and in some cases, both, not just in case of 1999, but in all of the 90s. For some, war was suffered by the people, civilians, because of the politicians' decisions and power struggle between West and East:

> Bombing is not a shameful part of (our) history because we opposed and fought back, both militarily and in a more grassroots way (e.g., defiance, concerts and target). However, it is shameful that we had state leadership that bears the greatest responsibility for allowing it to happen in the first place; Defending against NATO aggression represents a rather heroic act of the people. The political elite failed to play their role properly! Innocent people suffered while the 'people in power' spun their own stories. Mladen, 33 years old in 1999.

Asked about the state of memorization of the 1999, people have highlighted responsibility of current government, as well as past ones, as well the memorial dominance of the western discourse, for forgetfulness rooted in political and economic benefits factors:

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[34] For some, there was a big difference of social perspective on Yugoslav wars in the beggining of the 90s, and one in 1999, even on local neighborhoods' level: „the nation was not united as in '99. Since I live in an ethnically diverse environment (blocks), people had different attitudes. But when it came to the bombing, it seemed like everyone was united". As many interlocutors pointed out, difference between Yugoslav civil wars and war in 1999 was, as, for example, Dragan said: "because it happened to me!", that is, it was seen as continuity of these wars, but it was first one the Serbs are involved in Serbia and not in Croatia or Bosnia. Milica said: "War in 1999 is different only in terms of personal immediate experience and the experienced fear firsthand… that did not exist for objective reasons in the case of other wars".

Now they (the government) want to sit on two chairs. To gain nationalist points through hatred towards NATO, but to also participate in their peacekeeping missions; It's not marginal (social topic), but times have changed; they don't care about the bombing anymore. They give awards and money to the same ones who bombed us; Society is becoming increasingly divided, and the problem is that now parties that are pro-European Union are condemned as being pro-NATO pact. Stefan, 14 years old in 1999.

This dissonance, had impact on way people construct personal interpretation not always synonymous with official, state narrative. Concluding parts of narratives revealed sense of victimhood felt by civilians and also sense of political instrumentation of war memory, for many, seen as military but also civil event. For most people, memory about the war represented two connected aspects of experience, social and military intertwined with local and civil aspect of the experience. Some interviewees think that there seems to be collective forgetfulness about the acts of resistance but also cohesion during that war, mostly forgotten on institutional level, but remembered on grassroots level. For most of my intercultures, based on narratives, it becomes apparent that this *collective forgetfulness* today may find its origins in new Serbia's political elites' affiliations with past governments and also relationships with the West. Serbian government was seen as mediator between tree discourses of the 1999 memorialisation narratives, first being the western and second Serbian, but divided between state and grassroots perspective. Mediation of the state, in that sense, was described as indecisive by many of my interviewees. This could be attributed to the ongoing collaborations of Serbia's government and Western powers today, which for some implies need for the forgetting or marginalization of the war on national and international level.

Still, on grassroots level, there is still sense of trauma but also proudness or nostalgia connected to this experience. This is important since the goal of presenting fragments of interviewees narratives was to describe circumstances which shaped identity, socialization and world or reality views of people in Belgrade at the time. One of these examples would be person, 17 at the time, stated: "those few months and the period that followed was some of the most beautiful times of my life, which I will always cherish and remember!" As we said before, cause of nostalgia is often found not in objective experience and memory, but reinterpretation of different place and time reinterpreted from today's perspective. Other interlocutor, Marija, 15 years old at the time of war, tried to rationalize the present sentiment:

All (negative) happening back then was much scarier than it seems now… I remember more of the positive aspects, but only because I evoke such memories more often, not because there were more of them. Sometimes I feel guilty that only good memories remained… I wasn't fully aware of the situation back then.

As most pointed out reason of nostalgia, based on the interviews I recently conducted among witnesses, there is feeling that today's society changed for the worse, or came back to the same state of division of society and feeling of isolation compared to the 1999. Ofcouse, this sense was also product that was rooted in generation factor. For part of younger generations members, idea of unity experienced in 1999 defined whole 90s or socialism, more though idealization of the past rather than experience. For older generations, there was a recollection of partial cooperation in 90s, but they also remembered visions before and after the war. Regardless, it was pointed out by the most people that I talked to, that "something changed, (again)". "Something", would be, it seems, sense of collective cooperation as a survival strategy expressed through com-radery. For different people, comradery symbolized neighborhood cooperation, for others city was platform of collectiveness, and for some nation was the entity that was united. In post war era, the comradery faded as it apparently couldn't sustain without crisis, common enemy, collective defiance and most of all, situational socialization organized around the idea of legality, cooperation and (social, cultural or national) identity.

