

ENGAGING WITH THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND ITS PAST AMONGST SECOND-GENERATION YOUTH OF BOSNIAN DESCENT IN SWITZERLAND

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ENGAGING WITH THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND ITS PAST AMONGST SECOND-GENERATION YOUTH OF BOSNIAN DESCENT IN SWITZERLAND

Dilyara Müller-Suleymanova

Abstract: Based on the analysis of narrative-biographic interviews, this paper explores the ways in which second-generation youth of Bosnian descent in Switzerland explore, relate to, and engage with the past of their origin country and with the conflict-induced history of their parents' migration. It examines how the legacies of the homeland conflict exert an impact on the lives of succeeding generations in the diaspora and how young people deal with and transform those legacies in the contexts of their current lives and prospects.

Keywords: diaspora, second generation, memory, nostalgia, Bosnia, conflict in ex-Yugoslavia

1. INTRODUCTION

And once you begin to seek your own answers, you realize it's not that easy. You try to answer certain questions; you ask more and you get even more questions. And this goes on and on. And I had to do that all by myself.

The above quote by a young Swiss-Bosnian woman whom I interviewed for my research illustrates some important aspects of the ways in which children of migrants begin to engage with their families' experiences of forced migration and explore the political past of their country of origin.¹ The quote expresses their desire to seek own answers to questions about the past rather than merely pursuing their family's opinions and demonstrates the active role they want to take in this process. This quote represents many other experiences of dealing with a violent past in the country of origin that I encountered among young people of Bosnian descent in Switzerland whom I interviewed for my research.

In this article, I examine how young people of the so-called "second generation" (i.e. children of migrants) confront, address, and engage with the

political past of their country of origin and what repercussions this past can have on their own lives. This analysis is based on a biography of a young woman of Bosnian descent who migrated to Switzerland as a small child due to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–1995).

The study of the second generation has been the focus of migration and transnationalism studies for several years now. One of the primary research issues is the level of socio-economic integration of migrant youth in the so-called "host society" as well as transnational practices of the second generation (Levitt/Waters 2006; Wessendorf 2010; Haikkola 2011; Crul et al. 2012; Richter/Nollert 2014).² The old paradigm of "cultural assimilation" or "acculturation", which presupposes that migrants and their descendants would distance themselves from their country of origin and its culture towards the societal culture of the dominant society and thus to a single, clear-cut identity with growing socio-economic integration, is being increasingly criticized by researchers (Levitt 2009; Riegel/Geisen 2009; Weiss et al. 2014; Bolzman et al. 2017).

¹ I would like to thank the two autonomous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions as well as the funding agencies (Swiss National Science Foundation and Landis & Gyr Stiftung) for the financial support of the research on which this paper is based.

² While the term "host society" is widely used for the first generation that migrated, this term, in my view, is less applicable for the second and subsequent generations since they were born or socialized in this society and in that sense cannot be regarded as "migrants."

Second-generation youth continue to have multiple identities and affiliations and do not, with increasing social mobility, distance themselves from the culture of their parents. In this regard, there has been a particular increase in interest in the question of how young people from migrant backgrounds engage with their families' histories of migration and "integration" and the ways in which these are being re-appropriated by youth as a valuable resource in their own lives (Juhász 2009; Bloch 2018; Drnovšek Zorko 2020).

This paper aims to contribute to this research agenda by examining the ways in which young people whose parents migrated from violence-affected contexts interpret, address, and engage with the problematic past of their families and countries of origin. It is about the modes in which experiences of conflict, violence, and forced displacement are communicated within families, and it is also about the ways in which children engage with these memories and transform them. The focus is on young people whose parents migrated from Bosnia-Herzegovina (henceforth referred to in the paper as Bosnia), a country that experienced high levels of violence during the Yugoslav disintegration wars at the beginning of the 1990s (Bieber 2006). Not all of the interviewees' families have been affected directly by the war in Bosnia. While some came to Switzerland directly as refugees, others migrated prior to the war or at its outset and largely witnessed the events from afar, which nevertheless has not been any less traumatizing.³ Most members of the second generation, whom I interviewed, do not have any experiences or memories of the war, either because they were too young at the time or were born after its end. In all of the interviews, however, the Bosnian War was mentioned without any prompting or mention of the issue by the researcher, which attests to the significance of this historical event for the youth's narrations of the past. Moreover, this violent history has had repercussions on their

own lives and played out in various forms in their biographical trajectories.

