

'Things were good during Tito's times, my parents say': How Young Croatian Generations Negotiated the Socially-Mediated Frames of the Recent Yugoslav Past

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Abstract

How do new generations in a society negotiate different perspectives of a controversial past available from various sources? How do they use the past to make sense of their lives? Using in-depth interviews with 72 young members of the first two Croatian post-Yugoslav generations, the present study analysed how these young people acquired elements of their repertoires on the recent Yugoslav past from family members, school and the media, how they assessed these elements in terms of plausibility and legitimacy, and how they appropriated or questioned them. The study's findings suggest that the credibility of the socially-mediated perspectives of the past was increased by the emotional bond with the sources who adopted the role of witnesses, and by the fit with the personal concerns of the meaning-making audience. As a result, the most successful were the frames transmitted by the communicative sources through social interaction, rather than by the institutionalised sources.

Keywords:

collective memories, Yugoslavia, family, school, media, young

Introduction

How do new generations in a society negotiate different perspectives of a controversial past available from various sources? How do they use the past to make sense of their lives? I answer these questions by examining the perspectives on the communist Yugoslav past among two young Croatian generations, growing up and coming of age in a society that has, in the span of 15 years, transitioned from a Yugoslav totalitarian regime through an authoritarian Croatian state to a nascent democratic society. The two generations are distinct in their childhood and formative years' experiences of Yugoslavia and post-Yugoslav Croatia, but they share a dependency on the secondary sources – family members, school and the media – for the access to the meaningful evaluations of the Yugoslav past.

This case provides a unique opportunity for examining intersections of various influences, both institutional and interpersonal, on the formation of personal perspectives on the past. The young Croats born 1978-1971 (the transitional generation) and 1989-1991 (the post-communist generation) formed their perspectives on the Yugoslav past in a changing social context. The transitional generation spent its early childhood in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) that has already started to crumble under the nationalistic tensions after the death of its leader, Josip Broz Tito, in 1980 (Sekulić, 2004). Compounded with the economic crisis of the 1980s, and the unrest echoing the democratizing movements elsewhere in the Central and Eastern Europe (Goldstein, 2008), the breaking point was reached in 1990, just a couple of months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the Croatian and the Slovenian delegations walked out of the 14th Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (Goldstein, 2008). In some 18 months that followed, the Croats held the first multiparty democratic elections, overwhelmingly voted for the independence from SFRJ on a referendum, and experienced the start of hostilities on the Croatian territory, which soon turned into one of the 1990s Yugoslav wars lasting until 1995 in Croatia (Goldstein, 2008). These turbulent times marked the transitional generation's entry into the adolescence and the post-communist generation's arrival into the world.

The 1990s Croatia was characterized by the authoritarian rule of the nationalistic Croatian Democratic Party's leader Franjo Tuđman. Historian by profession, he sought to affirm the legitimacy of the new Croatian state in opposition to the communist Yugoslavia, and his heavy hand shaped the history curriculum (Goldstein, 2001; Koren, 2005; Höpken, 2007) and controlled the media discourse (Malović and Selnow, 2001; Ottaway, 2003). While the public discourse in Yugoslavia was dominated by the propagation of a supranational Yugoslav identity under the parole of "brotherhood and unity", Tuđman sought to present the Yugoslav project as another yoke of the Croatian national identity and celebrated the creation of a Croatian national state as the realization of centuries-long dream of statehood (Höpken, 1997; Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, 2007; Koren, 2005). This grand national narrative served not only to establish the legitimacy of his rule, but it also established the legitimacy of the war for independence from Yugoslavia, that was in the early 1990s fought against Serbs in Croatia and the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) under the Serbian leadership who joined forces in their armed opposition to the Croatian secession (Goldstein, 2001; Ramet, 2006). In Tuđman's nationalistic project, other pillars of the Yugoslav ideology were dismantled as well: Tito's cult of personality, the legacy of the communist Partisans' antifascist struggle in World War Two and the doctrine of "titoism" that claimed a Yugoslav-specific type of socialism – more open and less repressive, grounded on the self-management of workers, the federalisation of Yugoslav republics, and the non-alignment in international relations (Höpken, 1997; Ravlić, 2005). Both Tito's rule and the Partisans' role in World War Two¹ were now re-evaluated in terms of their crimes against the Croats, and the Yugoslav-specific type of socialism was interpreted primarily within the framework of the failed federal project

and the Serbian dominance (“Great Serbian hegemony”) that manifested in the exploitation and victimization of Croats (Höpken, 1997; Najbar-Agičić and Agićić, 2007; Koren, 2005). This is the context marking the transitional generation’s time in high school and the early formative years of their political socialization.

After Tuđman’s death in 1999, the country experienced a new period of democratization and liberalization. While these changes were notably manifested in the rise of the media freedoms and civil liberties (Freedom House 2002; 2004), the educational system in the first half dozen years of the 2000s remained inert, with only a couple of available textbooks presenting more pluralistic presentations of Yugoslavia (Vuckovic Juros, 2012). This was the context in which the post-communist generation was coming of age.

Both the transitional and the post-communist generation were too young to form meaningful personal evaluations of Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, this period was still recent enough so that they had to confront competing perspectives on the Yugoslav past, both in the public discourse and among people who lived through this period. Therefore, these generations are truly the first carriers of collective memories of Yugoslavia in Croatia, in the sense that their memories were socially-mediated – both by the political elites’ discourse and by other mnemonic communities (Halbwachs 1992 [1952]; Zerubavel 1996). The present paper aims to disentangle this process of social mediation of memories – both by identifying various perspectives available from diverse sources (family, school, media) and by analysing how they were negotiated by young Croats. As the analysis below will demonstrate, young people in this study dominantly appropriated social perspectives of the Yugoslavia that were communicated to them by their family members and other older people, rather than political, economic and ethnic perspectives that dominated Croatian history textbooks and newspapers. In this paper I will show how the credibility of social perspective on Yugoslavia was increased by the emotional bond with the family members who acted as the witnesses of the Yugoslav period. Moreover, with the less educated segment of this group, such social perspective communicated in everyday interaction had little actual competition from other types of presentations of Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, even better educated or better informed individuals used the social perspective of the Yugoslav past as tools of criticism or possible resistance to the negative political, economic and ethnic re-evaluations of Yugoslavia dominating Croatian public discourse. In fact, for all young Croats in this study, using social frames was the most meaningful way of thinking about Yugoslavia, because social lenses were simultaneously used to make sense of their everyday concerns, in a manner that could not possibly be done anymore with political, economic or ethnic lenses.