> It seems like the mutual relationships and socializing have faded away, as if we lost that something that once brought us together" (Luka, 16 years old in 1999): there was a vague sense of freedom we had at that time... it disappeared almost immediately after the bombing stopped… something has changed in a way that as a nation, we have become apathetic, alienated, and greatly confused about our national identity, history, culture, etc. (Nikola, 18 years old in 1999).

Narratives that used nostalgia to describe social answer to the crisis, seem not to talk (only) about the war used as meta context of the narrative, but about details as catalysts in the stories. Nostalgia is often used, as we pointed out before, to imagine time and space, in this case, different to current social context of 2023/2024 Serbian society as base for remembrance and nostalgia construction. Nostalgia was positioned in today's society, for part of my interlocutors, seen as divided, discorded and conflicted. Again, different generation shaped nostalgia about this differently. Of course, there would be factors such as youth or sense of freedom based of almost chaotic rhythm of life and absence of obligations lost in vacuum of crisis. But for most interlocutors' nostalgia expressed in narratives about 1999, seem to point out absence of sense of unity and cooperation seen as crucial for the survival in the past and also needed in today's society defined by individualism, pressure and uncertainty. Selection, from today's standpoint, implies forgetting context in which traumatic events happened, but rely on remembering the positive details such as the way people interacted and organized through the idea of humanism and less on class, ethnic or economic background that today separate them. Life struggles seemed collective and solvable through united effort, which is seen as missing in today's competitive reality.

As we can observe, institutionalized or spontaneous, socially responsible responses to the crisis, primarily promoted through media, propaganda, but also local and social activities, have left a mark on memory structure that is highlighting ideals needed in the past and present. These phenomena have reinforced certain stereotypes through which interlocutors perceived reality, reflected on themselves and their surroundings during this period, but, through remembrance, preserved them today as nostalgic images of the past. The absence of a context in which society turned inward, that is, people were directed towards each other, marked the end of the social drama and returned society from the limminal state to a condition lacking in cohesion that not only defined the post-war but also the pre-war state in the country. Similar to ideals of the past that connect people to the era of socialism, or in this case 1999 FR Yugoslavia, these ideals are products of experiences or imagination, but always seen as crucial and missing today. From today's perspective, as the children, teenagers and young adults of that time have grown up, it is not surprising that the period of adolescence defined by crisis and fear, but also a sense of belonging and protection, created nostalgia in a world that has changed in relation to the imagined security of collectivism (or for some, socialism)compared to (post socialistic) times when, as grown-ups, interlocutors faced global and local crises, weakening of social ties, individualism, growing up and facing of the imperative of survival in uncertain times.

Between past and present: understanding nostalgia

This article primarily uses Michael Herzfeld's concept of cultural intimacy as its main theoretical framework regarding both attitude towards reality of war in the past, and also position from which some people nowadays describe experience. However, it also incorporates several other prominent theoretical ideas to thoroughly describe factors important for understanding shaping of the specific survival strategies or social discourse in correlation to which culturally intimate perspectives were incorporated in social reality by government, medias but also local communities. Analyzing war experience (memories) provides valuable insights into how collective crisis and shared sense of risk lead parts of communities to seek ways of cohesion during periods of upheaval or social drama (Turner, 1974).

One of basis for building sense of unity was position of *militant middle ground* which marginalized existing political, social and class divisions of society, and in times of conflict, defined outsiders as the source of endangerment. The concept of imagined social unification understanding draws on notions of "collective jeopardization" (Hercfeld, 2004, p. 129) as survival strategies mechanisms resulting from the hybridization of individual and national

and civil and military experiences, constructed and interpreted by media and communities whose identity is defined by a sense of external threat. Ideals of classless unification were produced and exchanged on grassroots level, but heavy relied on state sponsored medias. Michel Foucault's metaphorical use of the "panopticon's prison window" elucidates the framework of a distorted societal window of perception (Fuko, 1997) during instances of comprehensive state crisis, sanctions, and isolation interpreted through medias, propaganda and stereotypes about "us" and "them". The sense of collectivism and unification on a national level was similar to Ivan Đorđević's ideas explored in his study of football fans, where (re)construction of individual identity towards group and nation is seen as a consequence of being recognized and stereotyped as a member of a specific group, valued and antagonized by other external and dominant groups (Đorđević, 2015). Stereotypisation of "others" and "us", is important factor that was, during the war, defined by pro NATO or pro FR Yugoslavia oriented propaganda, creating *collective mentality* imagined and represented though social communication, attitude and actions.