The biography of the young woman that I focus on in this paper was selected to illustrate how young people can develop their own interpretations of the past, which are critical towards the representations of the past that are dominant in the ethno-national community in which their families are embedded. This young woman developed an alternative articulation of her migrant identity by calling herself a "Yugoslav" and engaging with a Yugoslav past. She was part of a small group of cases with similar pro-Yugoslav orientations that crystallized during the research process. Her example serves to illustrate how divergent visions and interpretations of the past and alternative articulations of belonging could emerge and the biographical experiences that contributed to this. While this biography represents a specific case and an idiosyncratic experience, in comparison with other life-stories, it enables to illustrate a number of important common themes and patterns that emerged from the overall analysis of interviews. In particular, her example serves to prove that more attention must be given to the experiences of youths within the current contexts of their lives, particularly within their peer relationships and social circles, for understanding young people's ways of relating and engaging with the past.

The current paper is based on data from an ongoing qualitative study, conducted mainly in the German-speaking part of Switzerland from 2019 to 2020.⁴ The main type of data consists of life story interviews with young people of Bosnian descent.⁵ Thus far, 20 biographical interviews have been conducted (some of which involved several sessions) with young people from various ethnic backgrounds.⁶ The majority of interviewees were between 20 and 30 years of age, with the exception of the youngest, who was 18, and

³ Most frequently, the migration paths in my interview sample were a combination of labor migration and family reunification, accelerated or provoked by the outbreak of war in Bosnia.

⁴ This is an ongoing project which has been financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Landis & Gyr Stiftung.

⁵ The interviewees were either born in Switzerland or migrated to Switzerland as small children. All interviews were conducted in Swiss German.

⁶ Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats, and mixed origin.

the oldest, who was 34. These life story interviews were complemented by participant observations conducted during various diasporic events, commemorations, and community events (some of which were spent in the company of interviewees) as well as semi-structured interviews with experts and representatives from migrant associations. While ethnographic data is less central to this paper, it was nevertheless crucial for reconstructing the entire context of the ex-Yugoslav diaspora in Switzerland and for contextualizing concrete life-stories. The participants were recruited through personal networks using the snowball sampling technique; at the same time, the widest variety of access points was ensured to provide a diversity of profiles in terms of socio-economic background, professional and educational qualifications, and degree of involvement in migrant associations.

The use of biographical-narrative approaches in studies on migration and transnationalism has expanded in recent years (Apitzsch/Siouti 2007; Eastmond 2007; Mey 2017). Such approaches enable researchers to trace how engagement with particular issues (e.g. one's own migration past, sense of belonging, and more) unfolds in the course of one's biography and is influenced by specific biographical events and turns. They facilitate the exploration of how a person's individual life course is embedded in larger historical, social, and political structures and frameworks and how individuals interpret and make sense of their own biographical experiences but also their families or larger collectivities (Rosenthal 2005). Life stories are always a particular, time-specific reconstruction of biographical events and individuals can continually reinterpret their lives in the context in which they experience them (Apitzsch/Siouti 2007).

In the following section, I outline some relevant debates in the field of memory, past, and migration. Then, I provide an overview of the history of ex-Yugoslav migration to Switzerland and present the life story of Esmā, the protagonist of the biographical case study. I conclude with a critical discussion of her case in relation to questions raised in this paper.

2. MEMORY, PAST, AND MIGRATION

One of the central ways in which young people learn about the historical experiences of their families as well as the larger communities in which they are embedded consists of sharing memories and stories about the past, which are told and retold within the family (Bertaux/Thompson 1993; Erll 2011; Maček 2018). The topic of intergenerational transmission has been addressed from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives, including sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and psychology. This overview does not aim to provide a full review of the existing literature but rather discusses research that is particularly relevant for the study of memory in the context of conflict-induced migration.

There is a variety of modes in which experiences and memories can be transmitted to following generations, but not all of them are verbal and narrative in nature (Argenti/Schramm 2010; Kidron 2009; Maček 2017). Specifically, traumatic experiences and contested pasts are not readily discussed and often silenced (Rosenthal 2005; Kidron 2009). Experiences of extreme violence are especially difficult to verbalize and talk about. There is often, then, a tacit agreement between parents and children not to discuss these issues (Wiseman et al. 2006; Bloch 2018). In her anthropological study on the transmission of memories of the Holocaust, Kidron revealed that parents or grandparents never discussed their experiences of the Holocaust with their children explicitly. Rather, their memories were transmitted in non-verbal, silent ways, such as material objects (e.g. tattoos), tacit interactions, or embodied memories (Kidron 2009).

