A Small Nation of Souvenirs: Generational Shifts in the Perception of Ethnic Boundaries, at the Intersection of Knowledge, Memory, and Silencing

By
Isaja Karadakovska

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Abstract

Through rigorous theorization of knowledge, collective memory, and silencing, this thesis looks at generational discrepancies in the perception of the ethnic boundaries, as triggered by the silencing of two events—the armed conflict in North Macedonia in 2001, as well as a family event that overlapped with the occurrence of the national event—thus discontinuing the mnemonic link and establishing separate mnemonic communities, which approach the idea of ethnic membership through their understanding of their reality. The study was conducted using a combination of ethnography and autoethnography, with the analysis covering two data sets separately—the transcripts of a total of 8 interviews divided along generational lines, as well as the author's personal autoethnographic reflections—and ultimately subjecting the data to a careful and detailed thematic and hermeneutic analysis through the lens of sociology of knowledge, as well as theories of silencing, collective memory and ethnic boundaries. The analysis reveals a discrepancy in the understanding of one's ethnic membership, due to the first generation having lived experiences of both events—both of which have been silenced for the second generation—and thus an inherent negative understanding of ethnicity as a category. Moreover, due to the intertwining of both events, the analysis points to the inconsistency of the knowledge regarding one's ethnic membership, due to individuals approaching the idea of ethnicity through different social roles, as triggered by everyday interaction and their mnemonic positionality.

Preface and Acknowledgments

It would be very unlike me to part ways with this project without saying a few words, so here goes.

Despite my initial interest in academia stemming from the need to explain the world to myself, and to understand social phenomena that have genuinely fascinated me for all my life, I had always been told, throughout my academic career prior to CEU, to be rational, to be pragmatic, analytical, not to get too attached to the topic, as that would, naturally, make me unfit to properly discuss it in an academic manner. As if picking a topic that I have zero stakes in would somehow absolve me of my positionality and help me produce an unbiased piece of work. I absolutely abided by those rules, and it's what made the concept of research significantly more stringent and sterile for me. It shrunk my curiosity about my social surroundings and made me a very uncreative scholar.

This is exactly why this thesis was genuinely a life-changing experience. This thesis connected my identity as a scholar, to myself, as a human being. These two personalities were never detached, yet, I had put so much effort into trying to separate them. Consequently, this thesis was nothing short of a challenge, but I am ever so grateful for the opportunity to explore this avenue, enrich my understanding of the world, and grow both as a scholar, and as a human being.

On that note, I would like to address a few people that made this thesis happen.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Ana Mijic, who supported my ideas and helped me develop this project from a tiny idea to a thesis, introduced me to an array of literature, and has been an amazing mentor and a wonderful professor all along. I learned so much from you.
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1. Introduction

There is an inevitable, inextricable link between memory and knowledge—memory is the connective structure of societies (Assmann 1992, 293), it is what connects different "generational locations" (Mannheim 1952, 291) and what allows for the continuation of the remembrance of events, figures, as well as certain norms and values that are considered to be defining for a certain group of people. As time goes by and generations change, there comes a point where certain generations have no recollection or lived experiences connected to certain aspects of the past, yet, they do have knowledge of this past, as certain moments of the past stay embedded in the collective memory and continue to frame how a member of a certain group processes experiences, understands the past, and thus perceive their identity. A variety of scholars have discussed this, starting from Halbwachs, who has famously stated that the only place that hasn't been touched by the social context are dreams. (Halbwachs and Coser 1992) Although a debatable point, it cleverly points to the idea that humans are always part of a society, and while they all help shape society (Berger and Luckmann 1966), society also affects how they perceive themselves as well as how they interact with the surroundings. Thus, he argued that there is no such thing as individual memory—memory is always constructed in a social setting (Halbwachs, Coser 1992).

This will become increasingly relevant as this thesis progresses, as the central focus of this thesis is the shift in the perception of ethnic membership, i.e. ethnic boundaries, at the intersection of knowledge, collective memory and silencing. The case at hand is North Macedonia, but the scope of this research project is my family. The empirical work was conducted using a combination of ethnography (participant observation, interviews) as well as my own autoethnographic reflections regarding the same interview questions, as a member of the same family. Simply put, I am looking at the discrepancies in the generational understanding of ethnic membership and the placement of the ethnic boundary, as affected by the silencing of two events—the armed conflict in Macedonia of 2001, and a family event that overlapped with the conflict—which

caused a discontinuation of the mnemonic link and ultimately established a discrepancy in how knowledge is constructed along generational lines.

Symbolic ethnic boundaries have been studied at length, starting from Barth (1969), through Bourdieu (1989), to Wimmer (2008) and Lamont (1994, 2002), all of which demonstrate fascinating points regarding social, cultural, and ethnic symbolic boundaries. Symbolic boundaries in North Macedonia, however, are heavily understudied, although there are some notable works that have laid down the foundations. Dimitar Nikolovski demonstrated the existence of symbolic boundaries within the ethnically Macedonian community itself, caused by political opinions regarding several events in the contemporary history of the country (such as the Prespa agreement between North Macedonia and Greece, which changed the constitutional name of the country, as well as the Friendship Agreement with Bulgaria), dividing citizens in two opposing and monolithic camps. (Nikolovski 2020) Petar Todorov has produced significant work on symbolic boundaries within history textbook narratives in North Macedonia (Todorov, 2020), as well as the representation of ethnic Albanians in Macedonian textbooks. (Todorov, 2017) Jovan Bliznakovski took a top-down approach and studied parliament transcripts to ultimately demonstrate the construction of symbolic boundaries by ethnic Macedonians towards ethnic Albanians. (Bliznakovski, 2020) Ivana Hadzievska looked at cultural and religious boundaries in North Macedonia and demonstrated the negotiation between the church and the nation in the construction of boundaries, both from above and from below (Hadzievska 2020), whereas Darko Leitner Stojanovski (2020) shows how the instrumentalization of the myth of ancient origin of the Macedonian nation leads to polarization within the Macedonian community.

I have a couple of takeaways regarding the existing literature: 1.) there is little research that takes a bottom-up approach, and certainly no work using the sociology of knowledge approach, which aims to understand how the perceptions are being constructed; 2.) There is zero autoethnographic work being done on ethnic boundaries. This is where I identify the gap and locate my project.

What I demonstrate in this thesis, through the careful and rigorous theorization of knowledge, collective memory and identity theory, as well as my own empirical work, is that changes in the collective memory of the event, also affects and modify the symbolic universes that have been priorly established and maintained, and as a result, this shifts the perception of the ethnic symbolic boundary and thus, one's ethnic membership. Consequently, this thesis has to do with identity as much as it has to do with memory and knowledge, as changes in perceptions of belonging to a certain group are what I am mostly interested in. Where I decided to start, and what we know so far is that conceptions of identity have moved on from the dated primordialist explanations of the phenomenon, and there is a consensus that identity, as a category of practice, and thus of analysis (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 4)—is not to be taken for granted: it a fluid phenomenon, it is not set in stone and is prone to changes in the way that it is being contextualized from the top, as well as internalized and externalized at the bottom. (Jenkins 2000, 8-10) Thus, it is subject to a variety of factors that may influence or even trigger said changes. Subsequently, changes in the way ethnic identity is perceived, shift the symbolic boundary that determines who the members of the group are and who belongs to another, different group. I demonstrate this through a thematic and hermeneutic analysis of two data sets: interview transcripts with members of my close and extended family, as well as my autoethnographic reflections.

This thesis consists of 5 chapters: Theory, Method, Historical Overview, Analysis and Findings and Discussion.

The theory chapter includes an overview of some works that have helped me conceptualize this project as well as my own reflections regarding the literature. I discuss Berger and Luckmann's social constructivist approach to studying knowledge and I link it to Jenkins' theory on social identity construction. I look at collective memory theory and the negotiation between memory and knowledge, with an emphasis on the case at hand. Finally, I glance at silencing theory and how it might affect processes of knowledge construction.

The method chapter consists of a presentation of autoethnography as a method, as well as a presentation of the scope of this study, and the ethical dilemmas that I had to work through in order to make this study happen to begin with.

In the historical overview, I present a brief recount of Macedonian-Albanian relations using secondary literature, and I draw a timeline of events that I find to be relevant to my case.

Finally, the Analysis chapter contains the analysis of my autoethnographic reflections and the interview transcripts, whereas the Findings and Discussion chapter consists of the main methodological and theoretical takeaways from the analysis, as well as potential ways to expand on the study.

2. Theory

In this chapter, I lay down the theoretical foundation, my core literature, as well as middle-range theory through which I approach the issue at hand. The chapter consists of a total of five subchapters, tackling concepts of identity, construction of knowledge, collective memory, as well as social and symbolic boundaries.

I would like to, first and foremost, define the framework that I am working with in relation to identity as an object of analysis. In an effort to get away from essentialized, reifying and theoretically useless notions of identity, I would like to disclose my usage of the term identity. Namely, for the purposes of this research project, the concept of identity is approached in a social-constructivist fashion, as well as in line with post-modernist understandings of the term. This means that I am being considerate of several things: 1. Identity is a construct, it is constructed through a dialectic of internalization and externalization of the objective/subjective reality, through the processes of socialization; (Berger and Luckmann 1966) 2. Despite acknowledging the constructed nature of the concept of identity, we still need to be aware of its pervasiveness and existence as a mode of thinking and a cognitive scheme—identity is still an objective facticity (Berger and Luckmann 1966) and shapes everyday life. In this subchapter, I present my conceptualization of identity, but in order to do so, I must first turn to Berger and Luckmann's theory on the construction of knowledge.

2.1 Knowledge

Much of the scholarship on knowledge in the beginning of the 20th century centered around the idea of scientific knowledge, as in, intellectual thought and knowledge derived in scientific manners. In the late 60s though, Berger and Luckmann pioneered the idea that knowledge is not only the product of philosophers and intellectuals, it is rather the product of society as a whole. In this sense, knowledge consists, in fact, of terms that have relevance for "both the man in the street and to the philosopher". (Berger and Luckmann

1966, 13) Consequently, this knowledge would vary from society to society, or as Mannheim put it, knowledge is always knowledge from a certain position. (Mannheim 1952) What follows is that both reality and knowledge are contingent to specific societal contexts: it is why different social norms are embedded in different societies. Thus, what Berger and Luckmann argue, is that sociology of knowledge, aside from dealing with the empirical aspects of knowledge in different societies, it also must deal with the "processes by which any body of knowledge comes to be socially established as reality", or "whatever passes for "knowledge" in a society." (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 15) Now, in order for knowledge to become objectivized, to become the only imaginable social reality, it has to go through several processes, according to Berger and Luckmann. To start with, the example they use is two persons that are devoid of any kind of identity, as that would imply some kind of presupposed knowledge or positionality. Once these two persons start interacting, each of them will start to notice actions that the other undertakes. After some time passes, these actions will be understood as patterns and will be anticipated; both persons will now know how the other acts and what actions they undertake. This is what is referred to by Berger and Luckmann as habitualization, something that all human activity is subject to. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 70) However, once this habitualized action is reciprocally typified by different types of actions, it becomes institutionalized knowledge. It is now "how things are done". (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 77) Once knowledge is institutionalized, once something becomes objectivized as "how things are done", it implies control, but more importantly—and this especially occurs once institutions are passed down to the following generations—it implies historicity. How things are done depends on a shared history, which implies social control in and of itself. As previously mentioned, this is most visible once institutions are passed down: something that used to be habitualized action of a typification, becomes objective knowledge, "the objectivity of the institutional world "thickens" and "hardens", not only for the children, but (by a mirror effect) for the parents as well". (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 76) This means that as the established generation socializes the new one, the institutions they pass down become further embedded for the established generation as well. It further solidifies how things are done: "a world so regarded attains a firmness in consciousness; it becomes real in an ever more massive way, and it can no longer be changed

so readily" and it "further strengthens their reality", whereas for the children, "it becomes their world", all they have ever known. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 77)

Finally, an institutional world becomes the objective reality: there is a historicity to it, it cannot be traced anymore, it has been there even before an individual was born, thus, it is not something that can be traced simply by personal memories:

> *The institutions, as historical and objective facticities, confront the individual as undeniable facts. The institutions are there, external to him, persistent in their reality, whether he likes it or not. He cannot wish them away. They resist his attempts to change or evade them. They have coercive power over him, both in themselves, by the sheer force of their facticity, and through the control mechanisms that are usually attached to the most important of them. Since institutions exist as external reality, the individual cannot understand them by introspection. He must 'go out' and learn about them, just as he must to learn about nature. This remains true even though the social world, as a humanly produced reality, is potentially understandable in a way not possible in the case of the natural world.*
> (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 78)

What is of essential importance, however, is that, while man constructs the social reality, he is also a product of it. It is a dialectical process in which while society is constructed through the externalized products of human activity, man is also a product of said society, which he internalizes through processes of socialization. We externalize our subjective reality, our subjective understanding of things, which is then projected onto the objective reality, which ultimately structures us back. This is the essence of Berger and Luckmann's treatise. Now, in this thesis, I tie this to the concept of collective memory, and I posit that different generations carry different memory, a different historicization of institutions, which allows us to identify discrepancies in the knowledge different generations carry. (Mannheim 1952) An obvious example here—one that I draw from my case study, as I have divided my study participants along generational lines—is the generation that was born between 1966 and 1975. This is a generation that was born in Yugoslavia, has undergone processes of socialization in a political and social system that does not exist anymore, has undergone processes of additional resocialization brought upon Macedonia's independence, and is raising the next generation through what I find to be a mix of institutionalization knowledge that they themselves have been brought up with, and newly constructed knowledge of how things are now done in the new objective reality. Being born in a completely different political system is not the only (loosely put)

variable I consider in this study, as I am very much in the same line of thinking as scholars who argue that given the fluidity and dynamic nature of society as a concept, each generation carries within a specific imprint, a different positionality. (Mannheim 1952) Thus, even if we do not consider Yugoslavia as a separate symbolic universe, as Berger and Luckmann would argue, given how the construction of reality is an ongoing process, one could argue that each generation institutionalizes certain human activities that in time become objectivized into the objective reality, knowledge that is further "thickened" when passed down to the next generations, but that which is also even more alien to previous ones. This is exactly why I posit that there might be shifts in how ethnic membership is perceived through time, which is the main focus of my study. However, this calls for some further clarification on the processes of identification, as ethnicity is a mode of identification as well. To explain this, I draw from the work of sociologist Richard Jenkins.