The contribution of this type of analysis, that examines how young people acquired and negotiated different perspectives of the past available from diverse sources, is that it does not stop at collecting individual narratives of the past, as it is more typical for studies examining reception of collective memories. Instead, the present study also analyses these narratives in relation to one another and it specifically addresses how the socially-mediated stories were evaluated by the young. By focusing on the evaluation of sources’ credibility and on the meaning the young people attribute to the stories of the past transmitted to them, the present study is able to provide a deeper understanding of what makes some frames of the past – the communicative or non-institutionalized sources in this particular case – more successful than others.

Theoretical framework

Mnemonic Communities and Repertoires of Collective Memories

The field of collective memories, rapidly growing since the 1980s (Klein, 2000; Schwartz and Schuman, 2005; Olick and Robbins, 1998; Olick et al., 2011), has long been dominated by the study of institutionalized or structural memories. Building on Nora's (1989) examination of "sites of memory" and Assman's (1995) work on "figures of memory", European scholars mostly examined commemoration rituals and objects (Erll, 2008). In a related, but separate track emerging in the 1990s, the American scholars focused on the memory work of political elites and the media (Schwartz, 1996a; Schwartz and Schuman, 2005; Olick et al., 2011). Both of these approaches spotlighted the top-down process of collective remembering, where the individuals – the receiving interpretative audience – were temporarily suspended from the analysis.

The individuals, however, are now making a called-for return into the field of collective memories (Crane, 1997; Confino, 1997; Kansteiner, 2002; Schwartz and Schuman, 2005). These approaches highlight the insights made already by Halbwachs (1992 [1952]), that the collective remembering happens within frameworks of social groups – mnemonic communities (Zerubavel, 1996) – to which the individuals belong. People make sense of the past through their everyday interactions (Tschuggnall and Welzer, 2002; Fine and Beim, 2007), be that the interaction of individuals within their social groups (e.g. family, ethnic or religious groups) or the interaction of individuals with the institutions through which they encounter top-down presentations of the past (Beim, 2007).

Narratives of the past provided by various sources can be both complementing and competing. If individuals can access them, recall or use them, then all these narratives form their "cultural toolkits" (Swidler, 2000) or repertoires of collective memories (Wertsch, 2002). The existence of a narrative in one's repertoire does not imply its acceptance (Wertsch, 2002). It is just a "disposition to think", one among several acquired through plural belongings (Lahire, 2010). Whether it will be activated and appropriated, questioned or outright rejected, all depends on a particular context and on how the individuals interpret the situation (Swidler, 2000; Wertsch, 2002; Lahire, 2010).

How do, then, individuals assess various elements of their repertoires, appropriate some and question or reject others? In Wertsch's study on the reception of presentations of the past in the totalitarian USSR regime (2002), the state's narratives and public discourse were distrusted because they were seen as ideological, whereas family or the "kitchen talk" was the space for honest discussions. In Swidler's study on the perceptions of love (2000), the participants questioned the validity of "romantic love" because it did not fit their experiences. In the first case, a top-down narrative was rejected due to the perceived negative credibility of its source. In the second case, it was distrusted because it failed to provide meaning to individual experiences. I explore both of these mechanisms below.

Credibility of the Competing Sources of Collective Memories

The sources of the institutionalized presentations of the past, such as the educational system and the media, are typically perceived as strong top-down influences. The educational narratives are often state-sponsored and legitimized as coming from the institution imparting knowledge (Apple, 2000; Apple, 2003). The media narratives have been identified as an important resource the individuals use to make sense of the public issues, including presentations of the past (see in Cramer Walsh, 2004). Nevertheless, recent research in the collaborative remembering has demonstrated that portraying collective memories as the result of one-directional influences is far too simplistic (Harris et al., 2008; Hirst and Echterhoff, 2008; Hirst and Manier, 2008; Rajaram and Pereira-Pasarin, 2010; Hirst and Echterhoff, 2012). This research highlighted the importance of sources transmitting narratives of the past through everyday interaction – what Assman (1995) called "communicative memories".

Family members, in particular, are a privileged source of the perspectives on the past compared to the institutionalized sources. This is shown both by the research on the intergenerational transmission of stories of the German Nazi past (Tschuggnall and Welzer, 2002; Welzer, 2008; Welzer, 2010; Welzer, 2011) and on the perceptions of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) among the young Germans (Deutz-Schroeder and Schroeder, 2008; quoted in Clarke and Wölfel, 2011).

The credibility of the communicative sources, and family members in particular, may stem from two factors. First, family members are the emotionally trusted sources – they may be given the benefit of the doubt in order to preserve the family cohesion and justify the existing emotional attachment (Tschuggnall and Welzer, 2002; Welzer, 2008; Welzer, 2010; Welzer, 2011). Second, the communicative sources tend to present their perspectives of the past in the form of personal experiences. As demonstrated by various studies on the plausibility and legitimacy of competing cultural narratives, the form of personal experiences is a powerful conversational device. It is typically found most credible in the conversational settings and it is not easily dismissed by others, unless opposing personal experiences could be offered (Gamson, 1992; Perrin, 2006). The stories of personal experience communicated directly were often evaluated as more credible than the stories fitting the official memory framework (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994), or the media stories which were often met with doubt and expectation of bias (Perrin, 2006).

Using Collective Memories to Provide Meaning

Swidler (2000) famously proclaimed that individuals use culture to solve their problems. In an extension of this argument, the individuals appropriate those presentations of the past that fulfil their needs. For example, narratives of the past may sustain individuals' positive self-perceptions (Clarke and Wölfel, 2011; Tschuggnall and Welzer, 2002), they may provide individuals with tools to make sense of their current concerns (Clarke and Wölfel, 2011), or they may validate salient national identifications (Hyland, 2011).

