

“Actually we are Deeply Rooted in Austria” National Identity Constructions and Historical Perceptions of Young People with Migration Backgrounds in Austria¹

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Introduction: Migration and Memory

Due to the European integration process and the consequences of globalisation for European societies, questions concerning memory politics and the interpretation of history have gained momentum in many European countries. One reason for this are migration movements which cause a growing pluralisation of societies. They have led to a “juxtaposition and intertwining of multiple relationships, perceptions and practices” (Strasser 2009: 9) and also have an effect on the historical consciousness of the population. In immigration countries, new historical experiences and narratives are added to national master narratives and consequently interact with them as well as contest them. Migrants bring their own stories with them – stories about migration and biographical memories, as well as historical narratives from the societies of their origin that are often nationally or ethnically framed. It is an important political question whether these memories are marginalised and considered to be dividing or whether they are articulated as a shared memory which creates connections among members of a society (Motte & Ohliger 2004: 47). The sociologist Viola Georgi has warned that if only the history of the nation-state is laid as a foundation for the collective, this can serve as a further mechanism for the exclusion of migrants from the majority society (Georgi 2006: 356).

In the past years, the issues of migration and memory have started to be discussed among historians, social scientists and pedagogues alike: How is the

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history of migration remembered in the national histories of different countries? How are migration and migrants represented in museums, the media and textbooks? How should history be taught in classes where a large percentage of the pupils have a “different” ethnic and religious background? Especially in culturally heterogeneous school classes teachers face the question of how to deal with diversity on a practical level, and since the 1990s “intercultural didactics” has become a keyword – at least in the German debate.

However, despite these recent discussions and the obvious heterogenisation of the population, many European countries’ self-perceptions persist in being framed in national terms. Studies that deal with the public representation of migrants in Austria, Germany and France show that migration history plays a marginal role in collective memory and that despite the factual social importance of migration and the lived memory of migration, migrants and their stories are often marginalized in public discourses (Hintermann 2009, Motte & Ohliger 2004, Noriel 1995). Austria, for example, has a large share of migrant population and was also historically shaped by migrations: in the 19th and early 20th century, the city of Vienna in particular attracted immigrants coming from Bohemia and Moravia, Galicia and Bukovina. Since the late 1960s, migration history has been shaped by economically motivated immigration and more recently, a general diversification of the migrant population has occurred. Currently, 15% of the Austrian population was born abroad and almost 18% has a “migration background” (1st and 2nd generation immigrants). For the city of Vienna the number is even higher: according to recent statistical surveys every third person is either an immigrant or has foreign parents (Statistik Austria 2010:20). Despite the rich and multifaceted history of migration and the currently high percentage of migrants, migration hasn’t shaped the national self-understanding. Austria continues to be a “reluctant immigration country”, as the migration researcher Christiane Hintermann points out. According to Hintermann “non-representation (of migration and migrants) has been the prevalent model” in Austria (Hintermann 2009: 13, Bauböck & Perchinig 2006). Migration history and migration issues in general do not play an important role in the curricula and in textbooks, and national narratives persist to be central to the symbolic construction of belonging in Austria.

This article is concerned with one aspect of the study of migration and memory: the question of how young people with migration backgrounds engage with established national narratives which they are told about in school and in the media: How do they perceive and appropriate these narratives, and how is this related to their identity constructions? The importance of representations of history for creating, maintaining and changing social identity is a given among scholars of social memory (Liu & Hilton 2005, Gillis 1994). Maurice Halbwachs, whose work laid down the foundation for memory studies, assumed that “collective memory” reflects the identity of a social group and ensures solidarity and continuity among its members (Halbwachs 1985). While

Halbwachs has been criticised for his functionalist approach to memory and his “vision of frozen social identity” (Miztal 2003: 55), newer works have instead emphasised the dynamics of memories and identities; “...both identity and memory, we now recognize, are ongoing processes, not possessions or properties” (Olick & Robbins 1998: 133-4). There are many studies on the historical perceptions and identity constructions of young people which build upon these theoretical frameworks², but it is only recently that studies have started to ask how people with family histories and collective narratives that differ from those of the majority population relate to those narratives that are considered to have a foundational character for a nation-state (Georgi 2003, Fehler et al. 2000).