2.2 Constructing Identity

What I am about to discuss in this section is in no way detached from what I previously elaborated, as Jenkins himself builds on the same dialectical process of construction of knowledge. The main difference is that Jenkins solely focuses on the processes through which social identity is constructed. As with any kind of human activity, identity is an externalization that has undergone processes of habitualization, legitimation and objectivation, to ultimately become an integral part of our objective reality. The idea that identity is a social construct is no news, social scientists have spent a good portion of the past century discussing the constructivist nature of identity as a concept, in an effort to move past primordialist explanations of identity. However, what Jenkins' contributions offer is a nuanced theoretical explanation as to exactly *how* identity is constructed, which evidently builds on the theoretical foundation laid out by Berger and Luckmann.

Jenkins argues that all human knowledge is dependent on classification. (Jenkins 2000, 7) It is how we get to know and understand the world. By comparing differences and similarities between concepts (naturally,

by drawing on preexisting knowledge that has already been objectivized and embedded into the social reality), we come to know what things are and what they are not. Identity as a concept makes no exception. According to Jenkins, social identity is a product of a similar dialectical process: self-identification and external categorization. How exactly does this work in Jenkins' theory? Following the logic of Berger and Luckmann, we all externalize an idea of who we think we are, but we also externalize ideas of who we think others are. We all act as categorizers of others, which means that others are also categorizing us, and this, in turn, affects our self-identification as it draws from the possible categories that exist as objective knowledge in our objective reality, which (and again, drawing from the logic of Berger and Luckmann), is the sum of the externalizations of all of our subjective realities. Categorization, as a process, can be both internally and externally oriented, depending on whether we are identifying ourselves or our group, or others. In identifying our group, we acknowledge its existence. Consequently, a group is a group only because its members consider it to be a group: it is an epistemic category produced by both the members of the group and outsiders who also recognize the entity to be a group of sorts. This, in turn, constructs collective identity: any collectivity needs both its ascriptive identification (Barth 1969), as well as the validation of the external categorization of the entity as a group. Accordingly, the ethnic group is a categorization, and more importantly, different ethnic groups are categorizations that have emerged from interactions and assessment of the differences and similarities by members of both groups, who consider themselves members of their ethnic group and consider the others and members of a different ethnic group, respectively. Why is this important? As I previously mentioned, there is by all means a consensus in academia regarding the socially constructed nature of identity, but there are, nonetheless, several issues as to how we study identity today. Firstly, a large portion of academia approaches identity as a given, to the extent of it practically becoming an analytically useless concept, as Brubaker and Cooper cleverly point out. (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) The second issue that we commonly stumble upon in identity scholarship, is the fact that identity is commonly dealt with as a construct, granted, but one that is constructed by elites. This is a legitimate approach, it is crucial for us to be mindful of the role of power structures in the further reinforcement of identity as a concept, as well as the different ways identity is being instrumentalized by

power structures. However, it is commonly overlooked that power structures are also a construct: institutions are also constructed and embedded in our objective reality, the same way we constructed everything else, practically. Consequently, and this is the third and final issue I identify in present day academia: even in cases where scholars are trying to explore what "regular people" think and how they perceive these concepts, a lot of credit is still being given to power structures and these "regular people" are being treated as victims of the manipulation and the populist rhetorics of politicians. Again, this is not untrue, it is an absolutely legitimate claim, however, it is overlooked that said politicians also exist in of the same objective reality, and if we are noticing a certain trend in how certain things are being perceived on a communal or even national scale, even if said politicians were to be extremely influential and were to emerge under the right social, economic or cultural circumstances, it is still an ongoing dialectical process and for it to persevere, it needs to be further (loosely speaking) reinforced, and objectivized. This is not to exempt power structures from responsibility or to completely remove them from the equation, I simply argue for a more nuanced understanding of social processes. Elites play a key role in the instrumentalization of social and symbolic boundaries between groups, however, it is crucial to look at how these boundaries are constructed.

2.3 Boundaries

A great deal of the scholarship has dealt with the concept of boundaries, but for the purposes of this thesis, I am using a combination of the theoretical contributions provided by Barth, Wimmer and Lamont, as I believe it offers a clear explanation.

In her work, Lamont refers to boundaries as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space…tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality" (Lamont and Molnar 2002, 168), whereas Wimmer, building on Lamont, adds that boundaries are characterized by both a categorical and a social or behavioral dimension" (Wimmer 2008, 975). In Wimmer's understanding, the former relates to mental classifications

and categorizations, and the latter to individual acts of connecting and distancing. Simply put, boundaries are both ways of seeing the world, but also ways of interacting and behaving in and with the world. This also connects to the distinction between social and symbolic boundaries that both scholars acknowledge. Lamont sees symbolic boundaries as the precursors of social boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002, 168)—the drawing of actual social barriers as a result of having symbolic boundaries as a cognitive scheme, a worldview—whereas for Wimmer, social barriers are a result of "ways of seeing the world" corresponding to "ways of acting in the world" (Wimmer 2008, 975). In relation to the matter at hand, I believe boundaries offer a useful framework to study perceptions because it is a theory that works twofold: it allows us to consider mental classifications and categorizations as cognitive schemes that affect how and where one places themself—identity is, in a sense, an invisible line that one draws, or is being conditioned to draw, that allows them to perceive themselves as belonging to a certain group or community, and not to others; it allows us to see how the placement of the symbolic boundary affects how one interacts with individuals on the other side of the invisible line, as well as look at what factor determined the placement of the boundary in the first place and how they change in time. All of this makes much more sense once we turn to Barth, whose work all these ideas initially stem from. Barth argues that ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves. However, this identification also depends on the validation of the members of a different ethnic group, who recognize similarities and differences between both entities. Barth argues that contrary to the formerly popular belief that social distance and lack of mobility produces ethnic boundaries, it is, in fact, social interaction and flow of personnel that produce boundaries—it is in the very interaction between members that boundaries are constructed. Moreover, by continuous expression and validation of these similarities and differences, boundaries are maintained. However, although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, we cannot assume straightforward correlation between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences, as these are not objective differences, only differences that the actors themselves regard as significant. (Barth 1969, 14) Consequently, a group is a group only because its members consider it to be a group: it is an epistemic category produced by both the members of the group and outsiders who also recognize the entity to be a

group of sorts. This, in turn, constructs collective identity: any collectivity needs both its ascriptive identification (Barth 1969, 14), as well as the validation of the external categorization of the entity as a group. Accordingly, the ethnic group is a categorization, and more importantly, different ethnic groups are categorizations that have emerged from interactions and assessment of the difference and similarities by members of both groups, who consider themselves members of their ethnic group and consider the others and members of a different ethnic group, respectively.

2.4 Memory and Knowledge: Shifting the Ethnic Boundary

If we posit the idea that identity construction is an ongoing process of externalizing and internalizing perceptions about oneself or a group, then presumably these perceptions would be subject to changes, due to the changing nature of various social phenomena, including memory. Wimmer demonstrated that symbolic ethnic boundaries do, in fact, change, however, it is often a long process, that is "over the course of many generations, while in other contexts, substantial shifts in the ethnic landscape may occur during the lifespan of an individual". (Wimmer 2008, 984) This is also compatible with Mannheim's contributions to the theory of generations. (Mannheim 1952) In her work, Cynthia Miller-Idriss looks at how the perception of "Germanness" transforms generationally. By building on Mannheim's generational approach, Miller-Idriss demonstrates that each generation has a specific way of both perceiving and understanding nationhood, but also responding to it and projecting their very own idea about what the nation-state ought to be and posits that the idea of what constitutes Germanness has been changing through the years and different generations have different conceptions of this. (Miller-Idriss 2009) In this case, she defines generations using Mannheim's framework: as people who have experienced the same historical problems and are processing the material of the shared experiences in similar ways. (Mannheim 1952) From a sociology of knowledge approach, this would mean that there is a difference in how knowledge is produced and internalized between different generations, which is affecting how people understand and interact with ideas of nationhood, or—one's social positioning (generation, school of thought, class), influences how one

processes experiences. (Mannheim 1952) Translated into Macedonian terms, this would mean that generations who have lived through Yugoslavia, for instance, presumably have a different idea about what constitutes Macedonianness, compared to generations that have no lived experiences in Yugoslavia and have been raised and educated in a system that has put an effort to forcefully forget Yugoslavian memories and sentiments. That said, these two generations build two different symbolic universes (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 110-123) or, in terms of memory, this could be contextualized as a matter of different mnemonic communities. (Zerubavel 1996, 289) As Ana Mijic argues, the breakup of Yugoslavia "entailed more than just the downfall of a political system - it involved the collapse of [people's] complete life world of the objective reality in which they were socialized and of its symbolic universe" (Mijic 2022, 9), meaning that the following generations were the producers of a completely different symbolic universe. This does not necessarily mean that certain aspects of the past were not transferred regardless, as Assman argues, there is a distinction between objectivized culture and everyday communicative memory (Assman 1995, 126-128) and although the latter might lack the tacit knowledge that some members of the same generations who have lived through the same experiences carry, certain aspects of the past are still embedded in the objective culture. However, as Assman argued, memory needs to be narrativized to persevere. Memory is "continually sustained and modified by a conversational apparatus that maintains reality by talking through various elements of experience and allocating them a definite place in the real world". (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 173) To illustrate, in 2011, Ilievski pointed out a distinction in the perception of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia, in the minds of ethnic Macedonians—ethnic Albanians who have always lived on the territory, and ethnic Albanians who came as refugees from Kosovo. (Ilievski 2011) Accordingly, not only did there exist a boundary in the categorization of ethnic Albanians as such, but the former was considered to be a group that was constitutive of the Macedonian nation-state, whereas the latter was othered—a peculiar case of Elias' "the established and the outsider (Elias and Scotson 1965), to say so. However, although slightly anecdotal, I do not find this distinction applicable among younger generations, the categorization simply does not exist in everyday life, at least within the general populace, I do acknowledge that exceptions exist, and I will discuss them later. I assume there could be two causes for

this: 1.) younger generations do not carry the memory, and the memory was not narrativized for it to endure the gap caused by the lack of lived experiences; 2.) it might have something to with silencing. As Mijic points out in her case study on Bosnia, "figures, events, and worldviews have been banned from the collective memory simply because they didn't serve the objectives of political elites" (Mijic 2018, 139), and this applies to the Macedonian case as well—it was not in the interest of political elites to dwell on this particular issue, as it was in their best interests to always have Albanian parties in coalition. Put in this way, silence can be considered a social action in order to pursue political interests, but if we take a bottom-up approach to looking at this, silencing, as Mijic demonstrates, is a peace-keeping mechanism of sorts—it prevents further development of conflict and ensures a peaceful cohabitation in ethnically diverse societies. (Mijic 2018, 149) This is something that commonly occurs on my family's ethnically diverse dinner table: in order to ensure a peaceful celebration of whatever major holiday that happens to be the occasion for the gathering, we all abide by the rule that certain topics are off limits. However, silencing does not necessarily lead to forgetting; it can very much lead to more intense remembering as well—as Winter showed us, as new generations come, they start talking, looking, digging and writing. (Winter 2010, 5). While generations who were old enough at the time of the armed conflict between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the Macedonian Armed Forces in 2002, try to get over the trauma by not talking about it, it seems that far-right youth groups, for instance, have taken the task of remembering these events online.

