

## CHAPTER 2

# “CHILDREN OF THE BALKAN WARS”: RESPONSES AND RESISTANCE TO WAR-RELATED MEDIA CONTENT IN BOSNIA–HERZEGOVINA, KOSOVO, MONTENEGRO, AND SERBIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The Children of the Balkan Wars, as a post-war generation in Bosnia–Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia, share similar childhood war experiences, grew up in post-socialist societies, and live in comparable political and media systems. In our study about their practices relating to war-related media content based on qualitative interview data, we discovered that knowledge about the recent wars is very important for them. By interpreting the data against the background of everyday resistance theory, we argue that the findings show two main practices of media use: (1) avoidance of traditional media, which is perceived as distributing the official hegemonial narratives that are also transmitted within the family. (2) “Accommodating” as a form of everyday resistance: when it comes to war-related*

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*media content, members of the post-war generation become active media users. They expose historical facts or disseminate their own knowledge mainly online; they create their own content as a way of coping with the unsatisfying traditional (nationalistic, ethno-political) media offerings.*

**Keywords:** Post-Yugoslavia; post-war generation; childhood memories; war memories; media use; everyday resistance; collective memory; qualitative interviews; qualitative secondary analysis

## INTRODUCTION

On a sunny day in October 2019, we walked through the streets of Pristina and discovered a few interesting and intriguing things in the city that has been Kosovo's capital since the country's independence in 2008. The main boulevard in the inner city of Pristina is called Bill Clinton Boulevard, and at the end of it stands a statue of Bill Clinton on a pedestal. NATO, with the United States of America at its forefront, is perceived as having rescued the Kosovo Albanian population from the Serbs, and this story of the Albanian majority is still visible in their capital and burned into their collective memory (Baliqi, 2017).

The walk continued to our interview appointment with Nora. Nora is a young woman who was born in 1997, shortly before the NATO bombardment ended the Kosovo War in 1999. She grew up in post-war Pristina and was nine years old by the time of Kosovo's independence. Although the war is over, Nora feels the consequences and the hostility even today, and she names one institution that she believes supports the division between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs: "As I said, media has a very bad, great, great influence like it's huge but a very bad one" (Nora, Pristina, Kosovo, born in 1997). Nora is not the only member of the post-war generation who blames television, radio, and newspaper companies in Serbia and Kosovo for hindering reconciliation processes among the population by preserving national narratives like the one of the US rescuers.

## A POST-WAR GENERATION: THE "CHILDREN OF THE BALKAN WARS"

Nora was one of our interview partners for the research complex "The Children of the Balkan Wars," which was established in 2014 by communication scientist and historian Rainer Gries. He was head of the *Franz Vranitzky Chair for European Studies (FVC)* at the *University of Vienna (Austria)* until 2023 and worked with a transdisciplinary research team on three interrelated projects<sup>1</sup> that aimed to research the post-war generation in Bosnia–Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia.

All three research projects focused on this generation, on their experience of the same crisis and their coping strategies, as well as on their communicative practices in relation to their historical heritage (see, e.g., Asboth, 2023; Asboth et al., 2017). The first armed conflict on European soil after World War II, the Yugoslav wars of secession, took place in the 1990s. As the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

dissolved, there were territorial fights, ethnic cleansing, and genocide (Calic, 2018). The independent countries of Bosnia–Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo emerged in the 1990s and 2000s, and the post-war and post-socialist generation consequently did not grow up in a common Federal Republic, but in separate states. We refer to this generation as “Children of the Balkan Wars,” first of all to highlight that their common heritage did not start with Yugoslavia but is based on a centuries-old historical legacy (Todorova, 2005). Second, they share childhood experiences of crisis situations, such as witnessing atrocities, experiencing (ethnic) hostilities, and flight. Last, they have interconnected prospects for the future: they need to deal with reconciliation and help to establish political sustainability for their countries in preparation to join the European Union.