My article is divided into two parts: In the first, a theoretical framework for analysing the historical perceptions of young people with migration backgrounds based on literature on historical consciousness and migration studies will be presented. The second part is a case study of a young migrant which has been chosen from a sample of 23 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with pupils in three Austrian schools. This case study aims to provide insight into the complex nexus of historical perceptions and national identity constructions within the context of migration. It shows how young people can switch between historical narratives and reference groups in order to construct multiple belongings. Furthermore, it makes it clear that experiences of discrimination and exclusion influence the way they appropriate historical narratives and construct their identities. Consequently, the analysis of young migrants’ historical perceptions must take into account the sociopolitical context in which they are located; namely, where young migrants (even of the “second” and “third generation”) still represent the national “other”. In the conclusion I will discuss the results of the case study in a broader context and compare it to other young people’s narratives.

Theoretical Framework

Historical consciousness – shaped by different contexts

It is one of the main insights of early sociological and psychological studies on memory (Halbwachs 1985, Bartlett 1932) that memory is a socially shaped

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In Germany, the memory of National Socialism and the Holocaust, in particular, has been the object of numerous research projects (for example, Welzer 2007, Welzer et al. 2002, Leonhard 2002).

reconstructive process and involves an active engagement with the past within a present framework. Individuals engage with the past and make it meaningful in the context of present-day preoccupations and depending on their position in social space. According to Jeismann, historical consciousness integrates past, present and future and puts them together into one context of meaning (Jeismann 1985). Historical consciousness is not identical with historical knowledge but is closely related to people's identity. Matching the historical truth to people's knowledge is therefore of less interest for studies on historical consciousness than the social and cultural processes of how people appropriate and make sense of history.

While Halbwachs' functionalist approach to memory didn't pay much attention to processes of transmission (for a critique, see Connerton 1989: 39), newer research on historical consciousness (Welzer et al. 2002, Inowlocki 2000, Leonhard 2000) has analysed the processes for the effect social contexts – the family, the educational system and the media – have on the way the past is transmitted, perceived and appropriated. They illustrate that multiple social frameworks, communities and institutions shape people's engagement with the past, including the content and forms of how people speak about it.

Many studies put an emphasis on the role of the family in the shaping of historical perceptions: As the central institution for socialisation, the family has a special influence on the self-development of children and how they perceive the world and also history (Inowlocki 2000). Long before children and young people study history at school, they already have impressions and images concerning the meaning of certain historical periods for older family members. Memories which are transmitted within families are usually connected to lived experiences of "significant others" and create – despite the differences between the individual members' perceptions – a feeling of cohesion and continuity. However, to a large extent, the transmission of collective memories in modern societies is also shaped by specialised institutions like schools, museums and the media, which can be located on the side of the "cultural memory" (Assmann 1992). In the school and also the mass media, young people are confronted with cultural "objectifications" of the past. Interpretations of historical events are not only shaped during history lessons, but also in other subjects like literature, geography and arts. In large part, it is the history of the nation-state that is represented there: "Schools and textbooks are important vehicles through which societies transmit the idealized past and promote ideas of a national identity and unity" (Misztal 2003: 20).

There are different opinions about the influence that the family, schools and media have on young people's historical perceptions and about the role of the individual personality. Studies like the one by Harald Welzer and his colleagues on the transmission of memories of National Socialism in German families (Welzer et al. 2002) indicate that despite the social differentiation and the growing influence of the media, the family is still crucial for shaping political

attitudes as well as perceptions of history. In families, historical perceptions are more emotionally shaped than those transmitted in school, which instead have a higher degree of abstraction and institutionalisation. Of course, historical representations which are shaped by different contexts can interact and intermingle with each other, but they can also be contradictory: family conversations provide different interpretative frames than the school and leave a deep impression on the historical consciousness.