In the past few years, I have been witnessing a rise in far-right social media pages within the Macedonian online space. This started roughly at the beginning of the political dispute between North Macedonia and Bulgaria, when the Macedonian government showed willingness to accept most of the requirements laid out by the Bulgarian government regarding identity issues. Concurrently, a dozen of social media pages emerged with seemingly educational content, albeit grossly exaggerated and misleading, adopting a kind of a "scientific self" identity (Marwick and Partin 2020) and aiming to educate young people in Macedonia about the long tradition of the Macedonian identity, the "real facts", and the inaccuracy of the Bulgarian claims. Additionally, they also shine light on what they call the "shameless irredentism" by ethnic Albanians, as well as a few sections on Macedonia's issues with Greece and Serbia—practically all of the

"enemies" of the Macedonian nation-state. The majority of these pages are owned and administered by individuals who belong in a generation that does not have lived experiences of the events that they sometimes refer to. Why is this case important, though? Taking the scholarly contributions into consideration, I argue that the construction of alternate facts that is taking place within the Macedonian online space is, in a sense, constructing a separate symbolic universe, where things, figures, objects and events are categorized in a different way. Thus, it allows us to look at how newly constructed, alternative knowledge, also allows those who possess it to perceive the past in a specific way. For instance, there is an Instagram page with over thirty thousand followers, that has been doing interviews with former generals and military personnel that served the army during the 2002 armed conflict between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the Macedonian Armed Forces (MAF), in an effort to reveal the "real" truth about what happened, while the government is, in their eyes, withholding the truth in order to maintain a peaceful relationship with the Albanian parties. Ultimately, this points to the existence of a dialectic between memory and knowledge in and of themself: the present is shaped by the past, while the past is shaped by the present, thus, memory constructs knowledge, but knowledge, simultaneously, constructs the past, and different mnemonic communities, different generations holding different knowledge, will differ in how they perceive the past, the present, how they categorize objects, figures, and events, and how they perceive themself in terms of belonging into a specific ethnic group as well as who exactly constitutes this group. This does not necessarily only concern far right movements and other fringe groups. My generation has constructed enough tacit knowledge to allow us to understand certain phenomena, including the past, with specific nuance, compared to the generation of my parents, for instance, that also carries a vastness of both tacit and institutionalized knowledge of their own. I do not wish to argue for an idea of progress—from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, both worldviews are equally important; generational knowledge builds on top of one another. I am simply interested in the differences in these perceptions, and how the dialectics of memory and knowledge help shift the perceptions of belonging, i.e. the ethnic boundary.

Finally, given how boundaries have much to do with identity, if we take identity as a fluid and ever-changing concept (Brubaker and Cooper 2000), a logical argument would be that as identities change, or at

least the perception of one's identity, they, in turn, shift the boundaries as well. Wimmer, who has made significant contributions to the study of boundaries, acknowledges that boundaries do change, however, they do so in a very slow fashion, that is, "over the course of many generations, while in other contexts, substantial shifts in the ethnic landscape may occur during the lifespan of an individual". (Wimmer 2008) Thus, using specific examples, he differentiates between stable and unstable boundaries, depending on the possibility of the boundaries to shift and change, which is connected to different modes of transmitting ethnic membership. Accordingly, I use Wimmer's theoretical framework and perceptions regarding ethnic membership and its transformation through time as a key condition for the possibility of a shift in the boundary. More specifically, what interests me is how different generations perceive ethnic membership, and, in turn, how the ethnic boundary has transformed through time, at the forefront of collective memory and the construction of knowledge.

3. Method and Sample

The following chapter consists of a presentation of my method. In subchapter 1, I tackle some of the criticism that autoethnography has received as a method in social science. I engage with the existing literature and discuss my reasoning for my method of choice. The remaining 5 subchapters present the use of the method, the data selection and the scope, the ethical considerations I have taken, as well as the limitations of the study.

3.1. Using Autoethnography as a Method in Social Science

This research project was conducted using a combination of ethnography and autoethnography, as the data collection consisted of participant observation, interviews, as well as my personal autoethnographic reflections, as a member of said family. I made the decision to work on my family even before I had a coherent research question in mind, due to my family history, which has always been intriguing to me, has, naturally, shaped me into the person I am today, the way I see and understand the world and is something I have always wanted to go back to in an analytical manner. More on this can be found in subchapter 3.2. As of now, I feel it is my duty to try to convince the reader that the method I opted for can produce meaningful insights.

I recognize that research in social science always carries an unofficial personal imprint by the researcher, and "no matter what we study, we always have a relationship with the phenomenon, and we look at it from a very specific perspective". (Ploder and Stadlbauer 2016) All research is biased, whatever I look at, no matter how objective I try to be, I will inevitably look at it from a very specific positionality that has been constructed by my own social position and how I look at the world. I decided to position myself within the research project itself, which in a sense, provides me with a sense of radical self-awareness in the entire process, and I try to use positionality as an advantage, as opposed to treating it as a limitation. Autoethnography has a history of being discredited as a method in social sciences, due to several reasons,

with some scholars even calling it “literally lazy and also intellectually lazy” (Delamont 2013). I address some of the academic concerns raised against autoethnography and try to engage in discussion with them.

One of the most common criticisms of autoethnography as a method is its inability to produce generalizable data. (Delamont 2006; Walford 2004) Walford goes even further to say that "If people wish to write fiction, they have every right to do so, but not every right to call it research". (Walford 2004, 411) I argue that research, as a concept, is inherently biased. Just as knowledge is always knowledge from a certain position (Mannheim 1952), research produces knowledge from a certain positionality. However, given how our thoughts are products of a dialectic of internalization of the objective reality and externalization of our subjective reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966)—and given that they occur in a concrete social setting—autoethnographies are as capable of producing significant knowledge as any other qualitative research method is. A fascinating example, one that I also found to be immensely inspiring, is an autoethnographic work by Melanie Pierburg about traveling during the Covid-19 pandemic. Pierburg’s piece resonated with me so much due to the sheer relatability of its contents: despite Pierburg being in northern Germany during the pandemic, and me being in a small town in southwestern Macedonia, the idea of singing the happy birthday song three times as you wash your hands (Pierburg, 2020) simply resonates with everyone who was alive on the planet during the Covid-19 crisis. Granted, this is a specific case that affected the entire world, but I do think that we tend to minimize certain experiences and isolate them to a certain group without realizing how similar certain experiences are across groups, cultures and societies. It is commonly said that autoethnographies are useless due to the strong emphasis on the self: they have been rendered self-indulgent, individualized, introspective and narcissistic. (Atkinson 1997; Coffey 1999) However, using Pierburg’s example once again, as well as Zala Volcic’s (2022) autoethnographic work on gender equality in academia—where she analytically revisits some of her experiences as a young woman in academia, as well as the position of a Bosnian woman from Slovenia doing work on post-war media in the Balkans—it is evident that through sharing their personal experiences, both scholars were actually being *critical* about personal experiences—ones that a lot of other individuals have lived through, for instance—despite

seemingly not having anything else in common with both scholars. Thus, I do believe that there is *so much* to be learned from autoethnographies.

The second most common argument against autoethnographies is the concern that autoethnography as a method cannot be ethical. In all sincerity, there are some works that are blatantly unethical, or thread the line at best. Edwards (2021) shared a situation where her involvement in a situation was not only exaggerated in another person's autoethnographic work, but her consent to be included in the story was never asked for. Carolyn Ellis' autoethnographic account on the process of taking care of her dying mother (2009) is largely taken as an example of unethical autoethnographic work, due to two reasons: 1.) Although she asked for her mother's consent to take notes and report on the process, her mother was not informed on the extent to which said descriptions would go (descriptions of her fragile body, or about her inability to control her bowel movement, for instance); 2.) her mother could not review the content and have her say on whether or not she agrees to the way she is being portrayed due to the fact that the book was published after her death. This stirred up ethical debates regarding autoethnographies that contain descriptions of people that are no longer alive. Despite being critical of these kinds of practices, I do believe there is a workaround to this. As Megford argues, we must always be aware that our research subjects might disagree with our personal understanding of shared experiences, or they might even question why we even want to write about it in the first place. (Megford 2006, 862) Thus, we must always approach these research projects with full transparency. Instead of avoiding the issue or justifying it in ways that have to do with the fact that 1.) no stakeholder is going to read the final product; 2.) it is only our personal iteration of the events; 3.) they already gave consent (although partly misinformed)—we need to directly confront this issue. In one of her pieces, Ellis (2007) distinguishes between procedural and situated ethics, and adds a third dimension, which is *relational ethics*: the idea that although a project may have been approved by an ethics board or consent has been acquired, we must always ask for what she calls *process consent*—making sure that individuals we plan to talk about in our work are fully aware of the extent to which we are going to be discussing certain issues. Ellis did not necessarily practice her own preachings in some of her work, which

prompts Edwards to add a fourth dimension—the *ethic of the self*—the ethics of a researcher being authentic in their autoethnographic recollections and pledging to be respectful in the way they portray others. (Edwards 2021) That said, I do believe that autoethnography can be an ethically sound method once full transparency is taken at face value and individuals involved are fully informed about our work. Put this way, in terms of ethical considerations, there aren't that many differences between the way we should approach autoethnographies and any other kind of research method. What is of utmost importance is to be kind and respectful to the people involved, and not to engage in practices that might harm participants in any way.

3.2 Data Selection: Why do Research on my Family?

The scope of this research project is my family. The decision to choose my family for a master's thesis research project was one I had unofficially made a while ago. My family's history has always been intriguing to me, and in what follows, I present why.

During the armed conflict of 2001 between the Macedonian Defense Forces and the Kosovo National Liberation Army[1] a member of my ethnically Macedonian family eloped with an ethnically Albanian person. Given the difficult time, this caused a massive outrage in the family. My relative was practically excommunicated from the family and a 10-year long rupture in the family occurred. My first memories of this event are from when I was around six years old, when my parents would talk about this around the house. Naturally, I didn't have the faintest idea about what was going on, but I do have a vivid memory of the sudden realization that the situation presents a problem because we are somehow different, us and them. The situation has significantly improved ever since, in the past 15 years my family has been maintaining friendly and familial relations, yet it has always been fascinating for me to just observe family gatherings, the things we talk about, the things we never, under any circumstance talk about, how we address each other, how we react to hearing the other's language, music, etc. Moreover, this has only become a topic of

[1] This is further elaborated in Chapter 4: Historical Overview.

discussion in the past couple of years. Up to that point, it was never brought up during family gatherings, even private family dinners with my close family. My family allowed for a perfect setting for this project for several reasons: it is a multi-ethnic family, it allowed me to contextualize my participants along generational lines, and it holds a memory of a family event which coincided with a national event which magnified the implications of the family event, and vice versa. It allows me to study the generational collective memory of the national event, and its entanglement with the family event and see how both affect the perception of the ethnic boundary. It also allows me to study the negotiation of the silencing of both events: the armed conflict of 2001 was silenced both from above and from below, which is also the case with the family event.

My participants are divided along generational lines in two groups: people born between 1966 and 1975, and people born between 1997 and 2003. This allows me to make use of existing literature regarding official narratives and especially narratives in history textbooks and contextualize my participants' upbringing and the environment in which they were brought up and socialized as a reference to their specific mnemonic community as well as their symbolic universe. (Mannheim 1952; Berger and Luckmann 1966)

3.3 Method

This research project was conducted through a combination of an ethnography and an analytical autoethnography, (Anderson 2006), whereas the data collection was conducted in my hometown in North Macedonia, over the period of two weeks. The ethnographic work consisted of participant observation, 8 interviews with members of my family, and my personal autoethnographic reflections. In what follows, I present the method and describe the way I organized and navigated these three elements of my methodology.

The method I opted for was largely determined by the data selection. Once I decided to work with my family, autoethnography emerged as a useful method. As Adams and Manning (2015) argue, "autoethnography can offer novel and nuanced insights about how family members think, act, navigate, and coauthor their social worlds…family studies researchers can use autoethnography to ask unique questions about family life, questions not necessarily possible with other research methods". (Adams and Manning 2015, 351) Anderson (2006) distinguishes between an evocative and an analytical autoethnography. The former aims to sensitize certain issues and to stimulate empathy and an understanding of certain phenomena, it does not necessarily include an analysis, but rather produces a text that stands on its own. The latter puts greater emphasis on the researcher-self and treats the text as research data and subjects it to an analysis as they would with any other kind of research data. The work that I produced for the purposes of this thesis is closer to an analytical autoethnography, as even the initial motivation to do this kind of project was so that I could revisit events from my past in an analytical manner. The autoethnographic work consists of a story that I continuously interrupt to analyze and interpret the experiences through theory. The interviews were conducted in an informal, conversational setting, either at home or at a secluded cafe. In most cases, I was almost an equal part of the discussion, and I would also share my opinions and recollections regarding the questions I asked.

When I first arrived at home, everyone was already informed that I was actually visiting to do my field work, as opposed to an Easter vacation, which is what I would normally do as a graduate student at that time of year. Given the fact that I spend a great deal of time away from home, my arrival allowed me to easily gather my family at one place, which in turn allowed me to start my research. I didn't start conducting interviews immediately because I wanted to gather some ethnographic data first. I conducted my first interview after a few days and moved on to conduct the rest of them with short, two-three-day gaps in between, because I wanted to also meet my interviewees in more informal settings and collect more ethnographic data about how they behave around each other. Finally, I ended up collecting a total of 8 interviews with members of my close and extended family. I had several core questions that I asked

everyone, but I would also come up with follow-up questions on the spot, depending on the direction the discussion was taking. Almost all the interviews were conducted individually, except for Jasna and Atanas who were together, as well as the interview with Dafina, at which Jasna was also present. These were both conscious decisions: I was about to ask them to recollect on some traumatic and painful memories, and I wanted to make them feel more comfortable.

Finally, to keep the identity of my participants unknown, I have given them fake names by looking up the most popular names in the year they were born.