A number of studies has also drawn attention to the significance of gender and family dynamics in processes of intergenerational transmission (Leydesdorff et al. 2007; Eastmond 2016). Different family members have different ways of addressing the past and some are more open in talking about the past than others. For example, some of my interviewees have mentioned that they speak about the past with their mothers more often than with their fathers. They explained this saying that male family members do not want to touch upon emotional issues in the

past and show weakness in front of their children. At the same time, parents often want to safeguard their children from negative stories (e.g. about interpersonal violence and hostilities), thus imposing certain moral constraints on the stories told (Sorabji 2006; Maček 2018). This pedagogical-moral ingredient in the relationship between parents and children can affect “what” and “how” is communicated about the past and thus must be taken more seriously in memory studies.

Experiences of migration, flight, and forced displacement exert an additional impact on the dynamics of remembrance and intergenerational transmission (Glynn/Kleist 2012; Lacroix/Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013; Palmberger/Tošić 2016). Migration is connected with an urgent need to settle and rebuild one’s life in new circumstances and is often accompanied by prolonged periods of precarity and uncertainties regarding residence status (Eastmond 2007). The pressures of achieving economic security and the normalization of life in the migration context can thus have profound effects on the ways in which people address past experiences. As Eastmond and Selimovic (2012, 522) have argued for the post-conflict Bosnian context, “silence as a means of not addressing painful issues of the past has been both part of a struggle to normalise life and in itself a normalizing discourse”.

Studies that address young people’s memories and perceptions of the past emphasize that intergenerational transmission is a dynamic and multidirectional process and not a one-way, vertical relationship (Bertaux/Thompson 1993; Welzer 2010; Chaieb/Schwarz 2015; Palmberger 2016). The younger generations do not passively receive stories of the past but rather reframe and reinterpret them “through the lens of life course, age and gender” (Bloch 2018, 648). Moreover, young people can exert impact on their parents (i.e. the first generation) by compelling them to engage more with the past. In a study on second-generation youth from refugee backgrounds and their perceptions of family narratives, gaps, and silences, Bloch wrote that there was “an interest, almost a hunger for the narratives that can help

them to make sense of their pasts, their present and possible futures” on the part of youth (ibid.). While highlighting differences in the ways in which the examined communities have evaluated their pre-migration past, the study also revealed some common themes. One of the key themes referenced by the younger generation was the loss of their parents’ socio-economic status as a result of migration, which compelled them to succeed and advance in life in order to make up for this loss of status, and the difficulties that their parents had to endure (Bloch 2018). Indeed, to account for such feelings of moral duty and responsibility and to remember the suffering experienced by their families and communities could trigger young people’s involvement in various political, social, and humanitarian issues, sometimes in their country of origin (Baser 2013; Hess/Korf 2014; Blachnicka-Ciacek 2018).⁷

For the study of young people’s engagement with the past (including the analysis of the following case study), the theoretical and methodological elaborations of biographical studies are of particular importance. The biographical approach highlights that engagement with the past is not constant and depends on particular biographical experiences (Rosenthal 2006; Apitzsch/Siouti 2007). Thus, particular biographical milestones, periods of transition, and the search for identity in adolescence can trigger young people’s interest in family histories and their pre- and post-migration pasts.

One of the main theoretical points of biographic-narrative analysis is the mutually constitutive relationship between past, present, and future (Rosenthal 2006). The narrators’ present situations and circumstances define how they remember, present, and interpret their individual pasts. As Rosenthal argues, “points of interpretation” in the course of a life lead to a reinterpretation of the past and present (as well as the future) and *new remembered pasts* arise at each point (ibid., 6). These new remembered pasts can provide access to new dimensions of memory: “[I]n the process of recalling an experience, for example, shadings are clarified; details are added; refinements bring new voices, sounds,

⁷ Among the interviewees in my study, many have been engaged in humanitarian work in Bosnia and related this work to their own refugee backgrounds.

and visions" (Moustakas 1994, 72, cited in Rosenthal 2006). Thus, processes of personal transformation undergone by the individual are also inextricably intertwined with changing meanings of the past.

3. THE BOSNIAN DIASPORA IN SWITZERLAND

The dissolution of Yugoslavia and the resulting wars have had a devastating effect on the Balkans, leading to a series of lasting social, political, and economic consequences (Bieber 2006). The Yugoslav disintegration was caused large waves of migration from the region, leading to the formation of ex-Yugoslav, including Bosnian, diasporas in various regions of the world, particularly Western Europe (Valenta/Ramet 2011; Halilovich 2013). In Switzerland, migrant populations from the republics of ex-Yugoslavia constitute one of the largest and one of the most visible diasporas in terms of public and media attention.⁸ The first significant migration wave from the region comprised labor migration from the 1960s to the 1980s, which brought mainly male workers from Yugoslavia to Switzerland (Boskovska 2000; Dahinden 2009). There were various migrant Yugoslav organizations in Switzerland, including sport clubs, cultural organizations, and professional communities, which had direct ties to the Yugoslav state (Dahinden/Moret 2008). The economic and political crisis in Yugoslavia at the end of 1980s, which culminated in the Yugoslav disintegration wars, provoked the next major migration wave. Due to the Bosnian War, over 20,000 Bosnian refugees received asylum in Switzerland and another large wave of refugees migrated through family reunification processes (Iseni et al. 2014). The Kosovo War (1999–2000) provoked another major wave of