Concerning the memory of National Socialism, there is a sharp difference between official memorial culture and private memory in Germany; transmitted memories about grandparents' personal experiences during this time usually do not match up to the historical knowledge acquired in school. Despite the knowledge that young people have about the crimes of National Socialism and the Holocaust in Germany, they still tend to represent their relatives as heroes and victims, not as followers or perpetrators (Welzer et al. 2002).

Historical perceptions of young people with migration backgrounds

For a long time in migration research, the life-worlds of young people with migration backgrounds have been characterized as being shaped by “problems” and “deficits”. Young migrants are supposed to grow up “between two cultures”, the culture of the immigration country and the country of origin, and are therefore confronted with conflicting values and expectations. Hämmig, for example, supposes that the different demands of the primary and secondary socialisation – of family and school – can lead to a “crucial test” (*Zerreißprobe*) for young people (Hämmig 2000: 50). Young people with migration backgrounds seem to be uprooted, disoriented between the cultures, or in some cases to be still bound by their parents' norms and values. In the past two decades, migration research has undergone a significant change. Most scholars recognize that many migrants and their descendants maintain a variety of ties to their home countries, while simultaneously being incorporated into the countries where they live (Levitt & Jaworsky 2007). Influenced by post-structuralism, post-colonial studies and cultural sociology, migration scholars have criticised simplistic conceptions of culture and identity that underlie much of the past migration research. In their eyes, cultures should not be conceptualised as coherent and homogeneous entities based on a fixed set of norms, values and beliefs that can be clearly localised and ascribed to certain people. “Cultural overlaps” (Reckwitz 2001) and “transnational social spaces” (Glick Schiller et al. 1995) which are not limited to one nation-state are characteristic for the **life-worlds** of migrants and for our increasingly globalised world in general.

According to Reckwitz, it is necessary to openly define “culture”: first, cultural phenomena must be regarded as fluid and inconsistent. Second, it should not assume that the boundaries of a culture are identical with group boundaries, that is to say that culture is bound by pre-fixed communities (Reckwitz 2001). For

example, those actors that are part of migration movements are particularly confronted with “cultural overlaps” that influence the formation of identities on both individual and collective levels. Due to such “cultural overlaps”, different interpretations of situations are possible depending on which of the cultural codes are used. Moreover, Homi Bhabha’s concept of “hybridity” or “hybrid identities” (Bhabha 1994), which was developed in the context of post-colonial theory, points out that people have individualized ways of dealing with different cultural codes and belongings. Identifications of people with migration background do not have to be problematic, but can combine elements of multiple cultural contexts and redefine them.

Regarding young people’s historical perceptions, it is important to note that young migrants as well as “autochthonous” young people generally belong to different social circles (Simmel 1908) and have different resources at their disposal for narrating the past. However, although “autochthonous” young people have to come to terms with competing narratives as well, as a rule, people with migration backgrounds are exposed to a greater variety of historical narratives and, in general, of meaning patterns. In migration research, young people with migration backgrounds seem to belong to different social worlds to an even greater extent than their parents. They attend school in the receiving country, they belong to ethnically mixed peer-groups and are exposed to diverse media coverage (Oswald 2007: 137). In regard to their historical perceptions, young people with migration backgrounds are also confronted with different contexts in which often conflicting narratives are transmitted. In school and the national media, they are primarily taught the national history of the country in which they live which is still important for constructing national identities. Migration histories and histories of the country of origin are often not supported by social institutions and tend to lose their value (Apitzsch 1999).