Focusing on a generation means gaining insight into the members’ everyday lives: where do they work, what do they study, what are their (ethno-)political views and activities? What about their free time or their media use? Also, do they feel that they lack opportunities or options for their future, or that they have unequal (ethno-political) positions within this social group? (Gries, 2008). According to theories on social generations, they share spaces of experience (Bohnsack & Schäffer, 2002), such as growing up in a (post-)war and post-socialist society. Due to shared experiences and expectations, they feel connected by comparable political, social, and cultural challenges, they react in similar ways, and they are able to recognize each other (Gries, 2008; see also Gries & Ahbe, 2006; Jureit, 2017; Jureit & Schneider, 2010; Mannheim, 1928). Generation as an analytical category for research, thus, enables the discovery of social groups within transregional contexts and spaces, such as those of post-war Yugoslavia.

Based on the assumption that the post-war generation’s shared traumatic and crisis experiences shaped their self-image and world views as well as forming the foundation of their political dispositions, speaking with members of this generation was of central importance in all three projects (Gries, 2016). Therefore, as part of the research team working on these projects, we took several field trips to post-Yugoslavia between 2016 and 2020 and collected over 80 qualitative interviews with members of the post-war generation. We were eager to collect these young adults’ childhood memories, war experiences, family narratives, and historical legacies, and to find out how they live today and how they feel about the past.

Accessing their childhood experiences was not an easy task (Asboth & Griesbeck, 2024), but there was one point that the post-war generation was noticeably eager to discuss: the media (system) in their countries, the negative political influence it had on them, and how (ethno-)politics are trying to place “their” historiographical view of the Yugoslav wars of secession in the national media. The members of the post-war generation often told us that at some point in their lives, they started to doubt what media channels told them about the wars, the former enemy parties, or their own “national” state. During an interview, one young woman stated:

In a sense it’s, I think, it’s quite evident that it’s controlled by the government, most of the media is controlled by the government. ... that’s terrible, and this is not just that it’s controlled by the government, it’s just that the system, the content that’s placed on the market, that is presented to people is terrible. (Female, Belgrade, Serbia, born in 1990)

With this observation in mind, we formulated new research questions that we aimed to answer with the qualitative data gathered for the abovementioned three research projects during our field trips: How are the “Children of the Balkan Wars” responding to war-related media content? How are they talking about and remembering, but also dealing with the wars in the context of media activities? Which intragenerational practices – formed transregionally and independently, no matter where in post-Yugoslavia they are living – can we observe in their handling of war and war-related media content? The secondary analysis presented in this chapter focuses on researching the attitudes of the post-war generation toward war-related media content. The scholarly concepts of “Collective Memory” (Assmann, 2005; Assmann, 2016) and “Everyday Resistance” (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013) turned out to be pivotal for explaining the patterns of media use uncovered in the interviews, and are presented below.

### **“COLLECTIVE MEMORY” AND FAMILY NARRATIVES – THE POST-YUGOSLAV MEMORY LANDSCAPE**

In order to research the attitudes of the post-war generation toward war-related media content, we needed to evaluate their level of history knowledge about Yugoslavia and the 1990s and identify their (media) sources for gaining this knowledge within the corpus of interview transcripts. Consequently, in preparing the basis for coding the transcripts, we defined war-related media content as well as history knowledge not only in reference to the 1990s but also to World War I and World War II, the Balkan Wars (1912/1913), and wars and uprisings against the Ottoman Empire (14th–19th centuries). It is evident that the media discourse in the 1990s was influenced by historical narratives from the previous wars (Calic, 2018); hence, the transmission and re-interpretation of past conflicts play a crucial role within the post-Yugoslav societies and their current collective memory.

Jan (2005) and Aleida Assmann (2016) divided the collective memory into a communicative or social memory based on a communicative network that, on the one hand, has a time span of one generation. According to them, the family and media narratives of the wars of the 1990s and World War II were transmitted to the post-war generation through a communicative memory; the witnesses to these events are the parents or grandparents. On the other hand, there is cultural memory, which stores the historical legacy from a distant past, such as the Kosovo myth that is rooted in the 14th century. Unsurprisingly, we found that the communicative memory is the more prevalent one and that World War II is present as a frame of reference in addition to the secession wars. Some interviewees gave us insight into their cultural memory when talking about their country or Yugoslavia. One young woman immediately referred to her history classes, where she learned “what happened when Serbia got free from [unclear whether Ottoman or Austrian] occupation.” Then, she remembered another historiographic event: “Yeah, or well three years ago, I think, it was the anniversary of Serbia becoming a kingdom, like 800 years ago” (Female, Požarevac, Serbia, born in 2001).