migration from ex-Yugoslavia to Switzerland. After these events, migration movement from the region significantly decreased but did not cease entirely; it has continued up to the present day due to political and economic instability (ibid.).

The war in Bosnia and the ensuing Dayton Agreement separated the country into ethnically defined entities, preventing any political processes and developments from taking place (Bieber 2006). A reproduction of these conflict lines is also observable in Switzerland. The previously united "Yugoslav diaspora" was divided along ethno-national lines after the war (Dahinden/Moret 2008; Behloul 2016). Serbs and Croats from Bosnia joined existing ethno-religious Serbian and Croatian organizations linked to the respective states of Serbia and Croatia, while Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) established their own ethno-religious organizations: the so-called *džemats*, which significantly grew in number with the outbreak of the war (Behloul 2016).⁹ As the only organizations that foster links with Bosnia as such, they nevertheless have a very problematic relationship with Bosnia as a state.¹⁰ Each ethnic group maintains its own community life and cultivates its own ethno-national narratives; this is mainly done with the support of affiliated states, which for example sponsor additional "homeland language and culture" courses for school-aged children in Switzerland.¹¹

While divided on the level of associations, migrants from ex-Yugoslavia share many common features as members of a migrant population living in Switzerland. In addition to a common language, culture, and food habits, they also experience discrimination at the hands of the Swiss majority, which perceive them as a homogenous group. The pejorative term "Yugo" is

⁸ It is estimated that around 400,000 people of ex-Yugoslav origin live in Switzerland, excluding those who are naturalized and Swiss citizens. Currently, it is estimated that approximately 60,000 Bosnians live in Switzerland (Iseni et al. 2014). However, this number is but an estimate, since many Bosnians prefer to take up citizenship in another post-Yugoslav country (e.g. Croatia, which is part of the EU). Thus, they may be included in official statistics as Croatian or Serbian citizens (ibid.).

⁹ "Bosniak" is a commonly used name for the Bosnian Muslim population in post-war Bosnia. Some of these associations were established at the end of the 1980s, but the majority was established in the 1990s (Behloul 2016).

¹⁰ It is very telling that the organization of the national day of Bosnian statehood in Switzerland (28 November) solely takes place on the initiative of the Bosniak-run migrant associations, without any involvement from the diplomatic representation of Bosnia.

¹¹ These classes are titled *Heimatliche Sprache und Kultur* in German.

used to label and other this population in everyday life and public discourses, despite the fact that a large proportion of migrants from ex-Yugoslavia have been naturalized as Swiss citizens (Iseni et al. 2014). The rates of naturalization are higher among the second generation who were born or raised in Switzerland. However, exclusionary attitudes towards them are still commonplace.¹²

While second-generation Bosnians who grew up in Switzerland do have a sense of belonging to Bosnia, it is often a fragmented and diffuse relationship. They mainly know the country from holiday visits, their parents and other family members' stories, and various diaspora activities in which they have taken part. Although few of my interviewees were regularly active in migrant associations, almost all of them had participated in such activities at some point in their lives, whether they were in the form of language courses, religious lessons, folk dance groups, or community events. Encouraging young people to participate in these activities is intended to help them learn about the culture and history of their country of origin. However, apart from the commemoration of the genocide in Srebrenica, which is regularly organized by a Bosniak organization in Switzerland, there are few commemorative activities related to the past of Bosnia, whether they concern the Bosnian War or Yugoslav history.¹³ Still, references to the recent past and present of Bosnia can be found in the narratives of young people and these events are also discussed episodically in their families. As may be expected, the ways in which young people are involved in issues related to the past are diverse; some youth are very invested, while others maintain their distance or exhibit apparent disinterest.¹⁴

4. ESMA'S STORY

4.1 Growing up as the Child of Bosnian Migrants

Esma is a 32-year-old woman of Bosnian origin. She appears to be well-connected in the ex-Yugoslav diaspora in Switzerland and has been active in various spaces related to migrant culture in the country. Esma spent her early childhood years in a small town in a central region of Bosnia where she enjoyed a stable and secure life with her mother and siblings; however, her father was absent most of the time. As a seasonal worker in Switzerland, he sometimes returned to Bosnia with Western goods and sought-after Swiss sweets. This relatively prosperous life abruptly ended in early 1992 with the outbreak of war in Bosnia. Esma's mother decided to flee with the children, the youngest being only one month old, to join their father in Switzerland. Esma does not have many memories of the flight, except that there were "barricades everywhere" and that the journey "took a very long time".