We can see effects of above-mentioned state and communal reactions to crisis hybridization, which, incorporated experiences, propaganda and stereotypes in later group and individual memories about the 1999. This is especially interesting in the case of storytellers which have used culturally intimate motives in memorial narratives which describe *how we see ourselves* or *how we want to be seen,* by *ourselves* and *outsiders* (Naumović, 2010, p. 35), back in 1999 but also today. This phenomenon refers to the recognition of certain aspects of the group's cultural identity that might be negatively valued or perceived as embarrassing from an external viewpoint. However, within the cultural insider's perspective, these very aspects were marked with a crucial role in fostering a sense of shared social belonging among individuals within a society that is negatively perceived or under threat (e.g., football fans, neighborhoods, or in this case, nations; Đorđević, 2015; Hercfeld, 2004, pp. 255-267).

Emotional and symbolic ties, everyday practices, boundaries, inclusion/ exclusion, state control, negotiation and resilience as tools of adaptation to crisis, according to storytellers' narratives, served as mechanisms for coping, but also as motives that defended nostalgic narratives about the bombing in 1999. This phenomenon appears to have served as a survival strategies mechanism and base of rationalizing the war experience (Kleinman, 2006), but its impact is also evident in contemporary memorial narratives about camaraderie, unity, defiance, and perseverance as motives used to describe and evaluate the past from today's perspective. [35]

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[35] This hybrid theoretical framework could be applied on other similar social situations such as siege of Sarajevo; mobilization of the citizens in times of COVID 19 pandemics (Stajić, 2021); unification of social groups who share the risk but also sense of comradery, such as

Of course, this observation does not necessary relate to whole FR Yugoslav, Serbian or Belgrade society members, nor all generations which experienced the war. Not all interlocutors had same or positive experiences and therefore memories about the 1999. For younger people (10 – 19 years old in 1999), state of the society seemed better, but for older individuals (20 – 40), Yugoslav and Serbian society before and after the 1999, shares similar motive of discordance even though there were some important, positive social phenomena, as comradery I mentioned before. This was based on person situation, surroundings, status and expectations in the state of crisis, as well as level of involvement in conflict, where children, youth (as mostly spectators) and adults (as potential participants) had different positions of war perception.

For some of older generation interlocutors (25 – 45 at the time), narratives also seem to portrait Yugoslav and Serbian society of the 90s as limminal phenomena with negative continuity, in which motive of degraded society is used to describe continuous reality. Foremost older interlocutors, dark continuity was seen as chaotic and destructive reality which they could witness during the whole 90s. During this decade and also in 1999, there was sense of fear, responsibility and uncertainty with imperative of survival, and constant threat of potentially being enlisted in army and therefore war. Fear of being enlisted was noticeable even in case of people who were 18 – 20 in 1999, because there was theoretical chance that war will not be perceived just from the position of spectator (as it was case with children and youth younger than 18). Understandably, even if both groups had pointed out positive aspects of the otherwise traumatic experience, mostly younger interlocutors remember these happenings with stronger nostalgia.

Surface level cohesion highlighted in all narratives is seen as product of situation of crisis, but also essential base for survival strategies. Comradery was recognized appositive potential of humans and communities, in Serbian society today mostly absent and faded into memory. Phenomena is described not just through concepts of "good" or "humanely" transmitted by friends and family, but more importantly and unusual, acquaintances and strangers. The phenomena were product of culmination of communicative process defined and enforced through the local communities, state propaganda and instrumentation of traditional (as national) myths.[36]

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miners or football fans whose group or national identification is enhanced by sense of being valued negatively by more dominant group (Đorđević, 2015). By integrating these theoretical frameworks within the analysis, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between crisis, societal and group responses, trauma and nostalgia in context of remembrance defined by the concept of cultural intimacy.

[36] Of course, before 1999, there was also strong anti-Milosevic sentiment and struggle, which escalated after the war, but the official state discourse was aimed against "enemies" and "the West". In that time, promoted by Yugoslav medias, was the idea of unjust struggle or unfair competitions with united and stronger opponent(s). Common people, especially nationalists,