Being aware of the generation's cultural memory, of the historical narratives and events stored within it, helped us define interview paragraphs that referred to a war-related discourse. One must consider that this study is a secondary analysis of qualitative interviews that we conducted, but for other projects, it is a reconstruction of the generation's media attitudes and habits that came up incidentally in the interview. In some cases, members of the post-war generation activated their cultural memory when talking about media or other representation forms, which was one reason to broaden our search for corresponding text paragraphs. The (sub)public negotiation of war-related media content does not happen solely in newspapers, TV, or radio, but also comes across during commemorations, such as "Srebrenica Memorial Day," which is broadcasted by Bosnian TV channels as a national media event. It also comes across in the classroom, in history books, and on the streets in the form of graffiti or protests. Hence, the war-related media content was not bound to a certain media type, channel, or genre but can be found in different (sub)public spheres.

### **"EVERYDAY RESISTANCE" – MEDIA USE BETWEEN AVOIDANCE AND ACCOMMODATION**

When talking about media or war-related media content, our interviewees never used the word "resistance." This is explained within the concept of "everyday resistance," where [Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson \(2013\)](#) point out that "actors themselves are not necessarily regarding it as 'resistance' at all, but rather a normal part and way of their life, personality, culture and tradition" (p. 10). The authors understand everyday resistance as a practice that is *done routinely*, and they exclude organized forms of resistance, such as demonstrations, from their definition ([Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013](#), p. 10). Based on their theory, we scrutinized the interviewees' *practice* ([Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013](#), p. 18; see also [Picone et al., 2019](#)) of media use regarding war-related content, which exhibited both diversity and a homogeneous (hidden) culture of resistance, and organized the findings according to the techniques that [Vinthagen and Johansson \(2013\)](#) elaborated.

[Vinthagen and Johansson \(2013, p. 25\)](#) name four key techniques of resistance practices: coping, survival technique, accommodation, and avoidance/escape. In our analysis, we found that our interview partners mainly employed the avoidance or accommodation technique, as we will present in our results section. In our case, the avoidance of certain war-related media content or certain (traditional) media channels can be interpreted as a form of resistance since avoidance makes the exercise of power impossible.

The accommodation technique can be described as a disguised form of resistance, in which a subject seems to show subordination while acting out within the available possibilities – as if offering accommodation. This became visible mainly in the use of social media platforms by the post-war generation, where they carefully decide what to reveal or conceal based on the circumstances, topic, and audience they are addressing. According to [Vinthagen and Johansson \(2013\)](#),

the coping, surviving, and accommodation techniques are quite often found in combination because they all target the dominant power (system) by which people are repressed, with the goal of undermining it.

The comprehension of power and hegemonial structures is another key factor in resistance theory. We argue that the “Children of the Balkan Wars” share not only similar childhood experiences and past events, but also similar current power structures, like national(istic) politics or Yugoslav traditions. By acting within the prevailing power structures, they take position somewhere along the axis of obeying and resisting; hence everyday resistance can be observed through their individual practices. For our goal of approaching resistance theory in combination with the post-war generation’s media use, the density of interview transcripts collected for the *FVC* was, thus, an ideal departure point.

## RESEARCH DESIGN: A STUDY BASED ON QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

This secondary analysis is based on the qualitative interviews we conducted with young people on our field trips that happened in the context of our work at the *FVC*. In one-on-one, pair, and group (3–4 people) interviews, we asked people about their current living situation, their childhood memories, and their war and post-war experiences. We wanted to ensure our young interview partners felt comfortable being with and talking to us, so we used different stimuli, including narrative and drawing stimuli (Asboth & Griesbeck, 2024; Fujii, 2018; Lindlof & Tayler, 2018). In total, we spoke to 95 “Children of the Balkan Wars” in 82 interviews about growing up and living in a post-war and/or post-socialist country.

Studying the post-war generations’ use of the media in relation to war-related content was not the original goal of our interviews, so we first had to ensure a practical solution for filtering the relevant interviews, text phrases, and paragraphs for additional analysis. We developed a list of trigger words (e.g., media, TV, and Internet) for a full-text search of all our interview transcripts and conducted a test round to see if we could find (a) a sufficient number of referring paragraphs and (b) information on their knowledge about the history of (the dissolution of) Yugoslavia. The final sample consisted of 58 interviews (single, pair, and group) with 67 “Children of the Balkan Wars” (30 women and 37 men, aged between 16 and 38, most in their 20s) who met these criteria, which we analyzed in MAXQDA following a qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2018).