When they arrived in Switzerland, the entire family settled in a small apartment that Esma's father was renting while working at a Swiss industrial enterprise. Esma entered primary school and was socialized into Swiss reality. However, this relocation to a new context was accompanied by a distressing involvement in events in the homeland for the entire family. While physically removed from Bosnia, the war was still present in the daily lives of the family, as Esma describes in the following passage:¹⁵

The news was always present. During the war, CNN was on all the time at our place. And I remember my mother trying to receive Radio Free Europe at night. And I don't know which frequency that was, but she was always searching for it and, once she had found it, she let it play, but there was such a bad connection and there was always this "krss-krss" noise. I knew that my

¹² One of the issues is discrimination on the job market based on their surnames, which often end in -ić (Fibbi et al. 2015).

¹³ In fact, with a limited reach, since the event to commemorate the genocide in Srebrenica is organized solely in the French-speaking part of Switzerland.

¹⁴ Sometimes, such divergent attitudes may be found within the same family, among siblings.

¹⁵ This is an English translation. All interviews were conducted in Swiss German.

parents were constantly looking for sources of information about what was happening there. However, they rarely talked about it with us. [...] But also when my father lost his nephews or his brother-in-law, he never talked to us about it... It was just like that, I just knew. My parents were always on edge. I remember that when we came to Switzerland, the company of my father was cutting jobs because there was a crisis in the industry and my father was afraid: "Ok, now I have my family here with me, there is a war going on and I might lose my job!" My parents were stressed out. But did they talk to us about it? Not really.¹⁶

Esma's description of how her family communicated about the war in Bosnia echoes statements from many other interviews in my study. Parents rarely talked with their children about what was happening in their homeland, including the loss of family members or friends. They simply stated the fact that an uncle or a grandfather had died, without going into detail about how it had happened. Thus, one of the other interviewees discovered only later that her grandfather had been held in a concentration camp and was appalled by her parents' silence over this fact for many years.

As this quote vividly illustrates, the distress that families experienced at the time was provoked not only by events in the homeland but also by the precarity and constant uncertainty surrounding their residence status, including the possibility of having to return to their war-torn country or losing their jobs and not being able to earn enough money to provide for their families. Even the interviewees who had no memories of that time due to their young age speak with a sense of emotional involvement about what their families went through in those first years of settling in Switzerland. This preoccupation with the daily challenges of establishing a life in new settings may be one of the reasons for the sparse communication about what was occurring in the homeland. At the same time, many parents were insecure and perplexed by how to explain the situation. My interviewees connected this sparse

communication with their parents' desire to protect the children from negative information.

Esma's biography also demonstrates how migrant families were influenced by the war despite being physically removed from it. Esma's mother – and, later, her father – became increasingly religious, a fact that Esma connects directly with the war:

I was alone with my mother and she developed something close to a religious psychosis. "All this is happening to us Muslims", she said as the first massacres were taking place, "all this is happening to us Muslims because we haven't been faithful to God, because we have betrayed God. And now he is punishing us because we were not good Muslims during the communist time." And I believed all that; that really gave me work to do.

The violent conflict in Bosnia gave rise to various religious narratives and interpretations of the war. Thus, among Bosnian Muslims, there was a heightened sense of victimhood as Muslims (Bringa 1995; Eastmond 2016). In Bosnia itself as well as in the Bosnian diaspora, there was a trend towards a growing religiosity in the aftermath of the war (Eastmond 1998; Valenta/Ramet 2011; Bougarel 2017). For one, religious involvement was a way to cope with the difficulties and traumatic experiences of violence and displacement. This is also how Esma interpreted her family's growing religiosity: "My mother became very religious after the war. She found a source of spiritual strength in religion whilst addressing this whole situation."

In addition, migrant infrastructure (which was mainly of a religious character) became particularly relevant for Bosnians in the diaspora. The džemats not only became centers of religious life but also migrant community life. They were sites of orientation in which incoming migrants could obtain assistance on various matters, from finding a job to addressing Swiss bureaucracy (Behloul 2016). At the same time, they were important as spaces for retaining links to the

¹⁶ Throughout the citations, pauses are transcribed as ..., omissions as [...].

country of origin and its culture, especially for children.