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using a combination of thematic content analysis (Flick 2014) and objective hermeneutics. (Wernet 2014) The initial, open coding, allowed me to find statements of significance to the research question, whereas the axial coding allowed me to locate similarities and discrepancies not only along generational lines, but among members of the same generational group as well. Finally, I applied objective hermeneutics in order to find out how these individuals understand their reality, given the specific knowledge they carry.

In the Analysis chapter, the participants are divided into two groups: Generation A and Generation B, with the former consisting of individuals born between 1966 and 1975, and the latter consisting of individuals born between 1997 and 2003. The main comparisons are drawn along generational lines, although sometimes I make direct comparisons between specific individuals belonging to different generations.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The design of this project was filled with a number of dilemmas of an ethical nature, and a large amount of time was spent in finding solutions. In what follows, I present the ethical dilemmas and the decisions I made in order to overcome them.

One of the most serious issues with this project was that I was dealing with a sensitive topic. Not only was I planning to interview the person who in the midst of an armed conflict between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, decided to elope with a person from the other camp—which naturally carries a wide range of issues and consequences that they had to face in the following 10 years (and they continue to do so)—I also wanted to ask everyone else in the family what they thought about it, including myself and my memories and recollections of this event. What is more, given how the one specific event is not necessarily a dinner topic, one of my concerns was starting a family feud or hurting someone's feelings and making them feel uncomfortable just by asking a certain question. I spent two months going through literature to see how others solved this issue, as well as talking to scholars in the field. One solution was in front of me the whole time, however, it came at a price. Namely, one way to solve this issue was to approach my participants—especially the one significant other who would be severely affected by my design—with full transparency. I would have had to inform them about the exact extent to which my study would go, about me discussing their situation with the rest of family, as well as me writing about my personal recollections of the event as well, potentially in ways that do not necessarily overlap with their viewing of how things occurred. The issue with this, however, was that I would be compromising getting authentic answers: if I told my participants exactly what I was doing, If I told them that I was asking for their perspective as ethnic Macedonians, for instance, or ethnic Albanians, I was risking putting them in already existing categories which would effectively shut the door to the possibility of me being able to study the salience of the ethnic boundaries or the lack thereof. However, after careful consideration, I arrived to the conclusion that (again) knowledge is always knowledge from a certain position. (Mannheim 1952) A variety of factors would affect

the way my participants would (or would not) talk to me: me approaching them as a researcher as opposed to my private self, the news they read that morning, the people they hung out with in the past few days, personal matters occurring to them in the same time period, etc. (This would become even more evident to me during the collection of the data, when I realized just how much my presence as a researcher was disturbing the environment and how getting "unfiltered" answers was never even an option.) I decided to approach the matter with absolute transparency: I informed them exactly what my topic was about, I did not conceal details in the traditional ethnographic sense, in an effort to get unbiased responses, and most importantly, I made sure to explain to them the extent to which some issues would be discussed. Finally, I asked for their consent, which was given to me by everyone I asked.

In order to further apply transparency, I would always ask questions in combination with my thoughts. For example, when I would ask a question about a moment in their childhood when they remember being aware of their ethnic identity, I would tell them about my experience first, before asking them to share theirs. I made sure to present it in a way that makes it a harmless thing to talk about, but I did, nonetheless, tell them what exactly I was doing. In my experience, this made the interviews a lot more comfortable and to an extent removed the boundary between myself as a researcher—someone who they saw as a person of authority which sometimes made them tailor their answers accordingly—and them.

The second issue that I did not anticipate, in all sincerity, was my participants talking about each other during the interviews, and sharing sensitive information about each other that I wasn't necessarily supposed to know as it wasn't disclosed to me by the persons who actually had the experiences. This was exceptionally hard to navigate, because although the interviews were conversational, I still found it highly unethical of me to share my opinion on the rest of the participants with the participant I was interviewing at the time. I would avoid replying just by saying something generic that established my neutrality, or I would explicitly change the topic and ask them to go back to the previous discussion. This did affect some of the interviews, as I could sense that it triggered a lack of trust from that point on and they would be less

honest and less genuine in their responses, since they knew that they just overshared a piece of information to someone who disagrees with them, and I could tell that they felt like I was maybe judging them.

I complied with standard GDPR protocols, and all of my participants signed informed consent forms, however, this was, naturally, not enough for a project of this sort. Thus, I heavily relied on Edwards' idea of the ethic of self (Edwards 2021) and tried to approach everything extremely carefully and made sure that I was being respectful to everyone involved.

3.6 Limitations

One of the limitations to this study is the fact that I did the field work during an elections campaign in North Macedonia. Naturally, since the campaign was overwhelmingly present in everyone's life for those few weeks, I could tell it somewhat affected the statements given by some of my participants. This is not necessarily a limitation; however, it is an aspect of the study that due to time limitations I could not properly address.

The second limitation of this project is the lack of younger participants. 5 of my participants are in the age range of 48 to 62, and I only have three participants aged 22 to 26 (including myself). This creates a disbalance in the generational comparisons and a further expansion of this project would have to make sure to even out the participants age-wise.

4. Historical Context

This chapter contains a brief historical timeline of the events that have transpired in North Macedonia in the past 50 years or so, in order to make it easier for the reader to understand the historical context in which I place my work as well as the historical baggage that I refer to in Chapter 4: Analysis.

North Macedonia was established in 1945 as part of the Yugoslavian federation, as the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, or just Macedonia. It was part of Yugoslavia until 1991, when a positive outcome in the secession referendum decided its fate as an independent state. North Macedonia has always been a multi-ethnic country. According to the 2002 census, ethnic Macedonians constituted 65% of the population, whereas the largest minority, Albanians, accounted for 25% of the population, with Turks, Bosniaks, Roma and Serbs accounting for 7% of the population. (State Statistical Office 2022). However, as Ana Chupeska argues, the multi-ethnic make-up of the country has been acknowledged long before its accession to the Yugoslav federation, with the Krushevo Manifesto[2] being one instance of contemporary history that "highlights the dominant ideas of a joint future and a shared statehood" (Chupeska 2023, 24), as the manifesto for the insurgency was a call for ordinary people of various cultural ethnic and religious denominations and ended up constituting a provisional wartime government and the proclamation of "freedom and equality of all the nationalities in Macedonia". (Trajanovski 2020 in Chupeska 2023) The independence—according to Jovan Bliznakovski and Petar Todorov (2020)—is happening in a very complex political, social and economic context, which is where both scholars locate the reason as to why the Macedonian community in this period perceives itself as being under constant threat. According to Bliznakovski (2020), the distance between both major ethnic groups has always been there, even in

[2] The Krushevo Manifesto was a call for "ordinary" people to join an insurgency against the Ottomans in 1903. It was composed by several revolutionaries who fought against the Ottomans and advocated for the establishment of an independent Macedonian republic that would accommodate all "nationalities", religions, cultures and languages.

Yugoslavia, and that the current political landscape in the country reflects the same distance: politics play out in two arenas with all of the parties appealing to their respective voters through an ethnic lens.

4.1 Macedonian-Albanian Relations: A Brief Overview

Bliznakovski identifies two phases in Macedonian-Albanian relations in North Macedonia. The first one defines the period of the early 90s to the armed conflict of 2001. This is a time period in which a large part of the official discourse is centered around the symbolic definition of the country right after its independence, as well as the definition of minority rights. (Bliznakovski 2020) The first constitution was considered to be insufficient by the Albanian community, due to the definition of the country in an ethnic sense. Moreover, some of the other issues raised by the Albanian community, as Bliznakovski points, are the official use of the Albanian language, or lack thereof (Albanian was to only to be used on a local level, but not by the central government). When it comes to education, only elementary, middle and high schools were to be allowed to teach in Albanian as well (as opposed to universities). Albanian symbols were prohibited, the Islamic Community was not given equal status as the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and finally, it lacked any kind of protection within the parliament for issues that directly concern the Albanian community. Bliznakovski points to several initiatives within the parliament to increase language rights, however, they were all followed by protests by Macedonian students and highschoolers. Thus, the Albanian community resorts to boycotts of the democratic processes as well as street protests. The culmination of the tensions came with the 2001-armed conflict between the Macedonian Defense Forces and the National Liberation Army of Kosovo (more in this in the following subchapter), which ended with 4 of the largest Macedonian and Albanian parties signing a peace treaty, also known as the Ohrid Framework Agreement. This, according to Bliznakovski, marks the beginning of the second phase.

In 2001, after the end of the conflict, the parliament adopted several constitutional changes: it defined the country in a much more civic manner, it promoted the use of the Albanian language to the institutions of the central government, the use of the Albanian language in schools was increased, the Islamic Community

was added to the constitution and equalized with the status of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and finally, the parliament adopted the so-called "double ethnic majority" (*двојно мнозинство)* voting criterium for issues that directly concern the Albanian community, thus ensuring its representation. In 2016 and 2017, as Bliznakovski points out, the parliament started discussing a new language use law, and in 2017, the parliament chose an ethnic Albanian as a parliament speaker, which caused massive outrage among Macedonian nationalists and on April 27th they stormed the parliamentary building and attacked members of SDSM (the social-democratic party) as well as the Albanian parties. Bliznakovski concurs that although the second phase shows much more inter-ethnic trust and willingness to cooperate—the situation is still far from perfect.

4.2 Official Narratives in History Textbooks

Todorov, through years of work on Macedonian history textbooks, demonstrates that the curriculum is full of myths of victimization, myths of ancient origins and glorifications of the nation, thus framing the national identity question in terms of a need to defend Macedonians from Others. (Todorov 2017, 2020) Some textbooks, as Todorov points out, even criticize the socialist regime for favoring the Albanian minority by granting it healthcare and free education, so that it could continue to exploit the state. (Ackoska 1999 in Todorov 2023) History textbooks speak about ethnic territories of both Macedonians and Albanians without making it clear that these are two peoples who occupy the same space and have been coexisting for a long time. Todorov demonstrates that after the recently gained independence, history textbooks in the 90s dedicate some room to discuss Albanian national history, however, it is rather insignificant and is quite overshadowed by the negative portrayals of Albanians throughout the textbooks: Albanians are being portrayed as criminal bands, occupiers, a tribe, and mountain people. (Trajanovski 1997 in Todorov 2023), barbarians, as well as uncivilized people. (Todorov 2023) In the history textbook for the fifth grade, every other group is defined as a people (*народ),* except for Albanians, and what is more, Todorov shows that it

also offers a definition for the term *"shiptar"*[3], thus relativizing the term and its pejorative use. Above all, the textbook creates the image that Albaniand and Macedonians are completely different, with Albanians being considered a culturally inferior, non-native population as well as outsiders, not quite part of the *Macedonian* society, as Todorov shows. What is more, Albanians are also being portrayed as guests in the country (*гости),* whereas Macedonians are being painted as the hosts (*домаќини).* This specifically provoked Albanian intellectuals, some of which officially supported the armed conflict and the NLA's fight for rights.

Post-2001 textbooks seem to acknowledge the inter-ethnic nature landscape of the Macedonian society, as Todorov points out. Albanian historians started producing more works and started to shape the historical narrative of Albanians in the Balkans, especially after the opening of the Albanian university in Tetovo in 2004. Despite the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) never specifically mentioning the issue of educational reforms, it still had relevant implications in the field of history education. Yet, historians and politicians strongly opposed the idea of openly discussing the 2001 conflict in history textbooks. (Todorov 2023) This remains to this day; the armed conflict of 2001 is not discussed in schools and is not part of history or civic education textbooks. After the conflict, a multi-ethnic commision was formed to revise textbooks from the 90s. The new textbooks were published in 2006 and are still in use today. However, the changes made were rather insignificant: the term *"shiptar"* is still relativized, Albanians are still portrayed as inferior people and none of the textbooks address the complex relationship between both groups during the socialist period. (Todorov 2023) In fact, they even contain narratives about how the new constitution that was adopted with the implementation of the OFA enlarged the rights of Albanians in the country more than what international standards prescribe. At the same time, the Albanian narratives largely focus on the difficult position of the Albanians in Yugoslavia (mainly in Kosovo), and they present Serbs as their national enemy. (Todorov 2023)

[3] Derogatory term for Albanians in Macedonia.

4.3 The Armed Conflict of 2001

As already discussed, the late 80s and 90s in Macedonia were accompanied by inter-ethnic tensions due to the Albanian community not accepting the constitution of the country, which effectively defined Macedonia as a mono-ethnic state. According to a report by the Humanitarian Law Fund from 2022, the atmosphere was slightly optimistic with the creation of the first-ever, multi-ethnic government in 1992. However, tensions started rising again. The first incident that marked the start of the armed conflict was on January 22nd, when the National Liberation Army (NLA) attacked a police station in Tearce and immediately took credit for the event. These efforts were successfully suppressed by the Macedonian Defense Forces (MDF), however, in March 2001, violent attacks would start occuring again, and this time they would expand to Tetovo, a city in north-western Macedonia. The NLA was given an ultimatum by the MDF but shortly after, the MDF started shelling the villages near Tetovo which were under the control of the NLA, with the MDF declaring the conflict to be over shortly after. (Humanitarian Law Fund 2022) Yet, on April 28th, NLA besieged a convoy of defense forces by the village of Vejce (Tetovo), killed 8 members of the convoy and injured 6. This caused massive outrage by the public, especially in the city of Bitola, where all of the 8 killed soldiers were originally from. This caused massive outrage among residents of Bitola, who took it upon themselves to avenge their fallen soldiers by setting Albanian-owned shops in the city on fire. According to the report by the Humanitarian Law Fund, the incidents would carry on in the next few months, with the NLA threatening to bomb the capital. In May, a so-called "national salvation" government was created consisting of every existing parliamentary party in the country, whereas, as the Humanitarian Law Fund report points out, NLA started to rearticulate its goals by means of policy recommendations through the largest Albanian parties in the country. Yet, despite the readiness to cooperate, they continued to attack the MDF and in August 2021, they besieged another convoy and killed 10 of its members. On June 25th, the MDF stopped its operations with the help of the international community, whereas NATO helped the NLA to evacuate its members from the villages that were under their control. Finally, on August

13th, 4 of the largest Macedonian and Albanian parties signed the peace treaty known as the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), which practically ended the conflict. (Humanitarian Law Fund 2022)

4.4 The Ohrid Framework Agreement

The OFA had both short-term and long-term goals: the disarmament of the NLA, as well as the construction of a sufficient political and legal climate for the coexistence of multiple ethnic groups. (Humanitarian Law Fund 2022).