War time experience, remembered from today's perspective is better understood through idea of wider social, historical and political context in which meta myths (propaganda, historical legends, stereotypes) and individual perception of reality, were overlapping, as cognitive, communicative and identity hybridisation process. Before the 1999, childhood of the most of interlocutors (born between 1980 – 1985) was marked by Yugoslavian (SFRY) wars (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina), constant crisis, sanctions, hyperinflation and *isolation from the world.* During and after these conflicts, hundreds of thousands of refugees from war torn republics became part of SR Yugoslavian and Serbian society. SFR Yugoslav wars 1991 – 1995 and conflicts in Kosovo were perceived indirectly for most people in Belgrade, but symbols and witnesses of it were present in everyday life. Since beggining of the 1990s, there was strong perception of internal and external enemy. During the wars of the 90s, on the level of common folk, was seen in every symbolic dialog between the West and Yugoslavia.[37]

Besides subjective historical interpretation, on mass society level, 90s wars aftermaths was also described by some as metaphysical wins based on criterion of "heavenly nation". This concept represents the entity whose values are represented by *willingness to fight and die for the right cause which is more important than* (earthly, material) *goals or life itself* (Djokic, 2009).[38]

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saw these symbolic conflicts as way for nation to excel on almost metaphysical level. Opposition between objective, physical results and subjective, metaphysical ones, was based on the idea of justice opposed to injustice challenged by small but spiteful group fighting for the right cause, against bigger but unjust entity. This metaphor was deeply implemented in societal narratives, but it was also big part of media propaganda (Bašić & Tomašević, 2021). In socio-political context which preceded war in 1999, the motive of fight between David and Goliath was often incorporated in Serbian history interpretation in the times of SFR and later FR Yugoslavian wars. I can suggest example of Battle of Kosovo of 1389, which represents a traumatic historical but also mythological event in collective memory of Serbs (Spasić, 2011) and base of national myth. This idea was applicable to national but also folk perception of wars fought after the 1389, for example 1918, 1941, 1991 or 1999, in which small numbered Serbian or FR and SFR Yugoslavian nation was fighting unjust wars usually described as defensive by the political elites and ideologists of the ruling parties. After the end of SFRY, partisan mythology was marginalized, and in FR Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, Kosovo myth became base of national identity as well as position for interpretation of bloody war and political conflicts.

[37] For example, many remember the 1992 as year Yugoslavia got sanctions, but also as the year when national football team, at that time especially strong, was denied participation on European football championship in Sweden, for political reasons. From that time, till the begging of new millennium, every later international sport event was also perceived as symbolic war, not just with other teams, but also against referees or the opposing sport fans whose attitude was seen as product influenced or created by the western propaganda.

[38] Basic concepts by which myth communicate its message are: martyrdom – involves making sacrifices in the name of freedom and faith; Betrayal – serves as an explanation for defeat and serves as a warning to those who do not support the Serbian cause, like Vuk Branković; glory – promises "the kingdom of heaven" and eternal honor to those who make the ultimate sacri-

Instrumentation or adaptation of this motive, opposed to the idea of western interpretation by which *the Serbs* had biggest responsibility for the wars in Balkans. For part of Serbian society, this was example of production of unjust, stereotyping of FR Yugoslavia and especially Serbian citizens, and not just political figures or political government (Longinović, 2011). Therefore, the NATO bombing was seen as catharsis of the decade of conflicts, taken as evidence that "the whole world is against *us*". Narrative was present partly on grassroots level as well as it was exploited by the government medias. This logic behind animosity between *us* and *them*, one could argue, was reflected on the idea that the whole western world is corrupted and untruthful, and *we* (the Serbs, Yugoslavians, "The chosen ones"; Segesten, 2009, p. 163; Turton & González, 1999, p. 72), are therefore, good and right, and involved in unfair but almost mythological battle between good and evil (MacDonald, 2002, pp. 75-78).

In that sense, 1999 attitude of the part of society (especially nationalist and right wing) as well as state medias narratives, was influenced by the idea that bombing was the inevitable culmination of decade(s) or even centuries of conspiracy (by *the West, Catholics, masons, America, Britain*, etc) resulting in open conflict between *West* and *Balkan, and* in post-communist Yugoslavia context, especially *orthodox* nations, such as Serbian. Product of this was mobilization of society which, for the most part had to marginalize it inter differences and conflicts, to take *militant middle ground* position, and adopt collective and even national identity defined by negative and antagonistic image outside world (medias) have used to describe it.

In this particular instance, the mobilization process was rooted in the concept of cultural intimacy essential to the survival strategies, where the perception of being undervalued or marginalized by a "significant other" – a common enemy, played a crucial role in unification based on idea of shared risk and destiny, and therefore social identity, for the time. On the other hand, external stereotype of *the Serbs* barbarians and insiders' motive of "crazy Serbs" sometimes was appropriated in communal and media portraits of the nation, producing hybrid motive based on sense of proudness and humor. Humor had especially important role in dealing with circumstances, but also in construction and performance of public identity of citizens. According to Kleinman, humor is frequently employed as a means of escapism or as a psychological mechanism that humans use to cope with threats or dangers, including the potentiality of death.