Esma's family was likewise integrated in the local Bosnian Muslim community. They regularly visited the džemat and, as a child, Esma had to attend religious courses. However, Esma looks back on her involvement in these activities with skepticism. In the interview, she said that she "had to attend the courses," emphasizing that this was rather her parents' wish than her own. She was not particularly motivated to study and was extremely bored at the time. The manner in which she now interprets this period of her life is closely linked to her present views and to her particular biographical experiences.

One of the precursors of what became one of the major turning points in Esma's biography was when she started dating a young man – not just any young man, but one of Serbian origin. She describes this period of her life as follows:

... and then I fell in love with a young Serb [laughs]. And that was a scandal! My parents did not want to accept that, so I moved out. But I had always wanted that... For my parents, this was terrible because the war had made them nationalists, defensive nationalists. And the war had made them say that you could trust neither Serbs nor Croats, and you were to mix with them by no means. That was an outright no-go, and I completely turned it around. And particularly as a Muslim girl! A Christian! I think, they would have had difficulties with a Swiss guy too, but much less so. There had really been this war, which had happened...

This episode illustrates the repercussions that the legacies of a political conflict can have on the lives of young people, such as Esma. The war cemented ethno-national boundaries and divided people, not only through separate migrant associations but also on the interpersonal level. Some of my interviewees recalled that families from different sides stopped visiting and speaking to each other; others recounted arguments they had had with children from the "other" side in kindergarten or primary school. Polarization and defensive rhetoric on all sides of the conflict affected families in the diaspora.

While Esma was forced to confront and tackle these rigid ethno-national divisions, her everyday life in Switzerland was a different reality. She grew up in a hybrid, (post)-migrant reality in which young people belonging to the so-called second generation (Secondos in Swiss German) defined themselves in different terms than their parents and formed alliances based on other categories than ethnicity (Juhász/Mey 2003; Allenbach 2011). These youths found themselves in similar socio-economic positions and educational tracks and often shared a common migrant adolescent culture (Oester et al. 2008; Mey/Rorato 2010). Esma met her Serbian boyfriend after completing secondary school and entering vocational training. Thus, she pursued a professional path similar to that of many other second-generation youth in her social circle. Quite naturally, these circumstances led to her partnership with a Serbian young man, as they both occupied a common ground shaped by their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

The conflict with her family provoked by this relationship became a turning point in Esma's biography after which she moved out of her parents' house and started an emancipated life. Gradually, she began to diverge from the Bosniak community ideologically and, from what she viewed as conservatism, traditionalism, and its narrow interpretations of the past:

When circles are as conservative and as moralizing as that, there is much space for a double standard. That has always annoyed me. So I've always distanced myself from nationalism in general, no matter which one. I've been able to distance myself quite well and I try to keep doing that... It took me a long time, but somehow, at a point in my life, I was done with religion. I came to the conclusion that if God is so strict, I will seek my own way.

Currently, Esma positions herself in opposition to an organized religious life. While she does not distance herself from the Bosniak community socially (her mother is still an active member of džemat), she distances herself from nationalist sentiments and interpretations of the past that still dominate in the diaspora community of ex-Yugoslavs in Switzerland. After all, so Esma, these sentiments were responsible for the war

and her family's need to flee. In the following, I will illuminate how she came to relate differently to the past of her country of origin and developed alternative articulations of belonging through the ideology of Yugoslavism.

4.2 Coming to Terms with the Past through Yugoslav Legacy

The silences or gaps in knowledge about the distressful times that her family went through during the war in Bosnia did not preoccupy Esma as a child or a teenager – the quest for information arose later in life. After parting ways with her Serbian boyfriend, she decided to fulfil her long-standing wish to study history. She said that she wanted to seek her own answers about what happened in the history of her country of origin.

After completing an additional qualification, Esma was able to start her university studies in history. At the same time, she became more involved in music, which had been an important part of her life and an essential aspect for addressing questions of identity and belonging. She had been interested in music from the Balkan region; however, she did not share many of her Bosnian friends' fascination with "turbo-folk"¹⁷ and was instead more drawn to rock and alternative music:

And I've always loved music. I began discovering Yugoslav music in my youth. And I realized that we have great music, great rock, and for me, engaging with this music was part of finding an identity... Of course, we were labelled "Yugo" and I did feel that. But to discover that we have such great music was a little bit healing. To know that already back in the 1970s and 80s, we had this great rock music means we were not so bad, right? We are also worth something! We also have created something which is great! And this was healing for my own identity, it helped to discover, to establish a positive sense of belonging.