The OFA essentially established a weak model of power sharing, based on three pillars: group-specific rights and guaranteed representation (enrollment, employment and election quotas, as well as the implementation of the "Badinter" principle of double ethnic majority voting), power-sharing and consociation, and concrete interventions in the symbolic order (Chupeska 2023), some of which I presented in the previous sub-chapter. According to Chupeska, who is very much in favor of this model, the largest advantage of the agreement and the constitutional changes it brought upon the country, is that it managed to address multiculturalism without resorting to territorial interventions. Chupeska further argues that the power-sharing model established by the OFA places the state among the more liberal ones who tend to endorse the previously noted paradigmatic shift, and not among the states which tend to homogenize their culturally diverse population". (Chupeska 2023, 23) Florian Bieber, however, finds it to be a very weak form of power sharing that does not successfully address the issues and even stimulates more inter-ethnic tensions, due to its inability to alleviate fears of federalization among the Macedonian majority, as well as the minority grievances among the Albanian community. (Bieber 2008)

Although the OFA maned to end the armed conflict, according to Bliznakovski and Todorov, over two decades after the implementation of the changes recommended by the OFA, the Macedonian society remains deeply divided: there is little inter-ethnic communication, whereas the political mobilization remains to play out in two different arenas. (Bliznakovski and Todorov 2020)

4.5 Present-day Mnemonic Landscape

According to the Humanitarian Law Fund 2022 report, there are essentially two official narratives of the armed conflict, produced by the two ethnic camps. The Macedonian camp tends to celebrate and commemorate the "defenders", thus constructing a myth around the soldiers who fought during the conflict. For this purpose, the government has installed several monuments to commemorate the victims: one in Skopje, located across the parliament, one in Bitola, to commemorate the victims who died in the Vejce convoy, also located in the city center, and in Prilep, to commemorate the victims of the Karpalak siege, also in the center of the city, among others. What is interesting about the monuments in Prilep and Bitola, is that they seem quite depersonified and lack any ethnic symbolism that would make an explicit connection to the armed conflict. The one in Bitola is a fallen angel, whereas the monument in Prilep is a sphere held by curved concrete pillars. The monument in Skopje consists of four men protecting a sphere, including the names of all of the Macedonian victims, as well as the Macedonian national symbols.

The Albanian camp commemorates the victims of the conflict, the suffering, the fight and the victory of the Albanian rebels. (Humanitarian Law Fund 2022) Right after the end of the conflict, the Democratic Union of Integration (DUI)—one of the largest Albanian political parties—and the Union of NLA Veterans organized a series of events to commemorate the liberation of the villages that were under the control of the NLA in 2001. Members of DUI also opened the "Museum of Liberty", two of the very first exhibitions of which were centered around the first phases of Albanian nation building, and the fight of the NLA in 20021. (Humanitarian Law Fund 2022)

There is almost no overlap in the narratives of the event as well as the commemorations by both camps, thus creating two versions of the story and two separate mnemonic communities. (Zerubavel 1996)

4. Analysis

In what follows, I present the main findings of my analysis. Given the focus of this study, which is the generational shift (or lack thereof) of the ethnic boundary and the perceptions of ethnic membership, in this chapter, which consists of a total of five subchapters, through comparisons between the members of Generation A and Generation B, I identify the main themes and present the findings of my study. Subchapter 4.1 introduces the reader to the participants of this study and offers the context in which this study was conducted. Subchapter 5.2 contains my account of my family's history as well as other events that were closely intertwined with the family event and affected my understanding of it. Finally, subchapters 5.3 and 5.4 consist of the analysis of the interview transcripts, divided along thematic lines.

5.1. Context

Before I proceed to the analysis, a brief introduction of the scope as well as the context in which this study was undertaken is due. In early 2002, shortly after the resolution of the armed conflict between the MDF and NLA (which I elaborated on in detail in Chapter 3), Dafina (49) eloped with Agim (58). What followed was a rupture in the family, as her parents were unwilling to talk to her for the next several years, whereas Atanas (53), her brother, and Jasna (52), her sister-in-law were trying to help her reconnect with her parents. Dafina and Agim had their first child Laura (21) in 2003, who was similar to Dafina, quite unwelcome in the home of Dafina's parents. Most of my extended family was observing these events unfold. Some of them were more involved, such as Dafina and Atanas, others less, yet still present, such as Valentina (50) and Goran (49). All these individuals, including Bisera (22), as well as myself (26), constitute the participants of my study.

5.2 Autoethnographic Reflections

In what follows, I share my perspective on my family's history, as well as other, formative events in my life. I reflect on some of the topics that I also discussed with the rest of the participants, to be able to identify discrepancies, as well as similarities in our recollections. I focus on selected memories and events that I find relevant to the research question, and I also discuss how in retrospect I understood my experiences and I analyze the phenomena that emerge in my recollections. Once again, I would like to remind the reader that this is merely my account of what happened, which is subject to specificities brought by my positionality, which in this case is one of a person who was at the time being raised ethnic Macedonian in a relatively homogenous area, where Macedonians accounted for the majority of the population.

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There is nothing special about my family, I always thought. It's just a typical, middle-class family: it consisted of my mother, my father, my sister and myself, as well as my grandparents, living in an old house built in the late 60s by my great grandfather, specifically designed to fit a larger number of people. My first memories of my home include objects that don't exist anymore, as my parents have gradually been changing the face of the house both internally and externally, to the point where it sometimes doesn't even feel like the home I know. I had a happy childhood, which I am aware is a privileged position. My parents would occasionally argue, but I somehow knew that it was a normal thing. We had a loving family life; we spent a lot of time together and both of my parents were present ever since my first memories. My aunt on my mother's side was a very close person to our nuclear family as well. She was always there. If she wasn't at our house for lunch, she would have been there for dinner. If she wasn't coming to our house, we would probably be going for a walk. She would buy me ice cream, take lots of photos of me and show me off to her girlfriends. She took care of me when my parents were busy, and we spent a lot of time together, to the extent where I cannot really pinpoint a specific first memory, since she was always present since the beginning of my life. She was part of life as I knew it. The idea that I have an aunt who is a big part of the

family made the realization that I have a second aunt very striking. The social role of an aunt was already objectivized in my mind as someone who is, naturally, close to you. They are family, almost as much as your parents are. So, realizing that I have another aunt, whom I barely know, was a confusing realization. If she's my aunt, why aren't we spending time together? In this case, I vividly remember the very first memory of her, or at least related to her. It was a blue day. It was probably raining, or at least it was cloudy, but I remember it as blue for some reason. Someone called my mother on the phone, she picked it up, carefully listened for a few seconds and then stormed outside. I followed her to the yard and overheard a conversation that I didn't understand at all. All I heard was people asking her to take someone back. *"Да си ја земите назад"*, they said, which roughly translates to *"You need to take her back"*. My mother was pregnant with my sister at the time, and I remember her being worried about her state and about the baby, as if there was some kind of imminent threat to their lives. Once the phone conversation ended, my parents were whispering. They were evidently shaken, whatever happened, it seemed scary. No one would tell me anything at home, so all my knowledge about this comes from me eavesdropping on my parents' conversations, as well as their reactions, their handling of the situation, their understanding of the situation. The knowledge I have heavily depended on how they handled the situation. All I knew at this point was that I had an aunt, and that she married someone she wasn't supposed to marry. This was my working knowledge for around a year.[4] The vivid memory is related to the birth of my cousin, my unknown aunt's daughter. I was 5.5 years old at the time. My mother must have told me something to introduce me to the fact that I have a cousin and that we are invited to her first birthday party, but I don't remember any of it.[5] What I do remember is my mother arguing with my grandma, asking her to at least send a gift, if she's not planning to attend. My father was never quite engaged, he was always kind of quiet and reserved, never spoke up. I remember us going there, my mom bought golden earrings with a little ruby stone for my cousin. We went to their apartment. I remember a big mirror in the hallway with a thick, dark wooden frame, and

[4] I was, naturally, not aware of this passage of time back then and I am using my current knowledge to explain the events in the past. I was also not thinking about this actively.

[5] For context, this occurs less than a year after the resolution of the armed conflict.

my aunt telling me I don't have to take off my shoes in front of it. The celebration was in their living room/dining room, a big open space with two big tables and a lot of people sitting at them. There must have been around 15 people already when we arrived. There was a lot of food on the table and loud music. My aunt brought my cousin from the bedroom, where she was sleeping. I remember seeing the baby. Her eyes were barely open, and she was wearing a golden necklace. I remember being confused about her name (I had never heard that name before and it didn't sound like the names I was used to hearing among peers) which would also be a matter of debate at home later, with my grandma being frustrated with my aunt's decision to give an Albanian name to her daughter.[6] I remember my grandmother being disappointed. Back to the dinner table at the birthday party, though. My parents and I sat in the corner of the back side of the table. Everyone was speaking in a different language; the music was in a different language, and I remember feeling uncomfortable. It was a strange, foreign environment. Everyone was super nice. People were, naturally, speaking to my parents in Macedonian, but among each other, they spoke in a different language. So, what exactly was I experiencing here?

There were several processes taking place here. Firstly, this was my first encounter with identity as a category in the objective reality. (Berger and Luckmann 1966) I was constructing an idea of who I was, through interaction with *others* (Tajfel 1978), who were both subjectively and objectively different from me at this specific moment. I say both subjectively and objectively, firstly because at that point I had already established an idea of how my group does things, what language its members speak, some of the typical names that members of my group carry, yet I wasn't aware of it. Thus, it was only through interaction with a different group with different practices that I became aware of the shared values of *my* group. These were the subjective differences that I saw. However, this is a very textbook example of Barth's arena of "daily interaction" where the boundary is constructed. (Barth 1969) As much as the differences are subjective, as long as they are shared, the boundary is maintained. As I was categorizing others, (Jenkins 2000),

[6] Once again, I am using my current knowledge to explain the events from the past. At the time, I had no idea that the name was Albanian, as I didn't quite know what Albanian was.

identifying differences and crystalizing the idea of who *I was*, the other group was practicing the exact same thing and thus they validated my idea of who I was, in the sense that *we all agreed that there we were not the same*, that there was some kind of a difference between us. I felt uncomfortable, because I was used to being part of the established group in my environment up to that point (Elias and Scotson 1965), and for the first time, I was in an environment where my group did not account for most of the population in the room. This can also be understood through Giddens' idea on ontological security, the feeling of safety we get just by being familiar with our surroundings, knowing how things work, knowing that we can rely on our group's shared values, and knowing the language. Not knowing the official language of a certain environment, in this case a mere dinner table, meant that my 'thinking as usual' was not working anymore (Schutz 1944), I couldn't understand what was going on just by passively existing in the environment, relying upon shared values and tacit knowledge that I have internalized just by existing in a certain group. What I didn't have, however, was the knowledge of the armed conflict, which had just recently ended. I was unburdened by the idea that these differences were inherently bad.

In the next few years, things stabilized by far, mostly due to the efforts of my mother, however, a contributing factor must have been the fact that my aunt had one more child, which made my grandparents soften their standpoint and open to the idea of welcoming their daughter in the family again. At this point, the boundary started to thicken. (Barth, 1969) The more time we spent together, the more opportunity we had to compare differences and similarities between us and further maintain the boundary. My cousins would always address my aunt as *Ane*[7], my uncle always played Albanian music whenever we would visit them, whereas on the occasions when they would visit us for dinner, for instance, my mother would always cook chicken on the side, regardless of what her dish of choice was for the day. I vaguely knew it had something to do with their religion, not allowing them to eat certain meats. I remember wondering how my aunt felt about that, since for the majority of my childhood and my adolescence even, I saw her a victim,

[7] Albanian for 'mom'.

due to the discourses that were present around the house: that she had to change her religious denomination, that she was being treated poorly by my uncle's family solely because of the fact that she wasn't ethnically Albanian, as if my family was not doing the exact same. She was completely stripped down of her agency, which in an interesting roundabout way accelerated everyone's acceptance of her position.[8] However, as years went by, the bonds were strengthened, except for my grandparents, who remained reserved. Opinions regarding my aunt's position were very contextual and situational, it depended on who we were with, how approving they were of it, and whether we as a family were on the best terms with them at the time. The same thing applies to the saliency of the boundary: it could be felt more when my uncle would play Albanian music that none of us could identify with or even understand it, however it would shrink whenever we would play traditional Macedonian songs that everyone liked and everyone identified with due to them centering around topics of victimization regarding the Ottoman occupation of Macedonia or forbidden love between a Macedonian girl and an Ottoman soldier, overarching topics that easily resonated with everyone in the room regardless of their ethnic self-identification. The situation remains the same to this day, the boundary is quite situational. However, provided that we absolutely never, under any circumstance, talk about the armed conflict. Politics has always been discussed during family gatherings, it has probably been the most discussed topic since as far as I can remember, but not the conflict, to the extent that for a large part of my life, I had almost zero knowledge about it. However, as new generations come, they start talking, digging, looking. (Winter 2010, 5) As much as our parents tried to isolate us and protect us from the traumatic memory of the conflict, it was only a matter of time until we stumbled upon various souvenirs.