Against this background, the family usually has the role of transmitting the cultural heritage as well as the historical narratives of their own ethnic or national group to the next generation. According to the sociologist Bernhard Nauck (Nauck 2002), intergenerational transmission is often the only possible way to transmit the cultural heritage of the society of origin. Paradoxically, in the migration context, the family members simultaneously experience greater difficulties and greater need for intergenerational transmission. On the one hand, parents often lose their function as role models in the receiving society; on the other hand, some parents make an even greater attempt to transmit their cultural values etc. to the children, especially if they are not supported by cultural institutions (schools or nurseries). The transmission of the cultural heritage is therefore of even greater importance in migrant families.

However, this does not lead to the assumption that these families are “hotbeds of backwardness”, in which “pre-modern” values and orientations of the country of origin are transmitted – like the public discourse on migrants often supposes. Lena Inowlocki stresses that “knowledge about one’s origin” (*Herkunftswissen*)

and the family's migration history can be a positive cultural resource for young migrants because they often encompass positive "impulses of modernisation, autonomy and emancipation" (Inowlocki 2000: 71). Elements of the history of the country of origin can be used to interpret one's own situation and therefore have the potential to stimulate reflection.

How do young people with migration backgrounds appropriate history under these circumstances? Following Viola Georgi, three different scenarios can be imagined for the development of young migrants' historical consciousness (Georgi 2003): the appropriation of national narratives of the immigration country, the orientation towards the national narratives of the (parents') country of origin, and a "hybridisation of historical consciousness". In the first case, young people with migration backgrounds adopt the collective memory of the majority society and make it part of their own story. Their historical perceptions are orientated towards the majority society and are largely shaped by the majority society's school and mass media. In its extreme form, one can call this type "assimilation". A second option is the orientation towards historical narratives of the country of origin or of one's own ethnic or religious group. To explain, the specific ethnic or cultural background has the main impact on the formation of the historical consciousness, with "ethnic closure" being the extreme case. In the third scenario, a hybridisation of the historical consciousness takes place. In other words, the people's historical consciousness consists of elements of multiple collective narratives.

Following the theoretical approaches outlined above as well as newer empirical studies (Weiss 2007) in migration research, I assume that the hybridisation of identities is the rule in the migration context: Young people with migration backgrounds do not have to choose between Austrian narratives and those of their parents' countries of origin. Their historical consciousness consists of diverse collective and biographical memory resources. "Hybrid historical consciousness" can thus be used to describe the individualized processing of different historical resources. It can thereby subsume different phenomena: the juxtaposition of different narratives that are not interconnected and refer to different periods or events, the intermingling of different narratives when talking about the same subject as well as the reference to a shared transnational history.

Intermingled perspectives: David's narrative

How do young people with migration backgrounds narrate and appropriate central events from Austrian history, and how is this related to their identity constructions? Asking young migrants about their perceptions of National Socialism, the declaration of the state treaty, EU accession and other events which they consider to be crucial to national history, requires first asking them about knowledge that they were acquired in school. However, in the process of

making these events meaningful, young people not only apply this knowledge, but evaluate it in the context of personal experiences, values and orientations, using different interpretation frames to do so.

Between November 2008 and January 2009, we conducted open and semi-structured interviews with young people with and without migration backgrounds in three Austrian schools. In these interviews, young people spoke about their perception of Austrian national narratives and were given space to narrate about themselves, their interests and their family backgrounds. When considering the link between historical perceptions and constructions of belonging, it is important to note that narrations about history are, of course, only one way of positioning oneself and of constructing belonging. The ability to recall stories about nationally important historical events and to evaluate them requires certain competences in dealing with transmitted histories. In many interviews, young people used multiple reference groups and comparisons crossing national borders when making sense of historical narratives. However, not all young people were able to do so – this concerns people with and without migration background alike.