Thus, engaging with Yugoslav rock was for Esma inextricably linked with the need to find positive

meanings of belonging as the child of Yugoslav migrants in Switzerland. Several times during the interview, she repeated that listening to Yugoslav rock and watching videos of rock concerts from the 1970s and 80s on YouTube with its liberal, modern, Western-like atmosphere was "healing" and had given her self-confidence. Through "Yu-rock," she discovered that the cultural legacy of Yugoslavia was one to be proud of and could challenge common Swiss perceptions of Yugoslavia as an underdeveloped and exotic "other."¹⁸

Studying at university became an important crossroads for Esma; along with learning about the history of the region in more depth, she also encountered other second-generation youths of ex-Yugoslav origin who shared her musical tastes and her positive attitude towards Yugoslavia and its legacy. It was within this circle of like-minded peers that she further developed and cultivated what she called a "Yugo-nostalgic attitude." Many of these young people met and got to know each other through the Yu-rock scene, which organized concerts or regularly played Yu-rock in bars. This diasporic space differentiated itself from other ex-Yugoslav migrant associations by bringing together youths from all ethnic backgrounds and being "nationality-blind".

In cultivating these Yugo-nostalgic attitudes, Esma was able to draw on her family's memories, such as stories that her mother had told about her grandfather (who had been a partisan during the Second World War) or her uncle (who was himself a fan of Yugoslav rock music). She was inspired by her mother who was both a devout Muslim and a Tito fan, and who made an album with pictures of him after his death.¹⁹ For Esma, such images from the past served as powerful illustrations of the inclusiveness of the Yugoslav project in which being Muslim and pro-Tito were not mutually exclusive.

However, these Yugo-nostalgic attitudes were not only based on Esma's representations of the Yugoslav past. They were rather a product of her

¹⁷ Turbo-folk is a popular musical genre throughout the ex-Yugoslav region which combines traditional Balkan musical elements with pop, rap, and other contemporary musical styles (Archer 2012).

¹⁸ Yugoslav rock (or Yu-rock) was one of Yugoslavia's major cultural exports and received worldwide recognition. For more on Yu-Rock, see for example Pogačar 2008; Stankovič 2001.

¹⁹ Josip Broz Tito, communist leader of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1953–1980).

own manner of dealing with the violent post-Yugoslavian past and engaging with the current situation in the region critically:

And it seems to me, I am a Yugo-Nostalgic because I simply cannot... cannot overcome it. It's like this... I always say, nations are founded and nations decay. That is a normal process in history. It just hurts that it came to an end so violently. That is what I cannot cope with; that is why I grieve. And also because everything that came later is much worse than Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia wasn't great, it wasn't perfect, there were many problems, but it was still better than all that we have now.

For Esma, the Yugoslav project and a way of thinking outside ethno-nationalist categories suggested an alternative vision to the destructive forces of ethno-nationalism that have shaped the past and the present in the region. At the same time, the ideals of social justice and a distinct form of socialism that Yugoslavia had been pursuing, a more humane form, in her eyes, than the Soviet Union, made the Yugoslav project worth identifying with. Esma said that she does not idealize Yugoslavia's past and she is aware of the negative aspects of that time. Rather, her fascination with Yugoslavia has been based on the need for an ideal – a utopia that made it possible to imagine a different, better future for Bosnia:

... But it could really be such a beautiful country. It was big. It followed its own political course. Tito and Stalin were in conflict with one another and Yugoslavia walked its own socialist path. They tried. And all these are such elements... they create nostalgia because... I somehow need some kind of ideal to orient myself in life. And this collective, this anti-nationalist, this... yes, communist, but actually the social thought behind the communism... is just such a utopia that never became real, and yet it is a beautiful dream. And this dream, I'd still like to hold on to it somehow.

5. THE "OLD" AND THE "NEW" PASTS IN THE LIVES OF THE SECOND GENERATION

Esma's life story was narrated at a particular moment in her life and in the particular context of a research interview. It represents her current per-

spective from which she looks back onto her personal past and the history of her family and of Bosnia, her country of origin. This particular narration and interpretation of the past is subject to change as Esma moves forward in life and gathers new experiences and insights. This particular interpretation also emerges from the dialogue that she engages in with those whom she tells and retells her life story (Eastmond 2007). Thus, it is a very specific, individual, and subjective picture, which at the same time – particularly in conversation with other interviews – provides insight into the entire range of issues regarding memory, intergenerational transmission, and representations of the past in the context of diaspora and migration.