To distinguish between media use and media content, we designed the deductive main categories (Kuckartz, 2018) for the qualitative content analysis based on a robust but simplified communication model. According to sociologist and political scientist Harold Lasswell (1966), “a convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer the following questions: Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?” (p. 178).

For our analysis, we concentrated on three elements: “who” (the sender), “says what” (content), and “to whom” (receiver). “Receiver,” in our case, was coded when the interviewees talked about media consumption, that is, their own habits

and even more often the media use of others. Sometimes they talked about it very generally, but in certain cases, the media channels that were (not) used were associated with war-related content, and the interviewee specifically explained why it was avoided or used.

“Sender” was coded for paragraphs in which we found out about their participatory and active media use, especially social media activities. These practices include engaging with existing content, such as through likes, shares, and comments, as well as creating content like video or art productions or spontaneous posts. Based on this system, we coded the speaker as “sender” and/or “receiver,” adding the category “content,” which provided information about what was talked about in the paragraph. Hence, after this first round of deductive coding, we introduced sub-categories for “content” such as “Yugoslavia,” “wars of the 1990s,” and “World War II,” as well as sub-categories for “receiver” and “sender,” by using an inductive coding approach (Kuckartz, 2018). It turned out that these two main categories of “receiver” and “sender” have similar sub-categories, because many media services are used by a sender as well as a receiver, especially in the social media context. Under the category of “receiver,” we introduced two additional sub-categories. The first sub-category is “family narratives,” which were identified as a source of knowledge about the wars. Second, the category of “politics” contains paragraphs in which the post-war generation talked about the connection between the media system in their country and political parties or government. Nora explained to us what she and her friends talk about when the topic of war comes up:

But more than talking about ex-Yugoslavia, we talk about the relation between Kosovo and Serbia, the politics and the image that is being put on TV, and the influence that politics has on media in general. (Nora, Pristina, Kosovo, born in 1997)

Table 2.1 offers an overview of the sender and receiver codes with their sub-categories and gives insight into which media services are used and talked about.

Table 2.2 shows the media content that was mentioned by senders and receivers.

Using MAXQDA to analyze the content of 58 qualitative interviews, we found that the post-war generation responds similarly to war-related media content. More importantly, the analysis showed that their responses can be understood as an act of resistance. This *resistance*, which Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) define as an individual’s disguised or hidden everyday *practice or activity* within the prevailing discourse, will be discussed in the following results section in relation to young people’s media use.

The concept of media use stems from the discipline of communication science, where it is deeply rooted in the subfield of audience studies (Das & Ytre-Arne, 2018). Media use can be understood as all possible media habits and activities: the consumption or production of content or infrastructure, or activities between consumption and production (Bruns & Schmidt, 2011; see also Picone, 2011), which are highly relevant in the context of social media use. In the following first results section, we focus on media use and non-use in the sense of media consumption, whereas in the second results section, we concentrate on active media use, understood as active engagement with and production of media content.

**Table 2.1.** Sub-categories of the Categories “Sender” and “Receiver.”

Sender	Receiver
Media Services/ channels used	Media Services/ channels used
Public sphere & media in general	Public sphere & media in general
TV	Documentaries
Videos and movies	Videos and movies
Magazines & newspapers	Magazines & newspapers
Radio	The news on traditional media in general (radio, TV, press)
Internet	Internet
Social media platforms	Wikipedia
Websites	Online newspapers
Twitter	Twitter
Instagram	Instagram
Facebook	Facebook
Skype	YouTube
Online games	Books
Demonstrations & protests	Commemorations & memorials
Art (e.g., Street Art, Music)	School & official knowledge
Peers & siblings	Peers & siblings
	Family narratives
	Politics

**Table 2.2.** Sub-categories of the Category “Media Content.”

Media Content	1990s
	The (political) news
	Present (ethnic) conflicts, based on the 1990s
	Peer group exchange online and offline
	Youth exchange project
	Ethno-politics
	Yugoslavia
	Srebrenica
	World War II
	LGBTQI
	Ottoman period and Turkish heritage/history
	Nationalism
	Fake news and hate speech
	Media/media system
	Human rights and women’s rights
	ICTY trials

## RESULTS I: MEDIA USE AND NON-USE AS AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUE

The majority of the “Children of the Balkan Wars” reject official media content, especially as a way of dissociating from elderly generations. They argue that the news, reports, and stories of the wars in the 1990s are dominated by the ruling political party. The post-war generation encounters those war stories critically as part of their *everyday technique* (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 11).