The case of David³, which I will analyse in more detail below, is especially interesting because of his multiple historical references and the intermingling of different perspectives within one narrative. David was born in Vienna as the son of Bosnian Serbs. At the time of the interview, David was 19 years old and one of the most active pupils in his class. David has a strong interest in history – both in the family history as well as in the history of Yugoslavia and Austria.

David's family migration history, narrated at the beginning of the interview, reaches back to the grandparents' generation who came as labour migrants from Yugoslavia (now: Bosnia and Herzegovina) to Austria. David's grandfather was the first to migrate to Austria in the beginning of the 1970s to work as a construction worker. While he initially planned to stay only for a short time, "little by little" he changed his principal residence to Austria. His wife and his son – David's father, who was seven years old at that time – moved there a year after his arrival. However, the decision about where the family would live in the future was not definitive at that point. The financial advantages and the family's higher standard of living in Austria conflicted with the emotional attachment to the place of origin. Both David's grandparents and his parents had strong "social and symbolic ties" (Faist 2004) to their place of origin: they often visited their village where parts of the extended family were living and the family still owns a house there. Moreover, David's father chose a partner from Bosnia and Herzegovina and took her with him to Austria. Only in the mid-1990s – more

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The name was changed to guarantee anonymity.

than twenty years after the grandfather's migration to Austria – did David's family give up the idea of returning. The beginning of the war in Yugoslavia, the lack of options after the war and the birth of the second son were finally decisive and David's family decided to acquire Austrian citizenship. Nevertheless, the family's transnational ties persist to this day. Especially after the grandparents' return to Bosnia and Herzegovina after the war and the beginning of the renovation of the family's house, David's family has been going back and forth between Austria and Bosnia and Herzegovina regularly.

The family's border-crossing social and symbolic ties are therefore still important in the "third generation" of migrants – for the 19-year-old David who has grown up in Vienna. Especially during his childhood, David went with his parents to Bosnia and Herzegovina regularly. For a long period of time, David thought of "returning" there to open his own business. Despite the dense, cross-border networks to the place of origin, David evaluates the narration of his family history by referring to Austria.

D: Yes actually we are deeply rooted in Austria anyway. Yes, for example the territory where we have our house today this used to be – back then during the times of the monarchy, this was the territory of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy and for example, I only recently got to know that the brother of my great-great-grandfather is buried on the Zentralfriedhof (the central cemetery) in Vienna, because back then he was a soldier for the imperial-royal monarchy in the First World War. And actually I am surprised – /I: This is very interesting/

D: because he actually fought against the kingdom of Serbia, although we are Serbs (he laughs).

Having told about his grandparents and parents' extended migration story and the family's continuous connection to Bosnia and Herzegovina, David's evaluation that his family is "deeply rooted in Austria" is, in the first instance, surprising: It seems that he feels a need to justify the family's presence in Austria.⁴ David goes back to the history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and uses it as a means to construct continuity in his family history and to root the family in Austria. He inscribes his family history into the multinational history of the Habsburg monarchy, which formed a common space in which nations lived together. Through the Treaty of Berlin, Austria-Hungary obtained the occupation and administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1878 onwards. It was formally annexed to the Empire in 1908 and remained so until 1918.⁵

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This might be also related to the interviewer who is herself born in Austria and represents the majority society

However, for David it is not easy to judge the annexation: “Austria had the role of the occupants and we were the afflicted”, he says later in the interview. From the Bosnian perspective, the occupation was an expression of “Habsburg’s colonialism” and economic exploitation. According to narratives of Bosnian victimhood, social and economic progress was impeded through bureaucracy and taxation, and people’s rights as citizens were restricted during Habsburg rule (Aleksov 2007:203-4). While traces of this argumentation can be found in David’s narrative, he stresses the positive sides of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire for Bosnia and Herzegovina at the same time, mainly through the construction of a railroad network which is still used to this day. David supports the (Austrian) view of the Empire’s positive role for the province as he concludes that “the monarchy had more advantages than disadvantages”.