The last function is the one most extensively covered in the literature. The nation-building elites routinely use the narratives of the shared past to develop a sense of we-ness (Cerulo, 1997; Olick and Robbins, 1998). The receiving interpretative audience may respond in different ways. Most obviously, they may appropriate those narratives that affirm their already existent national identifications or they may use these top-down narratives as an orientative guide for forming national identifications (Zerubavel, 1997). But they may also use the narratives of the past in unexpected ways, as demonstrated by the case of young East Germans who used the from-below depoliticized memories of their good childhood in the GDR to affirm their – more inclusively defined – unified German identity (Hyland, 2011).

In fact, the research on the young East Germans demonstrated that, rather than for national identification, the collective memories the GDR were primarily used to fulfil two other functions: maintaining positive self-esteem and using narratives of the past to deal with the current concerns (Clarke and Wölfel, 2011). First, in the climate condemning East German communist heritage, young people positively re-evaluated the GDR to protect their status as successors of that heritage (Clarke and Wölfel, 2011). Second, they used the “model of society” (Schwartz, 1996b) described by their parents when talking about the GDR to think through the problems these young people encountered living in the unified capitalist Germany (Clarke and Wölfel, 2011).

The use of the past to address the present concerns was likewise noted in the recent research on Yugo-nostalgia. Several studies have found that individuals from different former Yugoslav republics, of various ages and educational and class backgrounds, use the positive images of Yugoslavia as a point of comparison with the unsatisfactory living conditions in

their different post-Yugoslav societies (Volcic, 2007; Velikonja, 2008, 2009; Spasić, 2012; Maksimović, 2016; Palmberger, 2016; Maksimovic, 2017). These authors noted how, despite the negative re-evaluation and the rejection of Yugoslavia among the nationalistic elites and in the official discourse of these societies, their “ordinary citizens” use their own memories of Yugoslavia and, in case of the youth, those of the older generations to criticize the current economic, political and moral conditions.

Data, Methods and Analysis

The present paper is based on 72 in-depth interviews with the Croatian transitional (born 1978-81) and post-communist generation (born 1989-91) conducted in 2008-2009, when these young people were, respectively, 27-31 and 18-20 years old. The participants were recruited through personal networks, advertisements and the snowballing technique. The selection of participants followed the principle of maximum variations sampling (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002), where the points of variation were (1) birth cohort / generation, (2) education (vocational group – finished vocational high school; university group – finished university-track high school), and (3) regional background (three regions differently affected by the 1990s Yugoslav Wars, aka the Homeland War in Croatia).²

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in Croatian and transcribed verbatim. The presented quotes were translated and edited for readability. They were selected because they provided either a good representation of a perspective expressed by different participants or a good illustration of an argument. Where available, I indicated the existence of negative cases, i.e. the examples that disrupted the main interpretative patterns of my findings (Rizzo, Corsaro and Bates, 1992; Becker, 1998; Patton, 1990).

Using the procedure of open coding (Emerson et al., 1995), I identified thematic codes about Yugoslavia, that were further abstracted into “idea elements”, also indicating a positive, neutral or negative evaluation of Yugoslavia. Based on the idea elements, I identified collective memory frames on Yugoslavia, where frames refer to central organizing ideas providing meaning for various associated ideas (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). For example, the idea element with positive evaluation “People could afford more with less money” was subsumed into the frame “Good or better lives in Yugoslavia”. For each participant I then identified their “repertoire” of frames on Yugoslavia, which was defined by the combination of all frames they used. Finally, I identified all the sources the participants claimed were the sources of particular frames, as well as the participants’ explicit evaluations of each frame, if available.

In the present analysis, I first identified the main frames of Yugoslavia that the interviewed youth attributed to the communicative (family members, other individuals) and the institutionalized sources (school, the media). Then, by focusing on the repertoires of collective memories, I examined how these sources and their presentations of the Yugoslav past competed in the accounts of the young Croats. Finally, I analysed how the first two Croatian post-Yugoslav generations used these frames to make sense of their lives.

Results

The Communicative Sources Framing Communist Yugoslavia

The communicative sources in this study, transmitting their narratives of the past through everyday interaction (Assman, 1995; Tschuggnall and Welzer, 2002; Fine and Beim, 2007), primarily presented Yugoslavia from a perspective of social rights and benefits. The parents

in particular mainly framed Yugoslavia as a period of good or better lives, affordable amenities and social securities. It was not uncommon, also, to have Josip Broz Tito, the ruler of Yugoslavia until his death in 1980, associated with some aspects of “good or better lives”. This is, in itself, an interesting reflection on Tito’s cult of personality surviving him, as other studies have found as well the tendency of individuals, younger generations included, to equate “Tito’s times” with Yugoslavia and to ignore the decade after Tito’s death that was characterized by rising socio-economic crisis (Spasić, 2012).

Stories of other older people, including grandparents and relatives, were often similar to the stories of parents in evoking the images of a society that functioned better for “ordinary citizens”. They talked about their everyday lives and experiences, and described social aspects of Yugoslavia that made it better than contemporary Croatia. This form of personal experiences seemed to have added to the credibility of their stories, as hinted by Djurdjica’s example below.

...what I am being told today by my folks, lives were better. ... my impression, it wasn’t so much about affluence, it was about my folks not thinking, that is what my old man says: I wasn’t thinking...will I have enough to buy bread, will I have enough to pay utilities or not. He wasn’t thinking if he would be able to have a seaside vacation next year...My parents got an apartment because they worked for INA [oil company] and... INA had money and built the apartments. (Djuro, transitional generation, vocational group)

My relatives... there is this saying ‘Things were good during Tito’s times.’... I guess they believe, because they have lived for a longer time and they saw, they lived in that period and now in this one...That life was better. (Djurdjica, post-communist generation, vocational group)

Although positive social perspectives on Yugoslavia were the most prominent frames among parents and older people, the communicative sources were also the most frequent sources of the images about social injustices or problematic social elements in Yugoslavia. To be clear, such negative social perspectives were rare in general and considerably less available than positive social perspectives. Nevertheless, when they did appear, they were most often attributed to parents, grandparents and older people who, again, talked to younger generations about experiences of their lives. This, for example, included describing the unfair treatment of people in Yugoslavia, or specifying the good lives only for those who were apolitical, as in the example below.