However, the traditional media is not the first encounter with war-related content; rather, the family is often the initial setting where children consume stories of war, as previously stated. These family narratives, stored in the communicative memory, play a significant role in shaping the perception of the Yugoslav wars of secession among the post-war generation. Vita Yakovlyeva (2020), who studied the post-Chernobyl generation of children in Ukraine, states, “children’s lives are heavily influenced by the structures of collective memory they are born into, available to children through the complex system of inter- and intragenerational relationships from very early on.” (p. 57). Dealing with family narratives gets the young people personally engaged in the memories and contributes to their emotional intensity (Sindbæk Andersen & Törnquist-Plewa, 2016). They were fed with their own family stories, learning where their parents and grandparents had spent the wartime, how other relatives were doing, and who to blame for the outbreak or atrocities. The family narratives set the basis of knowledge about war-related topics for the “Children of the Balkan Wars,” as their own memories are fragile or even non-existent (Gries et al., 2016).

Equipped with the family narratives, the post-war generation processed the war-related content that was available in the public sphere, starting with traditional media. By traditional media, we mean the offline media services of TV and radio broadcasting and the printing media. One must acknowledge that the media is highly influenced by (ethno-) politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro, and it is perceived as a major power structure by the post-war generation. The situation is highly problematic in Serbia because the media system is under the control of the ruling government (Bajić & Zweers, 2020). Watching the news on TV is often one-sided and, due to reporting on the relations with neighboring countries or on the minorities in their own country, it perpetuates ongoing conflicts or tensions among the communities resulting from the 1990s. As a matter of fact, this generation shows a significant tendency to mistrust the government system, in general, and especially party politics with a nationalistic background (Lavrić et al., 2019).

It seems that the offerings of traditional and often state-sponsored channels and newspapers, which, according to the interview partners, are mainly consumed by their parents and grandparents, had triggered some practices of resistance within the post-war generation. All of them show skepticism toward the news or other formats on TV or in the press. One of our interviewees, an 18-year-old man living in Sarajevo, referred to information in the traditional media as catastrophic:

But RTRS (i.e. Radio Televizija Republike Srpske) is catastrophic. You wouldn't believe what kind of stuff they show their viewers and everything. It's horrible. There inside, that people, I think, they still believe that if you go to Sarajevo, Muslims will kill you. (Male, Sarajevo, Bosnia–Herzegovina, born in 2001)

Another aspect of the post-war generation's knowledge sources for war-related content shows that the uncertainty of information from traditional media leads to an exchange among peers. This tends to occur at schools, mostly among individuals with comparable social backgrounds (schools are often mono-ethnic in the post-Yugoslav countries), and, therefore, does not bring much new information, but rather repeats the stereotypes already familiar from the media. The school, as another official channel of the state, contributes to a contra-hegemonic attitude within the post-war generation. One woman from a small city in Montenegro explicitly reveals her doubts: "I came across the fact that I was reading a history book that was not objective at all, it was clear that the book was written in such a way that some things were written that were not true" (Female, Bar, Montenegro, born in 1997).

The mixture of these traditional media reports perceived as dubious; the emotional, often incomplete family stories; and the unsatisfactory exchanges with peers led the young people to use additional sources like documentaries, movies, books, blogs, and information on the Internet to build their own perception of the recent past and to reflect on stories about the war and its causes. However, searching the Internet may lead to even more ambiguous information in some cases:

I really like the theme, '90 to '95 war. So, I searched all on the internet and I found the like two websites that talk about one thing in two different ways and how they look among guys as hero or as criminal. So, I wasn't there, so I will never know the truth. (Male, Sarajevo, Bosnia–Herzegovina, born in 2000)

On the other hand, some of the interviewees did research and found informative websites, such as the YIHR (Youth Initiative for Human Rights) regional network and the BIRN (Balkan Investigative Reporting Network), which provide reliable information. Furthermore, many national and local initiatives aim to inform young people in the region through various online channels.