The first time I encountered a narrative about the conflict was when I was around 14 years old. It wasn't at home, and it wasn't at school, it was rather through friends. I had just gotten my first boyfriend, a boy from my friend group. We dated for around two weeks, since the whole time I had a crush on his friend, who was dating one of my friends. I knew that he must have lost his father, since he never spoke about him,

[8] I am referring to members of the extended family.

even before we started dating. I never dared to ask; I figured it to be a sensitive topic. I'm not quite sure whether it was him who told me in the end, or one of my friends, but I got to the realization that his father was one of the victims of the armed conflict, and that I could even see his name on the monument dedicated to the victims of the armed conflict in the center of the city. This piece of information meant nothing to me, whereas the monument was just a random angel to me. I had no idea what it represented. We would often refer to it as 'the angel' with friends, as we would sometimes meet there to go out. '*Meet at the angel at 7pm.'* There is nothing more invisible than a monument (Musil, 1986), it seems, as I must have walked past it a million times by that point, and I never looked closer. Monuments do nothing if they are not narrativized. Even the most impressive symbols ensconced in statues, monuments and landmarks vary in their ability to attract attention (Brubaker et al. 2006, 145–6). They are "unseen, unheard and unnoticed symbols [which] do not and cannot generate national attachments. But this does not in itself render them ineffective. (Miller Idriss and Fox 2008) Billig argues, their purpose is to instill a sense of familiarity, while operating mindlessly, as opposed to mindfully. (Billig 2010). Yet, it seems a monument is rendered completely useless without the necessary memory of the event or the historical figure it is commemorating, which is exactly what I lacked.

I took the newly acquired piece of information home. I told my parents about how this boy's father apparently died in some conflict in 2001. My parents had just come back home from work, and we were sitting at the dining table, we had either just dined, or we were about to. My mother was open to talking about it. She was always excited to talk about my private life, friends, boyfriends, love stories and fights, as mothers usually are. She told me she knew his mother, and that she vaguely knew his father as well. That they were good people. She didn't tell me anything other than random tidbits of information about his parents. My father was reserved. He only said that he was also a direct participant, that he witnessed people die, that it was scary and tragic. I remember asking him if he's ever killed anyone. Naturally, he wouldn't answer. He was reluctant to speak about anything related to the event. I noticed this early on and stopped asking. This was the end of the conversation, which did not necessarily expand my knowledge of the event,

or even my interest in it, as I genuinely had no stake in this, and my parents didn't find it fitting to tell me more about the events that they had witnessed. Simultaneously, at roughly the same time, I remember meeting a girl through a friend. My friend group was relatively big, and often was the case that some of my friends would bring other people to the group. I met this girl during a small hike. She told me her name, I told her mine, and she asked *"Hey, you didn't bring any baklava, huh?",* which is how I was reminded that it was a holiday that day, it was Ramazan. My name is weird. It always stood out. I've never known anyone else with my name in my surroundings, kids at school would sometimes even make fun of it. It's a weird name for the place I come from. But this was a situation where my name was associated with Muslim culture. She heard my name, and thought I was Muslim, which is what prompted her to make the baklava joke. I felt inaccurately identified, I felt uncomfortable for some reason and felt the need to explain my situation, tell her that I am orthodox, and that my name is also very Christian and has nothing to do with Muslim culture. The rest of my friends started laughing, it became the highlight of the day, and even prompted an inside joke: everyone collectively agreed that I should start telling people that I am not a [pejorative term for Albanians in Macedonia][9] when I introduce myself.

I had already internalized the idea of Macedonianness at that point, I knew exactly where the boundary was and it absolutely included the religious denomination, despite no one necessarily teaching me anything about this. I acquired this knowledge simply by being part of a community, A Macedonian person is orthodox, an Albanian person is Muslim. Albanians were already othered in my mind, I was not like them, so the very idea that I could potentially be labeled as an Albanian because of my ambiguous name made me feel uncomfortable to the extent where for a while, I felt ashamed of my name, I wanted to be called something simpler, like Marija, or Elena, or any other typical Macedonian name. I internalized the institutionalized knowledge about these categories and constructed my identity based on that knowledge: I was Macedonian because I was not Albanian. Not that I was ever religious or devotedly practicing

[9] The term is mentioned and explained in the history chapter, so I choose to refrain from using it.

Orthodoxy, but I was *not* Muslim, because that meant something completely different. These realizations triggered complicated feelings about my family as well. The fact that I had a multi-ethnic family was not necessarily something I would bring up in front of friends. They were part of the extended family, no one knew about them anyways. The topic never quite came up during everyday interactions, so I wasn't quite lying, but I also wasn't being honest as well. I feared their potential reactions. I feared not being considered part of the in-group, of not being Macedonian enough for them. The boundary, in this specific sphere of life, was very salient. Simultaneously, I don't remember any feelings of frustration, or confusion, or even awareness of the boundary, when I would spend time with my family. They weren't my *Albanian family*. They were just my family. And I loved them dearly. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966, 172), in situations where a competition between different reality-defining agencies occurs, all kinds of secondary-group relationships with the competitors may be tolerated, as long as there are firmly established primary-group relationships within which one reality is ongoingly reaffirmed. This explains why despite existing within one's lifeworld of specific values and norms, as well as communicative and specific political memories (Zerubavel 1996; Assmann 2006), varying depending on the mnemonic community one finds themself, there is still tolerance, provided that the primary-group relationships are continuously affirmed. The mutual affirmation of the family relationship allowed for a mutual validation of our lifeworlds. It was only when I would step outside of the family borders that I would once again be reminded that my family is very unconventional.

This specific environment made me feel insecure because my situation was not validated in the objective reality in which I was socialized. (Berger and Luckmann 1966) There was absolutely no agreement that this is *how we do things*, things were actually done in quite the opposite way. As a kid, even more so as an adolescent, you always find it weird how grown-ups adhere to some weird social conventions for no good reason whatsoever, and you ask them why they do it, and they just tell you that it's how things have always been done. And while it doesn't necessarily make sense and you question some of their ideas, you eventually fall into the same pattern of doing things the same way because it's easier than standing out and

not being validated by your community. Our self-esteem and the image we have of ourselves depends on how we see ourselves and how others see us. In cases of lack of positive external categorization, we end up internalizing a negative self-image, which is the experience that I described above. I am aware that this is also a privileged position. I am not discrediting the intensity at which this process affects individuals who are not simply associated with *the other*, but *are*, in fact, *the other*.

This finalizes the subchapter on autoethnographic reflections. The following two subchapters include the analysis of the interview transcripts, before finally bleeding into a discussion on the main findings of both the analysis of the interview transcripts and my recollections.

5.3 Navigating Memory

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the armed conflict of 2001 was never narrativized (Assmann 1995), which is essential in order for the memory to persevere. Despite the OFA being the center of political debates to this day, especially during elections, the conflict itself is not necessarily brought up. As I point out in Chapter 3, every single government ever since the country's independence has included as least one Macedonian and one Albanian party, with the OFA not only stimulating cooperation, but due to its constitutionalist nature—urging both camps to work together. The conflict is still not part of school curricula, and there are also no official commemorations on a national level, although certain groups feel it to be their duty to commemorate the days on a regional, municipal level, such as city mayors and police officers or army veterans. (Kanal 5 2019) The conflict only exists as what Assmann (2010) calls communicative memory, it still stimulates strong bonds among members of certain communities, who continue to keep the memory of it alive, however, it has not quite become objectivized culture (Assmann 2010), as Generation B clearly tells us. Thus, the analysis reveals very contradictory recollections, not only among different participants, but also within the recollections of a single participant as well. This includes confusion in terms of when exactly events happened. For instance, during a conversation with Agim (58), who was at the age of 35

during the events of April 2001, he keeps mixing up the general timeline and the order in which the events happened, and when asked when he thought the general atmosphere calmed down, he says "around 1998".

There is consensus among members of Generation A when it comes to the general impressions of the conflict. However, despite all of them having traumatic recollections of the events, Atanas (53), Goran (49) and Agim (58) were direct participants, which, by all means, affects how they discuss the conflict, or even implicitly refrain from doing so, as can be seen in the following excerpt from the interview with Atanas. When I asked Jasna what she remembered from the conflict, Atanas quickly tried to change the topic by 1.) answering in her name and 2.) giving me a very brief rundown of everything he thinks needs to be known about the conflict:

"She doesn't remember anything. Before 2001 happened to us, it had already happened in Kosovo. NLA, the liberation army…and naturally, if national consciousness emerged in Kosovo, Macedonia was next, because before that it also already happened in Albania….Kosovo had an inevitable influence. The whole crisis started when we accepted the 400,000 refugees from Kosovo. Among them, militarized persons will sneak in…it's a fact."
(Atanas, 53)

This specific statement further proves the existence of a symbolic boundary in the perception of Albanians by Macedonians as distinguished between Albanians who have always lived on the territory, and Albanians who came as refugees, as argued by Ilievski (2011), but it also implies that Jasna doesn't have the right answer, or at least that her memory doesn't serve her well in this case. Atanas, as a direct participant, feels he holds a certain authority on the topic, but in a sense, he is also preventing Jasna from saying something that she is not supposed to say, as at this point, not talking about it has become a habitualized action. Additionally, something that seems to enjoy a consensus among ethnic Macedonians in Generation A, is the idea that neither ethnic nor national identity existed in Yugoslavia:

"We hanged out a lot, it was all normal. There was no segregation, no one told me not to hang out with Albanians or Romani at home…we never had any issues, it was a different kind of upbringing" (Atanas, 53)

"Up until the conflict, it was super normal…especially in Yugoslavia…trust me, no one even thought about that" says Jasna, yet continues to add that *"The most marginalized of all were the Roma, but never Albanians, nor did anyone ever think in those terms. After the conflict, though, it was scary."*
(Jasna, 52)

"We only ever started talking about some kind of a Macedonian identity in the 90s, with the independence. We were Macedonians, sure, but as part of Yugoslavia. No one was allowed to speak about any kind of nationalism at that time."
(Goran, 49)

Although this evidently spills into the following subchapter, which is related to self-identification, an ethnic boundary very much existed, ethnicity, which does not come as a surprise, is very much part of the world as they know it (Berger and Luckmann 1966), as I demonstrate later with excerpts regarding their self-identification. However, what the conflict triggered was an imminent *negative classification* of ethnicity as a category. (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Jenkins 2000) All members of Generation A are practically unable to discuss ethnicity without instantly referring to social boundaries, how they personally *are not* prejudiced against members of other ethnic groups, or without having to justify their behavior. I will discuss it in detail later on. The excerpt below contains Valentina's (49) impression of the conflict:

"Up until a few years ago, ethnic divisions didn't even exist, for me at least. We didn't even have any friends that were…we did, actually, where we lived. There were Turks and Albanians. But, there weren't any differences, I was too young to remember but my mother would tell me that they had a very nice relationship, no one even mentioned ethnic divisions or stuff like "they took this or that from us". They were neighbors and that was all. I think the first impression of divisions I have is from the conflict. I was…26 when it happened and the conflict really made some of us think. A lot of people from our hometown died and it made us reconsider some things."
(Valentina, 49)

I never asked about any divisions, but she thinks in terms of divisions because she understands ethnicity as a division at its core. One that can be softer, as almost all of them refer to when they speak about Yugoslavia, or stronger, as was the case during and after the conflict, but one that is absolutely part of her objective reality and helps her make sense of the world. What is also prominent, not only in Valentina's statement, as it is a unifying trait of the members of Generation A, is the attached guilt they display in discussing these issues. Despite displaying a certain amount of confidence in her statement, her tone as well as her enunciation of sentences such as "...but there weren't any differences" or "..no one *even mentioned…"*,

implies a certain need to justify her opinion, as if she was trying to prove to me that her opinion is a reasonable one and that I would feel the same way if I were in her shoes. Goran (49) tends to agree with Valentina, by arguing that the conflict (which he sees as one violently started by ethnic Albanians) was not quite justified, because:

"They had all kinds of rights before the war as well, they had the right to use Albanian, to study in Albanian…I can't really remember now if there was also the possibility to study in Albanian in highschools, but definitely elementary school…but that's not what the war was about, it was about territory. It wasn't about human rights, as they said. They already had human rights, the right to use one's mother tongue, they had that in all of Macedonia, it was never forbidden to them."
(Goran, 49)