...those who had different opinions from what was the politics, um, they certainly didn’t have it good. But those who lived simply, specifically my family who didn’t deal with the politics at all or with anything similar, they just worked in some firm, I think it was ok for them. (Frederica, transitional generation, university group)

Other negative perspectives – such as portrayals of political, economic and ethnic problems that dominated the post-Yugoslav public discourse (Vuckovic Juros, 2012) – were hardly ever identified as frames of Yugoslavia available from the communicative sources. On rare occasions such frames were attributed to the communicative sources, these were typically stories of suppression of Croatian national expression, the religious repression or the limitations of free speech that were the personal experiences of some parents, or, even more

rarely, the grandparents and other older people. However, parents and older people, recounting their own experiences, were also the most frequent sources of relativisations or questionings of such negative portrayals. Consider, for example, the two contrasted parental stories presented below.

My parents told me, like, you weren't allowed to get married in the church, nobody could know about that or you would lose your job. I was also, for example, baptized in secret, we all were...because you couldn't do that either. (Zlatka, post-communist generation, university group)

Those who wanted that could get married in church with no problems...that was individual matter. So, they could get married and nothing would happen...My father was some kind of a functionary in those times...almost everybody was in the Party then and so, and some didn't get married, but he, for example, normally got married and baptized me and my sister and everything was normal. So the stories about what you couldn't do, these are just stories...my father...functionary...he did everything normally because he wanted to, we went to church as a child...he was also an altar boy, I was an altar boy, you know, and things like that. (Zoran, transitional generation, vocational group)

The expressions of these frames, both positive and negative, may be situated within the interpretative frameworks of personal (e.g. political or national) identifications of individual communicative sources. The participants may be aware of these identifications and take them into consideration while evaluating these frames. One of the participants, for example, bracketed her grandmother's stories of life in Yugoslavia with the cautionary note about her grandmother's adoration of Tito. Nevertheless, the form of personal experience in which they are presented makes these frames difficult to be dismissed completely; this would require the participants to either consider the communicative sources being dishonest or to devalue the authenticity of the sources' experiences. This interpretation is consistent with the collaborative remembering research which emphasizes the emotional cost involved into questioning or challenging the accounts of family members (Tschuggnall and Welzer, 2002; Welzer, 2008; Welzer, 2010; Welzer, 2011).

Many members of the transitional generation also shared stories of their happy childhoods, which added credibility to the frame of good or better lives they obtained from communicative sources. Otherwise, there was little difference in the pattern of communicative frames between two post-Yugoslav generations; the majority was aware of the positive social perspective of Yugoslavia, transmitted through social interaction within their mnemonic communities. However, not all individuals were equally persuaded by these stories – at this point the pattern of educational differences emerged, which I discuss further in the section on the competing sources and repertoires of collective memories.

The Institutionalized Sources Framing Communist Yugoslavia

In stark contrast to the communicative sources, schools and the media featured most strongly as providers of negative presentations of Yugoslavia. These institutionalized sources most frequently framed Yugoslavia as the repressive regime, one which victimized the Croats in particular. These frames were aligned with Tuđman's nation-building agenda based on the narrative of the Croatian ethnic victimization by the Serbs in particular and the suppression of Croatian national identity in the former state (Goldstein, 2001; Koren, 2005; Höpken, 2007).

The media were most often identified as the source of the repressiveness frame, while the school or textbooks were mostly attributed the stories of Croatia's exploitation and subordination to Serbia, the Yugoslav republic that hosted the federal government.

Well, today in Croatia, it's presented [by the media, newspapers, TV] as bad, as something bad, as, for example, Goli otok [notorious island prison], persecutions of opponents, um, lying to the people, dictatorship, censorship. (Rina, post-communist generation, university group)

Well, we learned...in school that all money went to Belgrade, from Zagreb to Belgrade, right? Um, and then this money was in Belgrade re-distributed where needed, but most remained in Serbia. (Dorian, post-communist generation, vocational group)

School or textbooks were never identified as the sources of positive frames on Yugoslavia. The media, on the other hand, were sometimes identified as providing positive social frames, though not nearly as much as parents or older people. Most often, the young Croats could recall the images of good lives and social securities, greater solidarity and more relaxed lives. In many cases, these images were based on the old Yugoslav TV shows or movies and, as such, they carried an awareness of then-idealized presentation of life in Yugoslavia. Such an example is provided by Bruno, a member of the transitional generation, who spent his early childhood during the last decade of the communist Yugoslavia.

I think that...life was presented as very...nice, pink-coloured, we are all one lovely state...of people, and everything is nice and lovely. Because, um, all those shows airing, I don't know if you, if you remember 'Better life' [late 1980s Yugoslav TV soap opera].... It showed one well-to-do Belgrade family in one nice and lovely apartment...Everything was very nice, very funny, very amusing... Brena [one of the most popular Yugoslav pop-folk singers in the 1980s] who united all those people was also some kind of a big pop icon...Yes, I think everything was carefree...everything was brotherhood and unity. 'Train in the Snow' [1976 classic children's movie], everybody is working together on removing snow, 'The Fellowship of Pero Kvrzica' [1970 classic children's movie], everybody doing something together. That was all very...idyllic. (Bruno, transitional generation, vocational group)

A specific in-between position of teachers as sources warrants special attention. As the representatives of the school authority, teachers were expected to reinforce the narratives of the Yugoslav past presented in the textbooks and in the school curriculum. Some teachers mentioned by the young Croats indeed assumed this role and transmitted the repressiveness frame.³ However, a few teachers were also reported as breaking from the expectations of the official role, and acting as older people recounting their own experiences. Therefore, they were assessed under a different "discursive frame" (Middleton and Edwards, 1990); as witnesses, rather than as experts. As with other communicative sources, these teachers' frames presented Yugoslavia mostly as a country of good or better lives. Nevertheless, compared to other sources, teachers were generally very rarely identified as the sources of frames of Yugoslav past – in either of their roles. Mostly, their silence on the controversial subject of communist Yugoslavia was noted.

The Competing Sources and the Repertoires of Collective Memories

Young people in this study differed in the types of presentations of Yugoslavia they had access to – in the content of their “cultural toolkits” (Swidler, 2000) or repertoires of collective memories (Wertsch, 2002). Moreover, their particular backgrounds and socio-cultural contexts also influenced the ways in which they used various narratives in their repertoires. The pattern of the young Croats’ use and appropriation of the mediated perspectives on the communist Yugoslavia highlighted two groups, most notably characterized by education. For the first group, mostly individuals with vocational education, the communicative sources were the only sources on which they relied for the presentations of Yugoslavia. As a result, the repertoires of most young people in this group were limited to positive social perspectives. In contrast, the second group, mostly students and individuals with a university degree, identified both communicative and institutionalized sources as the providers of perspectives on the Yugoslav past. As a result, their repertoires were more complex and diverse, consisting of presentations of both positive and negative social, political, economic and ethnic characteristics of Yugoslavia.