David’s evaluation of his relative, the brother of his great-great-grandfather whom he uses to make a direct connection between his family and Vienna, is also ambivalent. From a Serbian national perspective it seems suspicious to have fought on the side of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire in the Great War. As David states, “actually I am surprised because he fought against the kingdom of Serbia, although we are Serbs.” And later: “I was wondering how he could do this. Probably he had to do it, otherwise they would have shot him.”

But despite these ambivalences, the Austrian narrative is predominant in the interview. This is clearly linked to the symbolic advantages that David gains through the reference to a (positive) common history of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Austria: David uses this historical narrative to construct belonging in the present – the fact that a relative fought on the side of the Austrian-Hungarian army as well as the present location of the family’s house on the former imperial territory help to create continuity in the family history and to explain the migration to Austria. When he found out about the brother of his great-great-grandfather during a random conversation about family history, David immediately told his classmates about it: “I was boasting a bit. Hey look! I am not a foreigner (*Ausländer*).” The relative’s grave at Vienna’s main cemetery, which is an important topos for Austrian identity, serves David as proof of his “Austrianness”.

David’s narrative has to be considered against the background of his experiences of discrimination and exclusion in Austria. In the public discourse, migrants and their descendants are often perceived as being uprooted and without a history (Glick-Schiller et al. 1995): they do not belong to the nation-state to which they have migrated nor are they still an integral part of their country of origin.

According to Glenny (Glenny 1999), the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was supposed to prove to the world that the ailing Austria-Hungarian Empire was still a great power.

Moreover, David experiences discrimination in his everyday life: Although he belongs to the “third generation” of migrants in his family – his grandfather was the first to migrate to Austria – he is still labelled a “foreigner” by his classmates. To inscribe his family into Austrian history can be regarded as a strategic reaction to discourses which construct migrants as the “other” of the nation-state. In his narrative, David counters images of “uprooted migrants” who do not belong by referring to the remote common history between Austria and Bosnia and Herzegovina during Austrian-Hungarian imperial rule.

Depending on the context, David positions himself as either Serbian or Austrian. While in his narrative these socially constructed categories of “Austrianness” and “Serbianness” are perceived as objectified cultural and religious differences and offer established frames for positioning oneself, he moves between them and employs them reflexively and relationally depending on the situation. He says that he is proud to be a “Serb” and positions himself as a practising member of the Orthodox Church, when being asked if his “background” matters for him, he argues that he has “a lot of Austrian culture” because he celebrates Christmas according to the “Austrian (Catholic) tradition”. Being confronted with discriminatory remarks from his classmates, he counters that he is an “Austrian thoroughbred” (*Vollblutösterreicher*). The possibility of navigating between identity categories and in this way negotiating his belonging in a multi-local life-world has to be understood as a specific cultural competence which is characteristic for many young people with migration background. For David, his knowledge about history is one cultural resource which he uses to construct belonging – in the context of his own family history when it comes to evaluating the occupation and annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Austro-Hungarian Empire and also in David’s evaluation of Austrian neutrality.

For David, the signing of the State Treaty and the declaration of neutrality in 1955 are the most important events in Austrian history. In this regard, David’s attitudes do not differ from other young people and those of the Austrian population as a whole. In opinion surveys, the declaration of Austrian neutrality is repeatedly called the most important event in Austrian history by people of all age cohorts (cf. Surveys of Fessler-GfK, quoted by Hintermann 2007: 493).

The Declaration of Neutrality was adopted on October 26, 1955 as part of the constitution and declared Austria to be permanently neutral. While it was the immediate consequence of the allied occupation of Austria by Soviet, French, British and US troops after WWII and not a self-chosen status⁶ in the course of the post-war history the Declaration of Neutrality soon became closely

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Without it the Soviet Union would not have agreed to sign the State Treaty of Austria which re-established the country’s independence.

connected to Austrian national identity and the idea of national sovereignty. Together with the State Treaty, which was signed in May 1955 by the allied powers and the Austrian government, it is considered to be the “birth certificate” of a stable Austrian nation (Liebhart & Pribersky 2004). Recently, in debates on Austria’s membership in the EU, the principle of neutrality has been intensely discussed in the public (Wodak et al. 1999): for example, regarding the question of whether Austria would be ready to participate in an EU Rapid Reaction Force. In particular, the far-right Freedom Party in Austria has used the neutrality in its anti-EU-rhetoric.