Aside from the use of language such as "us" and "them", which demonstrates his perception of himself as part of his in-group, constructed in opposition to the *other*, Goran's statement points to two things: it absolutely follows a narrative that was very present in history textbooks (see Chapter 3), but ones that he never studied from. The narrative that Albanians have always enjoyed human rights in Macedonia is one that was present in history textbooks in the mid-2000s, after the conflict. This *perfectly demonstrates the dialectical nature of the production of knowledge*, which "programmes the channels in which externalization produces an objective world" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 83-84), but also the role of power structures in the objectivization of said knowledge, through the implementation of narratives in history curricula. The second thing has to do with his perception of his in-group as the host, granting rights to another, smaller, non-constitutive group, not as two equally constitutive parts of a political entity. Similar narratives were shared by Atanas and Jasna:

"*The official narrative was that they were asking for their rights…representation, language, right to whatever….but no one disputed that, you know…no one forbade them from identifying as Albanians or studying in Albanian, but all of those classes were always empty"*
(Goran, 49)

"They always had the right to study in Albanian, but those classes were never popular, they never took advantage of that. And then, after the conflict, they slowly started filling up, from one to two, to three, to four classes in Albanian…the population was growing…"
(Jasna, 52)

However, Agim's (58) statement clearly demonstrates the ethnicized narratives and the existence of multiple mnemonic communities and the lack of canonization of the memory of the conflict, especially its causes. This specific personal memory, which draws from a collective communicative memory, the memory of a specific mnemonic community, which due to power relations at the time was never narrativized, does not exist among ethnic Macedonians:

"If you're asking about cohabitation in Yugoslavia, it was absolutely forced in every way. To our grandfathers, to my parents, they were forced to an extent where it became normal for us now. Why do I say forced? Because there was an evident majority, Macedonians considered Albanians to be inferior. A lot of my friends, when we were young, when we started going out…they would use fake names…he would say Sasho instead of Samir for instance…to get a girl…he couldn't get a girl otherwise…now why would he do that if everything was okay? There was always some kind of animosity against Albanians and on the side of the Albanians, since they were always belittled, marginalized…they were happy when they managed to get closer to Macedonians, you know?"
(Agim, 58)

He recalls fleeing to Turkey when the events in his hometown took place:

"It was chaotic…scary. I ran away to Turkey out of fear, I took my whole family. I gave my apartment keys to uncle Josif, my neighbor…watch over my plants 'till I get back uncle Josif, I said. I volunteered to fight, they were setting shops on fire…they were chanting 'death to Albanians', 'gas chambers'...they were setting houses and shops on fire throughout the city…It wasn't easy."
(Agim, 58)

He enunciates Josif. Josif is a christian name which implies that his neighbor was an ethnic Macedonian, demonstrating the thickness of the boundary among members of Generation A: on one hand, he is trying to let me know that he had a Macedonian neighbor with whom they had a normal relationship, a great deal of trust even, since he felt it was safe to leave his keys with him; on the other hand, he is categorizing these two identities in opposition to one another. Moreover, Agim's testimony also accounts for the silencing: as Mijic demonstrates, one must "remain within the boundaries of the in-group or to avoid controversial topics when it comes to interethnic encounters". (Mijic 2018, 148) Since interethnic encounters were absolutely normalized from a certain point on, topics related to the conflict, or the family event were avoided at all cost. But while this disconnected the memory link with the next generation, it thickened the idea of the

boundary among members of Generation A. As Berger and Luckmann argue, knowledge is thickened when passed on to following generations. (Berger and Luckmann 1966)

When I talked to Dafina, she recalled much more details from the family event, she recalls the support she was given and the confusion in regards to the variety of identities that she was trying to navigate:

"I remember…they sat me down in the living room…not to scold me, they were like we support you, we stand with you and all of that, but you will have a child hypothetically, what will this child be? It was everything I'm trying to explain to Laura now. I wasn't thinking about any of this back then….I was like, come on, what's the big deal, you know? But it turns out, it really is a big deal."
(Dafina, 49)

Jasna shared an almost identical recollection, from her point of view:

"She sat down here, we had a talk. Oh god…to think of it now…she said 'I've decided'…and I told her 'listen, look at what's going on…you'll get married, you'll have children, you will have to be very strong, you will be dealing with a lot of issues….what will the children's names be? What will they be? Macedonians, Albanians, Muslims, Christians…? It's all very complicated…you have no idea about the kinds of problems you will be facing, you will have to be very strong'...But I don't know if she really knew what was ahead of her…She really went through a lot, all because of ethnicity and nationalism (laughs)"
(Jasna, 52)

Jasna also recalls a situation shortly after Dafina and Agim's elopement, with the birth of their daughter Laura:

"This is when I really felt it…because, it was a huge living room and a dining room, two big tables, all of Agim's relatives, and it was just me and Atanas…cause we were the only ones that supported them. And this was 2003, imagine, the memories of the conflict were still very fresh. But…you could tell that they were already on the rise…they started emphasizing their Albanianness, telling us that they're here, it's not just us here, we also have the same rights as you, despite there being less of us in numbers…and then…I remember feeling a bit uncomfortable, for the first time ever. I felt so small, like I was sitting under the table and not on it with everyone else."
(Jasna, 52)

It is exactly these three testimonies that demonstrate the entanglement of both events, how they were using one to make sense of the other. Dafina's elopement was tragic because it happened in the middle of an armed conflict. The conflict was extremely frightening because it had direct implications on all of them with Dafina's elopement. Yet, all of this is completely foreign to members of Generation B, they do not

carry the memory and thus the trauma. Both the armed conflict and the family event were kept away from Generation B, both in their primary and secondary socialization stages. (Jenkins 2000) Below is what Bisera (22) said when I asked what she knew about the conflict:

"I don't know anything, honestly. I remember…I was at school, maybe 7th or 8th grade, I'm assuming it was an important day, maybe something happened on that day in 2001? Some soldiers died or something? Anyways, I remember boys were talking about it at school, they were so into it…it was something about us having to commemorate the fighters and I was like 'lol okay' and I don't remember what I said exactly, but it triggered them so much, they gave me a whole lecture about how I needed to learn more about it. But, like, no one told me, not at school, my mom and dad never spoke about this. This is the only memory I have associated with the conflict, and I didn't even feel the need to do some research afterwards, so that's it I guess…"
(Bisera, 22)

Mijic also argues that given how the silencing or war in interethnic encounters means avoiding conflict, and thus stagnation and further maintenance and perpetuation of the ethnic boundary (Mijic 2018, 152) However, this testimony demonstrates that the silencing, which practically accounted for the lack of memory of the armed conflict directly affects Generation A's perception of ethnic membership as well as the thickness of the ethnic boundary. What is more, neither Bisera, Laura or me, carried the memory of the family event for the duration of our primary socialization, that is, we are all aware of what happened as of now, however, the memory was not present in our upbringing, hence, the trauma was also not transferred. The silencing, which in this case was not just the absence of action, as Zerubavel refers to it, rather an active avoidance (Zerubavel 2010, 33), allows us to not instantly negatively classify ethnicity and ethnic membership as a category. These are some of Bisera's thoughts:

"When I was very young, and…They would come over for lunch very often, right…I remember noticing one time that mom had to cook chicken for them, like regardless of what she cooked, there was always chicken as well…and I was like, wait, what? Why? That's probably my first memory of the existence of some kind of a difference…like, not that we're different, you know what I mean…they just had a different lifestyle, they spoke a different language, etc…"
(Bisera, 22)

The boundary is still an objectivized part of reality, it plays a cognitive role, it helps us make sense of the world. Differences and similarities help us classify things, objects, phenomena, and even different types of

people (Jenkins 2000), but when it comes to Generation B, there is an evident lack of guilt, or negative feelings and negative associations with one's ethnicity in general, due to the lack of association of ethnic membership with the armed conflict. The following subchapters delves into the attached guilt that comes with one's self identification among the members of Generation A or the lack thereof among members of Generation B.

5.4 Being Albanian/Being Macedonian

Some of the first questions I asked my participants were related to their self-identification. I wanted to see what exactly this meant to them, how they understood it and how they constructed it given their understanding of their reality. While almost all understand ethnicity as a given, something that cannot be changed, their ethnic membership triggered different feelings for most of them. Out of all, the most striking exchange was with Atanas when I asked how he understood his identity:

> *"I don't. And I don't want to, I don't want to understand it. I don't even try. I don't care. Call me Greek, call me Albanian, call me Jewish….I don't care!....I don't want my ethnic identity, I don't like it…ethnic, national, whatever…There are good and bad people. That's it. I'm not interested…I work with all kinds of people, Albanians, Macedonians, Romani…"*
> *(Atanas, 53)*

Atanas' case offers a direct insight into how his memory of the conflict, of being a direct participant in the conflict, affects how he perceives his ethnic membership. Atanas was constantly opposing the idea of ethnicity, throughout the interview. Due to my method, my very informal, conversational interviews, as well as my approach of full transparency, I was able to remove the researcher/researched barrier and engage in a conversation about his opinion, and even tried to explain to him that there needs to be some kind of a negative association to the term for him to be so opposed to it, in an effort to understand more, however, I quickly realized that this was not a rational conversation, certainly not a topic that could be discussed on a rational level, which prompted me to move on to other discussion topics. Atanas displayed feelings of frustration in relation to the idea of identification during the whole interview, he was reluctant to speak, and

he even stopped the interview when I started asking about his memory of the family event. Aside from the evident trauma response, I understand this as an internalization of the negative categorization by the other. (Jenkins 2000; Berger and Luckmann 1966) The term Macedonian was negatively categorized and externalized by Albanians, especially in light of the armed conflict, and this is something that is deeply shameful for Atanas to the extent that he is not able to talk about it due to the attached guilt. This bleeds into other, related sentiments, expressed in the following exchange with Jasna and Atanas (for clarification, I never asked if they *minded* anything, it occurred organically):

"You see, we even have a photo at home from the mosque in Tetovo…we don't mind at all, our house is full of souvenirs…an icon here, sufi symbolism there…"
(Jasna, 52)

Jasna uses the word *souvenirs*, in a tokenizing manner, as if the objects in her house are supposed to attest to her friendly relations with members of other ethnic groups. This, in a sense, very much speaks to Generation A's approach to navigating inter-ethnic relations. During my observations, as well as mere general experience and insight into the lives of these people, I've noticed that tokenization occurs quite often. Having a multi-ethnic family, attests to the fact that one is an open-minded individual, accepting of differences between people, and thus stimulates the construction of a positive self-image. It also justifies the expression of statements that one is slightly insecure about, in the sense that they might be somewhat problematic in the understanding of the other. However, having souvenirs at home, or appreciating their music at a profound level, evens it all out:

"The photo is from the imam of the Tetovo mosque. And I take pride in the fact that he gifted it to me. I don't mind. I will respect every religion that respects mine. Whether or not I respect my own religion is another thing…but if someone else does, I respect that"
(Atanas, 53)

In the second statement by Atanas, we can also notice the internalization of the negative classification of his religious identity as well, which was often conflated with ethnic or national identity, at least his assigned identity and the identity by which he is acknowledged by the other religious camp. Atanas is also vaguely

referring to some kind of cosmopolitan identity the whole time. The fact that he was given a souvenir from a mosque attests to the fact that he is a respected individual among the members of the other camp, which in a sense is an effort to alleviate himself of the guilt. He, despite being Macedonian, is respected among members of the other camp, and the fact that he has this souvenir proves that. Guilt was also present in the statements of other members of Generation A, usually in the form of some kind of justification for their opinions and a reassurance that *'they have nothing against other ethnicities'* each time they would share an opinion, similarly to the responses by Jasna and Atanas above. Dafina, on the other hand, had an interesting response as well. This is what she said when I asked her to introduce herself:

"My name is Dafina, I work in a restaurant (laughs)...I live in [a city in the south-west of Macedonia], I have three children and I am married to a Muslim man."
(Dafina, 49)

While almost none of my participants specifically mentioned their identity as part of the introduction, but rather stuck to various social roles (such as woman, mother, employee at X, a practitioner of a certain hobby, etc), Dafina told me she was *married to a Muslim man* as something that made her who she was, and this is rich in latent meaning. She didn't say she converted to Islam, or that she has a Muslim husband, which would have given her response a bit more agency. She didn't even say '*I married a Muslim man'* but used a passive voice. Dafina is also internalizing the external categorization of herself, she is taking the image that the community has of her and making it her own. The image might not have stuck were it not for the complicated time period in which she *was married to a Muslim man*, but given the circumstances, this came to be her self-perception. Shortly after, we had the following exchange:

I: how do you understand ethnicity? How would you explain it?

D: Well, given how I'm married to a person of a different faith…there really isn't…there is no difference…I mean, there is a huge difference. But personally, it never bothered me, especially considering that I married him.

I: what do you think makes you a member of a certain ethnic group?

D: I am Macedonian, and I could never be anything else…I was born as such and it's what I've known myself to be since I was born. I can't change that and be a Bulgarian or Albanian. I can only be a Macedonian muslim, I can't be anything else. I know that I was born as a Macedonian.