For the first group, there was little competition between communicative and institutionalized sources. As these individuals mostly attended vocational high schools, with little concentration on history in the curriculum, this pattern might be explained by the decreased exposure to at least one type of institutionalized frames of Yugoslavia, those available from history textbooks. In addition, the media discourse on this topic likely did not register in light of many participants in this group, particularly those of the post-communist generation, explicitly expressing lack of opinion or interest in Yugoslavia. In contrast, the communicative sources such as family members presenting their experiences were the most easily available sources who also had the benefit of the emotional attachment and trust extended to them. The latter was mostly done implicitly, as theirs were the images of Yugoslavia put forward by the participants as credible perspectives of the life in Yugoslavia. In the example below Marijana, a member of the transitional generation, explicitly states the premium she puts on personal experience – both her grandmother’s and her own childhood memories. This example is also a good illustration of the reasoning behind the assumed legitimacy that the stories of personal experience acquire in the conversational settings or in the circumstances of competing cultural narratives (Gamson, 1992; Perrin, 2006).

Honestly, I think that today, that people are very rotten and that they are talking about things they never tried, they never experienced, never saw. Um, so, um, we can talk whatever we want...but those wholived in that something, and when they compare things, they see it for the untruth because...it’s easy to say something bad...but until you’ve tried it yourself...you can’t judge. Personally, I have only nice experiences, nice memories and everything my granny said, I think as well, I believe the things were like that because I partly experienced it myself. (Marijana, transitional generation, vocational group)

Among the second group of the mostly university educated young people, I identified repertoires of frames that were more diverse and complex; although not all sources of these frames were judged equally credible, nor all the frames in their repertoire were appropriated by the members of this group. For example, several participants questioned or criticized their sources. In a couple of cases, this critical position was explicitly directed towards their parents’ presumably biased perspective, whether this perspective was overly positive, as with Rina’s parents, or overly negative, as with Humito’s father.

I learn ... in the history [class] ... that it was bad, and then I come home and Mom and Dad say we lived better...they [teachers] are mostly fairly critical to it [Yugoslavia], at least those more educated are, because ... more educated [people] ...knew what was going on, while, for example, my parents and other parents, who have only secondary education, they didn't have a clue what was really happening. (Rina, post-communist generation, university group)

Well, the father is fairly negative...he is much more restrictive, much more, much more negative in his views... he has some kind of a story, like, Yugoslavia is shit... some kind of a rejection, denial, like...you need to cut all the links with the past. That was always ridiculous to me because I know...I saw the photographs and everything, and I saw, you know, you just hear from the stories and everything. But, this kind of, that you can't admit, in case somebody is listening, that you were talking something positive about Yugoslavia... in my case, something that differentiated me is that I maybe did accept a bit, I wouldn't say Yugoslavia, but this kind of greater openness toward otherness, differentness. (Humito, transitional generation, university group)

Credibility of the criticized sources was likely connected also to the personal identifications of the participants, making some images of Yugoslavia more salient and plausible and others more open to deconstruction. For example, Humito belongs to a group Volcic (2007) calls intellectual elite, comprising of politicians, academics and activists in the NGO sector and civil society, and like Volcic's Slovene and Macedonian intellectuals, he is also receptive to the ideas of multiculturalism and diversity that were part of the Yugoslav "brotherhood and unity" proclaimed ideal. Therefore, part of the appeal that such multicultural images of Yugoslavia held for him likely stemmed from his own socio-political orientation and anti-nationalistic sensibilities. In contrast, another participant – notable for being the only vocationally educated participant in my sample with a complex repertoire on Yugoslavia, and who also professed a particular interest in Yugoslav history – criticized many of the elements of the Yugoslav society from the perspective that could be identified as a strong national identification. Therefore, his own socio-political orientation, which undoubtedly privileged the existence of Croatia as a politically independent nation-state, likely made this participant more receptive to negative political, ethnic and economic re-evaluations of Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, one should not assume that questioning positive or bringing up negative interpretations of Yugoslavia automatically implies a strong national identification. Likewise, the use of positive images of Yugoslavia does not necessarily imply a political identification with the SFRJ principles nor Yugo-nostalgia. While such lines of correspondence are possible, and they were certainly the case for some individuals, different perspectives on Yugoslavia also served different purposes, as I show in greater detail in the next section. This is true for both the participants with repertoires limited to one or two perspectives and for those with complex repertoires for whom the diverse and not always corresponding frames on Yugoslavia were integral part of the complexity of the issue.

The latter in particular can be seen among some of the better educated participants who proposed more complex or rare interpretations by which they opposed some common perspectives on Yugoslavia. Humito, for example, identified the perspective of the Serbs, who were commonly the villains of the Croatian stories, in the break-up of Yugoslavia, where "...the Croats claim the Serbs were dominant, the Serbs claim that the Croats tried to create

ethnically clean areas...”. In another example, Zlatka, a member of the post-communist generation, situated the story of “better lives” into the context of unsustainable economic policies, which is an interpretation requiring a more subtle understanding of the historical developments in Yugoslavia.

In general, more diverse repertoires with rare or questioning frames and mixed negative and positive evaluations of the Yugoslav past were available mostly from the participants with at least some university education. With one exception, rare and questioning frames of the Yugoslav past were conspicuously absent from the repertoires of the vocationally educated participants. The latter mostly relied on the personal experiences of emotionally trusted communicative sources and their mainly positive social perspective. In fact, even a handful of the vocationally educated participants who provided a more negative perspective on Yugoslavia, also relied on the accounts of trusted family members and older people, rather than on the school and the media narratives. Therefore, these negative cases as well support the argument about the crucial role of the communicative sources for the young people with limited access to information. In contrast, the individuals whose access to information was greater, likely due to their higher education, were more likely to suggest both positive or negative interpretations of the Yugoslav past, to use more diverse sources (both communicative and institutionalized), and to be more critical towards some of their sources.