The neutrality is a sign of national sovereignty and connected to Austria’s post-war history of success for David as well:

D: I think it’s good that the Austrians declared the neutrality.⁷ Since then things have been looking up. At least until now, because now everything has gone downhill again. For a few reasons. Yes.

I: For what reasons?

D: Well, the EU and generally. We wanted to get rid of the occupants, and in 55 we got rid of them with the treaty and in 1995 the same again. We are governed by others (3) I don’t understand this.

David appropriates the Austrian master narrative of the successful reconstruction of Austria after 1955 and the “real” liberation of Austria in 1955 after the allied troops had left the country. The allied troops are regarded as occupants from this perspective. Only after Austria had regained her sovereignty could the country successfully develop. David interprets Austria’s accession to the EU as a continuation of a foreign dominance which contradicts national interests. In the same way as the narration about his family history, the narrative of neutrality gives him the opportunity to position himself as a “true Austrian” who defends the country’s interests and who opposes the “domination of the European Union”. This is one of the few paragraphs in the interview where David speaks of himself as part of an Austrian national “we”: “We wanted to get rid of occupants”, “we are governed by others”. David’s appropriation of the myth of the “successful reconstruction” of Austria after 1955 and the anti-EU-narrative can be regarded as an attempt to construct belonging by adopting an Austrian perspective. It offers him the possibility of positioning himself as part of an Austrian national “we” which is contrasted by the “politicians in Brussels” and to explain what he thinks to be best for the country. At the same time, his

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The original German expression was “... dass sie das g´macht haben, die Österreicher mit der Neutralität“.

narrative also reflects biographical insecurities. David feels insecure about his future and doesn't know whether he will find work in Austria. His fears about an uncertain future lead him to make exclusive claims: He argues for closing Austria's national borders and re-establishing national sovereignty, by leaving the EU if necessary.

But David does not only take on the position of a defender of Austria's national interest, but also justifies the neutrality from a Serbian perspective. He criticises the deployment of NATO soldiers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. David uses the neutrality strategically to denounce NATO's deployment. In his eyes, the NATO troops did not fulfil their supposed peace-keeping function – they were only watching.

D: Why should one risk the neutrality of a state, only so that it can participate in crisis deployment. NATO was of no use in the Balkans during the war. They couldn't interfere and really, I don't know why they were there at all, the Blue Berets (peacekeeping troops). They didn't help anyone. (...) They were just there; they didn't do anything, just watched.

While David doesn't add new dimensions to the narrative on neutrality – he deploys the frames of national sovereignty and security – it is interesting that he speaks about it from different perspectives: he uses it to defend Austrian national interests as well as from a Serbian perspective to criticize the deployment of NATO soldiers in Bosnia.

David's case shows how people with a migration background find strategic ways of positioning themselves and constructing belonging. He uses different cultural codes as well as historical narratives to position himself as an Austrian and a Bosnian Serb at the same time. In her study on how young people with migration backgrounds perceive National Socialism and the Holocaust, Viola Georgi has reconstructed a typology of biographical strategies to deal with the past which is based on the identification with historical and social reference groups (Georgi 2003). She identifies four reference groups in the interviews with young migrants in Germany: victims, perpetrators, one's own ethnic group, and humanity. Similarly to Georgi's study, our interviews show that there is a deterministic relationship between ethnic belonging and historical perception and that young people with migration backgrounds can use the national "majority society" as a reference group. They also indicate that young people can also switch between different reference groups in order to construct belonging. While in David's interview the different frames do not contradict each other in the case of the Austria neutrality (David supports the neutrality both from an Austrian and a Serbian perspective), in the case of the evaluation of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – which touches upon national narratives in Austria and Bosnia and Herzegovina – we encounter conflicting memories which exist parallel to each other.