There's a couple of things we could learn from Dafina's response: although ethnic categories rely on cultural differences, these are not objective differences, as Barth argues, only ones that the actors themselves consider to be significant. (Barth 1969) Often during the interview, they would evidently conflate the categories of religion and ethnicity: they use one to explain the other and vice versa. While the ethnic boundary is considered to be a given aspect of life that cannot be changed, the religious boundary seems to be understood as one that can be more easily crossed. (Wimmer 2008) You can change your religious denomination easily, compared to your ethnicity, however, you should, ideally, not. And this is objectivized knowledge that both ethnic communities rely on.

I asked Jasna the same question and she gave the following response:

"Well, Macedonian…(thinks)...the way I dress, the lifestyle, food, music, you know? Not religion for sure. I don't think that makes a difference. I am a christian, they are Muslim, that's all. We dye eggs, they make baklava."
(Jasna, 52)

Both Dafina, and Jasna, as we can see in the excerpts below, don't find religion to be a significant distinction regarding their ethnic group in relation to others, yet, when asked what some of the things that made them aware of their ethnic membership growing up were, they gave the following responses:

"Well, my first neighbors were Muslim. The different holiday celebrations…they celebrate Ramazan, we celebrate Easter, but it was all together, it was all the same, like, the same nationality." (Jasna, 52)

"There was an Albanian girl in my street, we would hang out often. There wasn't a big difference, we were all equal back then, it's just that, when Ramazan came, she would tell us what they did at home, and when there was an Easter celebration, we would tell her how we celebrate it, but we were all the same." (Dafina, 49)

There is an evident congruence of codes and values, but also a recognition of the values and codes as not that different. (Barth 1969). According to Barth, in this case, the boundary should hypothetically be

reduced, but what is happening here is a conflation of the ethnic and the religious boundary, in the sense that its salience reduces situationally. They recall that they became aware of their *ethnicity* by meeting a *Muslim person,* or by identifying the similarities and differences in how they celebrate holidays through everyday interaction, which is how the boundary initially forms. (Barth 1969) But it is practically perceived as one of the same: it's a religious boundary when it's harmless and it just defines a cultural difference in how people practice religion, but it's an ethnic boundary when it's politicized, as both statements keep reminding us of how none of this was important when the individuals were growing up in Yugoslavia, implying that it does actually matter now, especially in the post-conflict era. As Generation A constructs ideas of ethnic and religious identity through the lens of a certain 'before and after', Generation B has been given a clean slate, which can be seen in the response that Laura gave me when I asked her if she remembers when she became aware of her ethnic membership:

"When you're born, you're instantly told things…you know that you're Macedonian or Albanian, or Turkish…that you're supposed to do this and that, customs, tradition, whatever…language…You're told what to do during holidays. You don't even have to be religious, some aren't at all, I'm also not very religious…I know that I'm Albanian, my mother tongue is Albanian and that's how I know. You know what, it's whatever was told to you at home growing up, that's it basically, most of it comes from home."
(Laura, 21)

There is an evident presence of an ethnic boundary in Laura's worldview, but the overlap with the religious boundary is slightly less present, as in, there seems to be an idea that this is in fact how things are, but also a dose of skepticism. What is more, she basically understands her ethnic membership not as a given, but as *constructed.* She is aware of how she wasn't born Albanian, but rather became one, through the process of primary socialization. Similar sentiments can be noticed throughout the response of other members of Generation B. This is Bisera's response, when I asked her what she thought the term ethnic identity meant:

"It's about where people come from, I guess? I guess people want to know where they come from, and this is a way to classify people based on their origins … The main differences are probably culture and religion. I'm not religious at all, but we're definitely raised differently compared to other religions. Not completely different, but in terms of culture, it's slightly different."
(Bisera, 22)

I then asked her what she meant by culture:

> *"The people in a certain state maybe. But then again, I can't categorize our culture as "Macedonian" for instance, because it's way too similar to Serbian or Croatian…or Albanian in certain respects. So you can't even define it along country lines…I don't know…at the end of the day, what difference does it make? I could have easily been Albanian right now."*
> *(Bisera, 22)*

Both Bisera's and Laura's demonstrate that they have constructed these identities, regardless of what they are, without the knowledge of the armed conflict: there is no attached guilt, they are willing and able to talk about these phenomena and do not find it traumatic and painful to engage in discussion. At worst, they are very indifferent, which I am mostly attributing to a couple of things: where they currently are in life, as well as their current goals and ambitions: when I asked Bisera to introduce herself, she told me her name, her age, her city and her occupation, she told me she was very career-focused lately and that this was important to her. Laura, on the other hand, spent a large amount of the conversation telling me about her struggles with the fact that she is currently in a relationship with a person from a different ethnic community and that this particularly posed an issue for her parents. All knowledge is knowledge from a certain position (Mannheim 1952), I am not arguing for some kind of an idea of progress, or that these two individuals do not perceive the ethnic boundary at all, that would be an overstatement. The ethnic boundary very much exists as a cognitive scheme in the worldview of both individuals. Rather, I believe it demonstrates the situational perception of the boundary as well as its varying salience. As of now, given their current ambitions, and their current positions in life, their ethnic membership is not something that is of significance to both. As I discussed in the previous two subchapters, there have definitely been moments, phases even, in the lives of members of Generation A, when the boundary was simply not salient. Moreover, Assmann argues that humans acquire memories not only through experiences that they have lived through, but also by interacting, communicating, learning, identifying and appropriating. (Assmann 2006) Thus, Generation A's position is not one of complete lack of knowledge, they are well aware of the events that have preceded their time; however, they tend to see themself as different from the preceding generation. (Mannheim 1952) Yet, not having the communicative memory (Zerubavel 1996), and I say communicative because the

memory of both events was not necessarily narrativized (Assman 2006), and as such was not part of their upbringing and the processes of socialization (Jenkins 2000; Berger and Luckmann 1966), they do not carry inherent negative association to ethnicity or ethnic membership as a category. The excerpt below from the interview with Bisera demonstrates a similar sentiment:

> *"I don't know…like, I've known [the name of her Turkish/Albanian friend] for years now and I've never, never felt any kind of difference between us … and sometimes when she would join us for Vasilica[10] for instance, my mom would always ask if she found it weird or something. She is accepting of it, naturally, but you know, they expect her parents to say something about it or something …."*
> *(Bisera, 22)*

Generation A is approaching this from the position of someone who has directly experienced trauma. The failure to admit to oneself that they find something weird about the situation manifests as an inquiry about how the other camp feels about it, as in, we absolutely approve of this, but the others might not, which is where they locate the main issue.

This finalizes the analysis of the interview transcripts. The following, and final subchapter offers the final takeaways and a brief discussion of the findings.

[10] Orthodox New Year.

6. Findings, Discussion, and the Path Forward

This study has come to several conclusions and in what follows, I present and discuss the main findings, as well as potential ways this project could be expanded. This chapter consists of three subchapters, dedicated to the methodological and the theoretical conclusions, as well as potential ways to expand on this study.

6.1 Methodological Takeaways

Despite being firmly convinced in the idea that there is no such thing as an unbiased response, it was only when I started the field work when it struck me how accurate this theoretical conception was, and how deeply contextual and situational the understanding of social phenomena is. As I observed my participants, they would voice out different and contradictory opinions, based on a variety of factors, such as: who is in the room, who they are appealing to, what their both current and long term intentions with these persons is, how close they are to said persons and how much they actually care about their opinion, but also, whether or not they read the news today, as well as their general mood and wellbeing. We would be discussing the exact same things (given how I did my fieldwork in the middle of an election campaign, some things would be brought up on a daily basis even), and I would keep hearing drastically different responses by the exact same persons. In an interview setting, however, they try to be their best selves, whatever they imagine that to be: politically correct, reasonable, or brutally honest. According to Schütz, the knowledge of a person who thinks and acts in the world in their daily life is not homogeneous: it is incoherent, only partially clear, and not clear from contradictions. (Schütz 1944, 2) This is because one's interests, which determine one's relevance of objects, are also incoherent. They are only partially organized in different plans, plans of life, of work, of leisure, various social roles, etc. Thus, one's knowledge is not at all consistent. (Schütz 1944, 2-3) One could be responding to the same question differently, depending on whether they are answering the question as a woman for instance, or as a mother, or as an ethnic Macedonian, or from the perspective

of the issues related to their occupation, whereas all of these social roles could be activated or deactivated by various triggers in one's daily interaction with others.

Having said that, and this bleeds into the following subchapter, I found that the issue of imposing one's worldview, one's personal biases, one's theoretical baggage even, onto the subjects of the research study, is not something that should be concerning the researcher a great deal. The researcher by all means disturbs the natural order of things, and it is difficult to get rid of the researcher's reputation as a person of some kind of authority, which urges participants to act in a certain way. However, my biggest concern was that, by being fully transparent, I would end up imposing a category of practice upon my participants, one that maybe would not have come up organically, one that simply didn't exist in their worldview up until the point where I bring it up. Yet, my observation showed that knowledge is quite inconsistent, contextual and situational, that despite me bringing up certain categories during the interviews and my participants responding a certain way, 1.) My presence and my phrasing were only one of the number of factors that affected how my participants responded to questions, and 2.) Upon observation I could still tell where and when these categories became salient.

6.2. Theoretical Takeaways

Given how the focus of this thesis was the generational shift in the perception of the ethnic boundary as affected by the presence or the lack thereof, of the memory of two entangled events, my analysis has revealed several things.

1. Due to the lived experiences and the inflicted trauma by the armed conflict, Generation A has constructed a negative categorization of ethnicity as a category, whereas Generation B, being unburdened by the memory of the conflict, does not inherently construct a negative classification of ethnicity as a category. However, this does not mean that the perception of the ethnic boundary does not exist as an objectivized category in the understanding of reality by Generation B. This

occurs because, despite Generation A not transferring the political memory or the event, their lived experiences are enough for the cultural memory (Assman 2006, 6) to thicken and for a further perpetuation and maintenance of the boundary, even by Generation B, to occur. Despite the memory of the family event not being part of the upbringing of Generation B, the way Generation A handled the situation and the way it constructed the idea of the boundary was enough for Generation B to internalize the knowledge of how things are done. Political memory addresses individuals first and foremost as a group, usually tied around one seminal experience, as Assman argues, cultural memory, on the other hand, related to members of a group as individuals. (Assmann 2006, 12) Not belonging to the same mnemonic community, due to the lack of political pedagogy on the event at hand (Assmann 2006, 7) does not mean that new generations will not internalize how things are done after the conflict, just by being subjected to primary and secondary socialization in the same community.

2. The saliency of the boundary, as I briefly discussed in the previous subchapter, depends on a variety of things, and it is thus, quite contextual and situational. Despite the boundary initially forming through interaction between groups, as Barth has stated, and despite it theoretically having to be thicker in cases of more interaction between groups, my analysis found that it is in fact less salient and even thinner in cases or more often interaction. I understand this as primary-group relationships enjoying dominance. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 172) The family event made the experience of the armed conflict significantly more traumatic, whereas the lived experiences of the conflict affected how the family event was experienced and understood. The result is that the trauma from the armed conflict triggered more understanding and support when it comes to the family event, but this, in turn, affects how Generation A approaches the memory of the armed conflict: painful, traumatic, and silenced. Due to the dominance of primary-group relationships, however, the knowledge varies depending on the social role the individual takes on. They might find it harder to

discuss it from the position of their ethnic membership, however, will be more open to discuss it from the position of a relative, or a business owner. This bleeds into the following point.

3. Despite the conflation of the religious and ethnic boundary, as almost all participants used one to describe the other and vice versa, and despite there being clear requirements for membership in both groups, which, by all means, includes the religious denomination as well, the ethnic boundary is considered to be more permeable, and thus easier to discuss. The religious boundary seems to enjoy a certain amount of empathy among members of Generation A, which is since it has not been politicized. (Wimmer 2008, 980-982) Thus, while essentially referring to the same thing, individuals are more likely to refer to the religious boundary when distinguishing between us and them, as it does not necessarily hold a negative categorization.

4. Even though Generation B did not live through the traumatic family event, in light of the armed conflict, as Berger and Luckmann argue, primary socialization internalizes a reality apprehended as inevitable. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 167) In this reality, marrying across the ethnic boundary is frowned upon, and Generation B has internalized this knowledge as such. Among Generation A, there are certain exceptions to this rule, and they can even be celebrated and applauded (one of the participants mentioned during the interview that they read an interview with a famous influencer who married a person from a different ethnic group and that they seemed happy), however, it's one thing when someone out there is doing it—they are brave and should be supported—and when this happens to your own family. However, in this case, the lack of lived traumatic experiences among Generation B, puts them in a position to question institutions they find unreasonable, which could mean that in time, new generations might put an end to the affirmation of the institution in the objective reality, just by the fact that marrying across the ethnic boundary, for instance, is simply not a negatively classified activity in their subjective reality.

6.3. The Path Forward

This study would greatly benefit from a longer, more structured participant observation. Due to time limitations, I was not able to conduct a longer ethnography, but I do believe it could potentially enrich the study, especially when paired with multiple interviews with the same persons to be able to identify patterns as to when the boundary becomes more salient. Furthermore, once again, due to time limitations, this study did not tackle the concept of national identity, which would be quite interesting to study in such a setting, in relation to one's ethnic self-identification. Finally, it would be most fruitful to delve deeper into the trauma aspect of this study, as well as to explore the topics through the lens of a gender and class intersection. I leave these worries for another day.

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