These findings also further highlight how the inclusion of individuals into the analysis offers a more comprehensive understanding of how collective memories are formed, as requested by several scholars of collective memories (Crane, 1997; Confino, 1997; Kansteiner, 2002; Schwartz and Schuman, 2005). As illustrated by the different repertoires on the Yugoslav past and by the different ways in which various elements of these repertoires were used by diverse segments of the Croatian youth, these findings show that the individuals as the receiving audience can be constrained by the frameworks of the mnemonic communities to which they belong (Zerubavel, 1996), but that they can also do an active interpretative work across several such interacting frameworks (Beim, 2007).

Uses of the Appropriated Frames of Yugoslavia

Using past for constructing and solidifying national identities has received a fair share of academic attention (Cerulo, 1997; Zerubavel, 1997; Olick and Robbins, 1998). However, for two young Croatian post-Yugoslav generations, the Yugoslav period – both in the negative re-evaluations in the official discourse (Vuckovic Juros, 2012) and in the positive frames available from the communicative sources – played a limited role in the construction of their Croatian national identity. For the post-communist generation, born after the Yugoslav break-up, Yugoslavia often seemed distant and irrelevant. This echoes the similar finding by Palmberger (2016) about the young Bosniaks and Croats living in Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina. These “Post-Yugoslavs” (more widely defined: including both the transitional and the post-communist generation of my research) were generally not interested in talking about Yugoslavia, and when they referred to the experiences of their parents, their accounts were notably less emotional (Palmberger, 2016). In a similar manner, for the post-communist generation in this study, the period of Yugoslavia was clearly relegated to the past. Their distancing from that state happened even when these young people appropriated the positive frames of Yugoslavia. Despite such appropriations, the explicit identifications of this youth focused on the struggle for independence in the 1990s and on the creation of independent Croatia.

Well, when I look at it now, maybe it [Yugoslavia] was good in some respects, but I think we're better off now. Because now we're making our own decisions. (Lidija, post-communist generation, vocational group)

For the transitional generation, who spent its early childhood in Yugoslavia, this period was less distant and often remembered fondly. Nevertheless, this group also did not incorporate Yugoslavia into the narratives of their Croatian identity. This is again similar to the case of young people from Mostar where even among those with fond memories of childhood in Yugoslavia such evaluations did not interfere with their, often primordially understood, national identifications (Palmberger, 2016). The exclusion of Yugoslavia from national identification of young Croats in the present study likewise echoes the disassociation between childhood memories and collective identifications found among young East Germans, who celebrated their childhood in the GDR and simultaneously explicitly identified with the unified Germany (Hyland, 2011). However, while for the East German youth, celebration of the GDR childhood also meant adding value to the part of their heritage devalued in the public discourse (Clarke and Wölfel, 2011), the young Croats did not need to use the officially unrecognized frames for this identity-building purpose. The new value given to the Croatian identity, was indeed, one of the main motives behind the negative re-evaluations of Yugoslavia in the Croatian post-Yugoslav official discourse (Vuckovic Juros, 2012). It is likely for this reason that the institutionalized frames of the Croatian victimization and Yugoslav repression – legitimizing new Croatian nation-state – were more successful among young Croats than other negative political, economic and ethnic frames. While, for example, it might have been difficult for these young people to apply to their lives the relevance of discussing failed federal organization of Yugoslavia, it was much easier to make the connection between the Croatian victimization and Yugoslav repression and the pride invested in their Croatian identity they were now encouraged to express. This may also serve to explain the (relatively) greater presence of the negative frames of Yugoslavia alongside positive ones in the case of young Croats in the present study, than was the case for some other people from former Yugoslav territories for whom the break-up of Yugoslavia was not perhaps so strongly associated with the freedom of national identification (Volcic, 2007; Spasić, 2012; Maksimović, 2016).

However, this success of the frames of the Croatian victimization and Yugoslav repression among this group of young Croats was only relative; compared to the frames of good lives, affordable amenities and social securities transmitted by the communicative sources, the negative frames of the institutionalized sources clearly lost the competition. Unlike any of the institutionalized frames, the positive social frames on Yugoslavia were widely available among all participants, independently of their generation, region, education and class background.⁴ The purpose these frames served was, however, distinctly different than the nation-building purpose of the institutionalized frames. Similarly to the young East Germans (Clarke and Wölfel, 2011), the young Croats used their parents' social perspective on the Yugoslav past to deal with their everyday socio-economic frustrations and insecurities. Since these concerns were situated in the context of the Croatian post-communist society struggling with socio-economic reforms and the capitalist market insecurities – but which was no longer a society of repression or the Croatian ethnic victimization – young people in the present study were more receptive to incorporating social frames on Yugoslavia into their collective memories than to incorporating political, economic and ethnic frames that, for them, described a period which was no longer their concern. These young people “*mostly look at now and at the future. The things that happened before, well, we would sometimes talk about what was before...but more often we leave it behind us*” (Sana, transitional generation, university group). In contrast to talking about the economy and the politics of

Yugoslavia, discussing the social past of Yugoslavia was part of discussing their problematic present.