This crisis encompassed both internal factors, such as political mismanagement and betrayal by a corrupt government, and external hostilities, includ-

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fice, as exemplified by Lazar and Miloš Obilić; vengeance – seeks to reclaim the Serbian medieval state in the lands where it once thrived (Trgovčević, 1996).

ing the Yugoslav wars and NATO involvement. This brought Serbian society, typically polarized, into a state of cohesion, enforced by national myths, positive and negative stereotypes, conspiracy theories, patriotic propaganda and shared threat experienced by all regardless of social class. These meta-factors such as national myths or stereotypes exploited through humor had a profound impact on local communities as well, fostering a feeling of security and unity, and therefore sense of historical and social egality, which is evident in the memorial and nostalgic narratives of my interlocutors. Comradery, seen as base for survival strategies, allowed people to adopt, find strength and solidarity amidst the uncertainties they faced as victims but also as participants. These cognitive positions facilitated a shared understanding of their collective struggle in the midst of an otherwise turbulent, unjust, and intricate reality characterized by competition and discord, both before and after the war. After the war, camaraderie vanished as the common enemy disappeared, leading to renewed internal social and ideological divisions renewing tensions in the post war and post socialistic society facing not just consequences of the wars, but uncertainty, competition and individuality of everyday life.

Final considerations

Nostalgia present in narratives of once children and youth of the 1999 Belgrade, emphasized the positive aspects of the crisis. For some of these individuals, mostly ones who did not directly experience the war, risk, and death during the bombing of Yugoslavia, these events evoked a stronger sense of nostalgia. This was based or re-imagining time and space, and also experience perception constructed by suppressing negative aspects of the war such as danger, destruction, death, fear and uncertainty. On the other hand, lack of experiences and understanding the context of 90s and 80s, also strengthened idealized view of the past. The fact that "we survived" or "pull through" gave space for romanisation of the past seen through the lens of certainty. This was, in opposition based on forgetting the feeling of fear of uncertainty in war times but recognized in today's world. This nostalgia is not solely rooted in an objective experience or understanding of the traumatic nature of the war or even prewar era, but rather in a subjective remembrance of a period when, superficially, society appeared to exhibit greater unity, egalitarianism, and cooperation compared to the present. The nostalgic feelings associated with the bombing of FR Yugoslavia was, at least in case of part of my interlocutors born between 1980 – 1985 (13 – 19 years old in 1999), shaped by individual and collective memories hybrid position used not just to describe horrors of war, but also longing for positive social and human characteristic seen as once present and now gone. These memories may idealize the sense of unity and coop-

eration experienced and, in memories, recognized as tool for overcoming complexities and challenges of the crisis.

This model of memorization implies both, remembering and forgetting heavy relied on positive details used to construct romantic picture of, objectively traumatic and negative happening, seen as space of manifestation of positive social and individual potential. Of course, nostalgic interlocutors were mostly children or young adults who spent was as spectators which could not face direct involvement in the conflict. On the other hand, nostalgic views maybe do not describe just imagined past, as it creates meta narrative, which details were used to comment on experience of present-day adultness. The selective recall of positive aspects contributes to the formation of nostalgic sentiment toward the era, creating a longing for a seemingly more cohesive and harmonious society in contrast to the perceived divisions and negative changes in the present day. In post-socialistic and today's society, according to the narratives, comradery seen as essential aspect of collective survival and progression, was replaced by individual risk and competition vastly different than one shaped by social and political climate in 1999.

Summary

The narratives I encountered centered on crisis, danger, and risk, while also reflecting nostalgia for the superficial unity and camaraderie of society. In 1999, a sense of cohesion emerged from "communitas" and "social drama," creating an illusion of cohesion and classlessness. Cultural intimacy played a key role in constructing identities to overcome crisis challenges, fostering a lasting camaraderie. As the crisis abated, suppressed tensions resurfaced, but nostalgia for wartime camaraderie persisted, especially among those aged 13 – 19 in 1999, now adults. Nostalgia present within part of this interlocutor category, stems from the collectivism, unity and cohesion experienced or imagined through selective memory about the childhood or early youth, but also with the fact they didn't experience direct involvement in crisis or the war as members of older generations did. This nostalgia refers to certainty of overcome past, but also serves as reaction to challenges, competition, uncertainty, and individualism they face in today's Serbian society.

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