Esma was not directly and explicitly informed about her family's migration experiences and political events in the homeland. It was rather a somewhere in-between communication and silence with emotionally charged atmosphere, distress, and overheard conversations as the main means of learning about the past. Political developments in the homeland and experiences of migration had further impacts on Esma's family in that they became more religious and turned towards their own ethnic community – a phenomenon that has also been documented in the post-conflict, ex-Yugoslav diaspora in other places (Eastmond 1998; Huttunen 2005). The violent conflict triggered an increasing social distance among people from the same country who had different ethno-national backgrounds. For Esma, this meant that her family could not approve of her dating a Serbian man; as a result, she moved out of her parents' house, starting her process of emancipation from the family as well as from the Bosnian migrant community and its narratives.

Gaps in knowledge about the political history of their country of origin have a variety of further implications for second-generation youth. Esma's case shows that, while she grew up with conflict narratives that were intended to socialize distrust towards "others," she was able to develop a critical gaze towards these narratives and formulate her own view of the past.

How did the "new" Yugoslav past emerge as a relevant point of reference for Esma? On the one hand, there were family memories and stories

about Yugoslavia, which later served as mnemonic resources for her personal and emotional engagement with this history. On the other hand, the discovery of the Yugoslav rock music which conveyed an image of the country as modern, liberal, and Western-oriented, has been an essential experience. Biographically, it took place at a particular point in Esma's life, when she was in the process of searching for belonging and acceptance in society as a child of Yugoslav migrants. She deepened this engagement during her time as a university student where she could explore in depth the political history and ideas of the Yugoslav period. University was equally important because she socialized in a group of like-minded peers there – second-generation youth like her with positive attitudes towards Yugoslav legacy. Thus, Esma did neither live and cultivate these Yugo-nostalgic attitudes within her family nor in Bosnia itself (during holiday visits, for example) but in Switzerland in the circle of like-minded young people of migrant background. Thus, Esma's experiences and her social life in Switzerland played an essential role in the formation of her Yugo-nostalgic attitudes.

6. CONCLUSION

Esma's case exemplifies various aspects of young people's engagement with the past that I encountered in my research on this topic. It illustrates how the legacies of the past impact the lives of following generations and the ways in which young people address, reinterpret, and transform these legacies in the contexts of their current lives and prospects.

As Esma's story and other cases in my sample have shown, knowledge about the past is not passed from parents to children in a straightforward and unidirectional manner. Rather, there is a variety of forms and modes of transmission in which narratives, stories, and conversational fragments overlap with material objects, emotions, body language, and other non-verbal means.

Young people later seek to fill in possible silences, gaps, and elisions in their knowledge about the past. They do so by revisiting emotionally meaningful family memories but also by referring to various other sources of information such as

books, documentaries, the stories of other family members, and, increasingly, digital media (e.g. videos on platforms such as YouTube). They also ask their parents or grandparents pushing them to confront and reinterpret their past making this process a multidirectional one. The biographical approach further reveals how interest in and scrutinization of the past is a dynamic process; this interest emerges at certain points in an individual's life, then fades away and is replaced by other, more pressing life challenges. For this reworking of the past, experiences that young people gain throughout their life trajectories are of utmost importance. Thus, for Esma – as for a large number of other interviewees – her preoccupation with the past was intertwined with the processes of finding belonging and recognition in a society where she was perceived as a member of the stigmatized group, the "Yugos."

Further, what Esma's and other cases in my sample show is that the political legacies of the homeland conflict – such as the Yugoslav disintegration wars – have an impact on the lives of young people in the diaspora. It is one of the important constraints that these young people must address and cope with in their lives. While they rarely reproduce the conflict dynamics themselves, they are embedded in and move within spaces and contexts in which conflict is still a structuring force. There are families in which a relationship with someone from the "other" side is not accepted; and there are diasporic spaces in which ethno-nationally oriented ideologies and narratives are continually reproduced.

At the same time, these ideologies and narratives are always filtered and perceived through the context of the youths' current life situations and the milieus in which they move. Esma's case shows the importance of peer circles or particular youth scenes for the ways in which young people engage with the past. Alternative information can be shared within these peer circles; as a result, a critical and distanced stance towards narratives dominant in the own community can evolve. This was the case for Esma as well as for other interviewees with pro-Yugoslav outlooks in my research, all of whom have developed a critical opinion towards their families and ethnic communities' visions of the past and present of their homelands.

Furthermore, Esma's case shows that the past can become an orientation or an ideal for the future. The Yugoslav legacy and the ideals that it embodies – anti-nationalism, social justice, and equality – serves as a source of political visions not only in relation to the country of origin but also in relation to Switzerland with its vocal presence of right-wing, exclusionary rhetoric in public debates about migration. This utopian vision is appealing not only because it resolves many tensions that run through the biographies of these young people, but also because they speak to their political, social and cultural visions and needs.

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