The recent studies on Yugo-nostalgia share a conclusion that is, up to a point, similar to this one; they interpret the positive portrayals of Yugoslav society among ordinary people as expressions of the criticism of their current societies. In light of absence of the more critical evaluations of the Yugoslav regime, these studies also interpret their findings within the framework of nostalgia for the romanticized past (Velikonja, 2009; Spasić, 2012; Maksimović, 2016; Palmberger, 2016; Maksimović, 2017). However, although tempting, placing the transitional and the post-communist generations' positive evaluations of Yugoslavia within the framework of Yugo-nostalgia does not accurately reflect the experiences of the young people in the present study.⁵ Admittedly, the positive frames describing better economic and social standards and the country that was better-functioning for its ordinary citizens were, in fact, in many aspects identical to the imagery regularly documented in the research on Yugo-nostalgia (Spasić, 2012; Palmberger, 2016; Maksimović, 2016; Maksimović, 2017). Nevertheless, the young people who used only positive frames of Yugoslavia, to the exclusion of all others, are only one of the interpretative groups in this research, alongside those who used negative evaluations as well, either in their simple or more complex forms. More importantly, even when positive evaluations of Yugoslavia were appropriated, there persisted an emotional detachment among both generations, one that is similar to the emotional distance Palmberger (2016) noted among her Post-Yugoslavs, and one that is notably absent among the older generations, such as Palmberger's First Yugoslavs (2016) and other people who looking back see themselves as building Yugoslavia together with "their" Tito (Velikonja, 2008). The use of the Yugoslav past among the young Croats in this study lacks the "bitter-sweet yearning", the positive emotional element that is the key feature of nostalgia (Velikonja, 2008). For this reason, I argue that there is a distinct quality to the young generations' evocation of Yugoslavia, and that reducing this quality to Yugo-nostalgia is too simplistic. The frames of good lives, affordable amenities and social securities transmitted by the communicative sources were used by these young people because they were the most relevant to their everyday experiences, and thus most salient to their interpretative framework. All the negative elements of Yugoslavia that were the focus of the institutionalized frames were, for the most part, ignored or neglected because they did not have direct implications for the day-to-day meaning-making. When positive elements of Yugoslavia were recalled, they were not evoked because there was an emotional connection or yearning for that period, but because these images provided the best conceptual tools available to make sense of these young's people unsatisfactory realities. In the absence of the emotional attachment to the Yugoslav period, I argue that the appeal that the positive social imagery of the Yugoslav past has for these young people is not necessarily related to their political or national identifications, nor can be perceived solely as a tool of escapism from the difficult realities of their everyday lives. Instead, the positive social imagery serves as the most relevant and *easily accessible* framework that can be used to comprehend and verbalize these young people's precarious livelihoods in contemporary Croatia.

Discussion

The present study showed how young people, situated in a society transitioning from a totalitarian through authoritarian to a nascent democratic society, negotiated different perspectives of a recent controversial past available from different sources and how they used that past to make sense of their lives. The first two generations of young Croats coming of age or growing up in post-Yugoslav Croatian society dominantly appropriated the positive

social frames of Yugoslavia, and the frame of good or better lives in particular, which were presented to them mostly by the communicative sources such as parents and other older people. These communicative frames of Yugoslavia can, in fact, be interpreted as the frames of resistance, as they were running counter to the dominant – mainly negative political, economic and ethnic – frames of Yugoslavia available from the textbooks and newspapers of the post-Yugoslav period (Vuckovic Juros, 2012).⁶ The latter types of perspectives on Yugoslavia were notably less salient for most interviewed young people, and even completely absent from the repertoires of most vocationally educated young Croats.

The present study demonstrated greater credibility of the communicative sources, whose frames of Yugoslavia were appropriated by most young Croats, in preference to the alternative available frames, including those dominating school and media discourse. This credibility stemmed in particular from the communicative sources mostly being family members who presented their stories of Yugoslavia as the witnesses of that period. Such a conclusion is supported also by the findings of previous studies indicating that family emotional bond (Tschuggnall and Welzer, 2002; Welzer, 2010) and the presentation of “evidence” in the form of personal experiences (Gamson, 1992; Perrin, 2006) are powerful tools for increasing the credibility and salience of socially-mediated narratives. In the competition between different types of available cultural narratives, therefore, it was those attributed with the personal and emotional links – which was more typical for the stories of communicative sources – that were most easily credited with legitimacy.

Equally important, the young Croats were more receptive to the social frames transmitted by the communicative sources than to other types of frames also because they could use them to think through their everyday concerns. Although certain personal and socio-cultural identifications were also relevant for what types of presentations of the past had more appeal to certain groups and individuals, ultimately it was difficult to equate univocally such identifications with the various narratives that were available and diversely utilized from collective memory repertoires of young Croats. For these reasons, therefore, nor, for instance, the assumed nationalistic identifications nor the assumptions of Yugo-nostalgia were particularly useful tools for interpreting the salience or appeal of different presentations of the Yugoslav past. Instead, the purpose to which these narratives of the past could be put while making sense of one’s own life and circumstances seemed to be more relevant for assessing which images of the Yugoslav past were more widely used and appropriated. Social frames on Yugoslavia provided thinking tools which were more germane to these young people’s lives than the frames detailing political, economic and ethnic aspects of Yugoslavia which were no longer immediately relevant. Therefore, the present study confirmed Swidler’s insights (2000) about uses of culture for solving problems individuals encounter in making sense of their lives. The young people in this study used the easily available positive social imagery of the Yugoslav past as conceptual frameworks through which they processed the everyday concerns at the forefront of their minds (see also Clarke and Wölfel, 2011).

Finally, the present study also suggested the relevance of the varying access to information for shaping the collective memory repertoires. In this study, this was most often the function of the educational differences. The participants with vocational education, or at least those not interested enough in the topic to do their own research, were rarely able to use school as a source of their perspectives on Yugoslavia. Rather, the perspectives from school, if remembered at all, were generally overshadowed by those communicated by parents and other older people. The communicative sources, then, were the only sources that were really available to this group and, as noted above, they were available in the circumstances that made them credible. In contrast, for the participants coming from university-track high schools, who were more widely exposed to historical information in school, education

mattered as a provider of the “cognitive sophistication” (Schuman and Corning, 2000; Schuman and Corning, 2006). Although they also found the social frames transmitted by communicative sources salient and resonant images of the Yugoslav past, the better educated participants relied on the communicative sources less. Instead, they were more likely to use diverse sources of the past and to be more critical of both communicative and institutionalized sources in the context of the consensus on the Yugoslav past not yet being established. In the case of participants with the vocational education these findings also illustrate the interpretative limitations posed by the frameworks of particular mnemonic communities on which these young people seemed to solely depend. However, for better educated participants, whose resources were distributed across several mnemonic communities and interpretative frameworks, these findings highlight the active interpretative work of the receiving audiences.

Conclusion

The present study suggested that the credibility of the socially-mediated perspectives of the past was increased by the emotional bond with the sources who adopted the role of witnesses, and by the fit with the personal concerns of the meaning-making audience. As a result, the most successful were the frames transmitted the communicative sources through social interaction, rather than by the institutionalised sources.