Conclusion

Narrating history/ies is an essential part of positioning oneself and constructing one's identity. Representations of national history offer definitions of "who people are" by referring to the past and linking it with the present and future (Liu & Hilton 2005). This paper has attempted to demonstrate that young migrants have an active role in dealing with historical narratives and that their historical consciousness is influenced by different sources which can be strategically used to construct belonging. In addition to identity being based on memory, that which is remembered is based on people's identifications (Gillis 1994: 3). When talking about the past, young people like David make multiple framings and use different historical and social reference groups. These framings reflect their multiperspectivity and ambivalences in their identifications. Young migrants refer to their family history and historical narratives which stem from their own ethnic or national group, but at the same time they can use "Austrian narratives" to position themselves as part of the national "we". A conceptualisation of identities as ongoing processes allows us to capture different ways of positioning oneself and to ask in which situations young people make use of which frames and reference groups. Young people can also refer to them strategically depending on the interaction with others: It is likely that when talking to his grandfather about his relative who fought against the Kingdom of Serbia (in David's eyes, against his own ethnic group), he will evaluate the history differently than in front of his classmates (where he has to prove his "Austrianness").

While reflecting upon the agency of young people with migration backgrounds, the narrations should also be regarded as ways of claiming recognition for their multi-local life-worlds in a certain sociocultural environment (Scheibelhofer 2008: 196). There are many young people with migration backgrounds in our sample who have appropriated some central myths from Austria's history: they support the Austrian neutrality as a symbol of the country's sovereignty, regard the withdrawal of the Allies that liberated Austria in 1945 as the real "liberation" of the country and, like one adolescent in the sample, even adopt the position that Austria was Hitler's first victim – a myth that has eroded since the Waldheim Affair in 1986 and is no longer taught in school. This reproduction of national myths shows the power of national narratives that persist in people's minds and continue to be transmitted throughout the sociocultural environment of young people, even after they have been questioned by historians and the general public (like the myth of being Hitler's first victim). Despite young people's active role in referring to multiple narratives while telling their stories, it is necessary to take into account that immigrants and their descendants have a marginal, "peripheral" position in the national collective memory, and that the

adoption of these narratives can be a way to construct belonging. In the public discourse, migrants remain underrepresented and, even when they are integrated into the education system and the labour market, they are not symbolically included in the national self-image.

Experiences of discrimination and exclusion can influence the way young people appropriate historical narratives and construct their identities. The adoption of national myths and of national “outgroups” (like the Allies of WWII and the EU) enables them to construct themselves as part of the national “we” and to defend the country’s interests. It expresses a desire to belong to the national collective which generally does not regard migrants and their descendants as full members of society.

However, the adoption of particularistic national narratives and myths is only one way in which young people with migration backgrounds narrate Austrian history and deal with misrecognition. In contrast to the particularistic versions of national narratives presented in the case study (to construct belonging to Austria and one’s own ethnic group), universalistic positions can also be found among young people with migration backgrounds. Our interviewees made such universalistic references when they condemned Nazi crimes, referred to human rights transcending the nation-state and also interpreted the neutrality as a pacifistic principle. Securing peace and fighting discrimination are important values for many young people; for some of them, their evaluation of historical narratives is also connected to their own or transmitted experiences of war, violence and discrimination. In the context of the fragmentation of national memory resulting from the diversity of cultures, traditions and religions within states, ethnic and national groups may still provide an important frame for making sense of the past and claiming belonging. However, at the same time, the pluralisation of memory can also lead to a denationalisation.

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