The present study also demonstrated the particular power of the communicative sources to influence collective memories of the less educated young people since lower exposure to the historical information or to the more nuanced historical perspectives made this population vulnerable to an uncritical appropriation of the only available images of the past, often those communicated through everyday interaction. With the better educated or better informed individuals, the communicative sources may lack the power to displace the perspectives of the past acquired through the institutionalized sources such as school. Still, for this group, the communicative sources may still provide alternative perspectives that create ground for criticism and possible resistance to the top-down narratives of the past. This finding suggests that in cases when the legitimacy of the historical education is questioned or when it is simply unsuccessful with some segment of the population, the top-down narratives of the past will likely fail to compete successfully with those transmitted by the communicative sources.

These conclusions are limited by some characteristics of the present study. First, it was based on a small and non-random sample, and its findings are therefore not generalizable within the framework of the probability-based generalizability. Nevertheless, these conclusions can be discussed within the framework of the theoretically-based generalizability which examines how particular results contribute to the sociological knowledge through the use and understanding of carefully and purposively selected cases or samples (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Flyvbjerg, 2004; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Gobo, 2008). The accounts of the Yugoslav past, collected through the maximum variation sampling (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002), reflect perspectives of 72 young individuals with various educational, professional and regional profiles. Further, while self-selection of individuals with more positive perspectives on Yugoslavia remains a concern, the study’s planned sample size was expanded to include a larger number of different profiles of the post-communist vocational group, as many of the initial participants from this group explicitly stated lack of interest or knowledge about Yugoslavia. This raises confidence that the study succeeded in collecting diverse perspectives on Yugoslavia among the young Croats and that a non-mentioned perspective was rare in the population of these two generations. The observed patterns of similarities and differences between the participants’ accounts of Yugoslavia can therefore be

used as a springboard for further theoretical considerations, especially as these patterns would be difficult to observe from other research designs.

The present study has answered the call for the return of individuals into the study of collective memories (Crane, 1997; Confino, 1997; Kansteiner, 2002; Schwartz and Schuman, 2005). By focusing the analysis on the ways the receiving audience – the new generations in the society – negotiate, resist or appropriate the socially-mediated presentations of the past, the present study has demonstrated how collective remembering happens within the framework of social groups to which individuals belong, and at the level of everyday interaction (Zerubavel, 1996; Tschuggnall and Welzer, 2002; Fine and Beim, 2007). Most notably, the present study has moved beyond a typical study of reception, as it has assessed not only how are various elements of the personal repertoires of perspectives of the past acquired, but also how they are assessed in terms of plausibility and legitimacy. By doing this, the present study has also highlighted the active interpretative work that goes into remembering the socially-mediated past; one that clearly shows how suspending the receiving interpretative audience from the analysis can only lead to incomplete understandings of transmissions of narratives of the past.

Therefore, this study's findings contribute both to the specific field of collective memories and to the more general field of sociology of culture. Specifically, its main contribution to the field of collective memories lies in the identification of one of the mechanisms of mnemonic struggles – the familial emotional attachments boosting the legitimacy of frames of the past and the narrative form of personal experiences boosting their plausibility – which serves to make one particular source of socially-mediated frames of the past (communicative sources) more credible and powerful than others that may seem to have more societal power (institutionalized sources). The findings of this particular study can also be situated in the more general field of sociology culture as the present study has also demonstrated how individuals actively engage in the meaning-making activities while incorporating the stories of the past into the framework of their lives.

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Endnotes

¹ Tuđman's project also included a revisionist and apologetic approach to World War Two and the Nazi-collaborators Ustasha and their short-lived *Independent State of Croatia* (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH) (Bellamy, 2003; Goldstein, 2001).

² Sampling on region was intended to capture different evaluations of Yugoslavia reflecting diverse war experiences. However, as the analysis did not reveal any meaningful regional patterns, the regional background was not included in the presentation of the findings.

³ Some even stood out as taking extra effort to convey to their students a negative perspective on Yugoslavia, but – in accordance with the focus of the Croatian history curriculum in the 1990s and 2000s (Koren and Baranović, 2009; Koren, 2003; Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, 2007) – these were mostly the stories about the communist Partisans' crimes against Croats in World War Two, rather than the stories of the SFRJ.

⁴ The classed character of the Croatian educational system has been documented in previous studies, with the particular focus on the link between the vocational schooling and the families of lower socio-economic status (see, for example, Doolan, Lukić and Buković, 2016). It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the class background of the participants in this study is at least partially related to their education. Nevertheless, to avoid reducing class to only one of its dimensions (education), in this research I used the classification of class based on the parents' occupation, with three general class categories: salariat, intermediate and working class (Rose and Harrison, 2007). Although one can note a slight tendency for the university group to have parents from salariat and for the vocational group to have working class parents, there is by no means a one-to-one correspondence between the education and the class background in my sample. The university group consists of 7 working class, 10 intermediate class and 19 salariat parents, while the vocational groups consists of 16 working class, 11 intermediate class, and 9 salariat parents. While there is a clear educational pattern to the data, the class pattern is less clearly identifiable. Furthermore, as the studies of post-socialist societies usually find the working class and the less educated to be the main "losers" of the transition (Arts and Gijssberts, 1998), I also attempted to further disentangle the assumptions of the correspondence between the categories education – social class – "losers" of the transition by identifying 13 participants who explicitly claimed that their family circumstances were worse off now, in the post-Yugoslav period, and who therefore subjectively identified themselves on the "losing side". These participants were evenly distributed in the vocational and the university group, and across three class categories. All these participants predominantly framed Yugoslavia in terms of its positive social aspects, and the presence of more negative elements in their repertoires was concentrated among the better educated participants. Therefore, when comparing patterns of frames across educational and class background and the "subjective losers", the wide distribution of positive social frames across all groups suggests that their expression was not a function of particular social or class interests.

⁵ The participants in this research did not see themselves as Yugo-nostalgic. Some authors claim (see, for example, Maksimović, 2016) that the rejection of the label is the function of the derogatory connotations of the term that characterize the public discourse of many post-Yugoslav societies, Croatia included. However, my evaluation that the framework of Yugo-nostalgia is not appropriate for this case stands independently from the motivations some participants may have for rejecting it.

⁶ The research on other former Yugoslav republics indicates the existence of a similar division between positive social frames available from individual narratives (see, for example, Maksimović, 2017) and negative re-evaluations of Yugoslavia dominating public discourse (see, for example, dominant presentations of socialist Yugoslavia in Slovenian newspapers in Pušnik, 2017).

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