Throughout our interviews in all of the Yugoslav secession countries, we found a profound skepticism toward traditional media, which we call an everyday practice of "resistance": "If I was just watching the news, I would like be, 'Serbians are bad. They did genocide. They killed many people'" (Male, Sarajevo, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, born in 2001). By avoiding the consumption of traditional media, the post-war generation weakens the omnipresence of nationalistic political parties, family narratives, and national or ethno-national myths:

I would never read one article and say 'Hey, Croats are right, or Serbs are right, or Muslims are right.' I will always read several different articles, separately, so I can give certain judgment of my own about it. In most cases, it is the Internet, and sometimes a book, since I have a lot of books. (Male, Vrbanja, Bosnia–Herzegovina, born in 2001)

Departing from this standpoint of questioning the family narratives in their adolescent years distributed through traditional media channels, the members of the post-war generation became active and especially used the possibilities of the World Wide Web to distribute their own created content.

## RESULTS II: ACTIVE MEDIA USE AS ACCOMMODATION TECHNIQUE

The everyday decision not to consume TV, radio, or newspapers for news or war-related topics, and the general mistrust in political institutions, could give the impression that the post-war generation is politically lethargic and uninformed. However, we learned that their media avoidance is a form of resistance, a way to challenge the political parties in power that control the official media system in their countries. Moreover, their resistance practices toward (ethno-)politics, national narratives, and family narratives show a broad range of public participation. Though these observed practices of public participation contain a “non-dramatic, nonconfrontational or *non-recognized* way” (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 37) of acting against the actors in power, we argue that they are coping strategies for an ongoing conflict that dates to the 1990s. Only in a few cases do we have examples of resistance in the form of protesting. Nevertheless, the “Children of the Balkan Wars” are trying to *accommodate* (p. 25) themselves to this political situation (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013).

Over the years, the “Children of the Balkan Wars” have become active media users (Picone et al., 2019). They show a variety of producing activities: posting and commenting on selected Internet platforms, on the streets (graffiti), through youth exchange programs, and by questioning some (family) narratives within the collective memory. They are starting to disseminate their research results, their opinions, their life stories, and other puzzle pieces in different ways in the public sphere. The interviewees talked about their broad spectrum of social media activities: they might share a call for protests, for instance, or a call for (mostly NGO) projects. They use social media platforms as distribution channels and for peer group contact.

Some of our interviewees take advantage of anonymity on social media platforms, where they can perform as disguised users. Although they actively share and produce war-related content, their personal information remains hidden. Others use those platforms as self-presentation, to give insights into their personal life or professional field of expertise, but they put the message in the background. One of our interview partners, for example, was a young man in his 20s from a small town in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which he was running for political office. On Facebook, he always appeared in photos as a family father and religious person, but his political program was not featured. Nevertheless, his political agenda was contrary to the dominating one. Both methods of *everyday resistance* use social media platforms, hiding as well as highlighting, were approached (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013).

The post-war generation shows resistance toward several actors who, in their eyes, are powerful players that determine either the consequences of the wars or their historiographical presentation. As the main actors that dominate the hegemonial discourse, they define the party politicians and media producers – not the individual journalists working within the system, but rather the media system itself, which is dependent on ethno-political and state institutions. Depending on their viewpoint, they counter the power discourse dominated by the political and media

system at home or/and abroad or the communicative memory. As active media users, they publicly cast doubt on what these systems and memories distribute. Although they do not organize a rebellion against the government or the media/political system, we consider their media productions as a form of resistance.

Their role as active media users is manifold: one young woman from Kosovo wrote an article about the Serbian-Kosovar relationship that was removed from the website by the provider after a few days. Two young people proudly told us about the high school magazine they were working on. Other interviewees told us they attend youth initiatives that deal with war-related topics. Commemoration festivities were often mentioned. One young man from Sarajevo managed to establish an exhibition based on submissions from his age cohort: He asked for childhood memories relating to the Bosnian war, and he got so many responses that he collected them, published a book, and created an exhibition in Sarajevo: the “War Childhood Museum.” (<https://warchildhood.org>). The resistance of narratives, archived in collective memory and upheld by the political and media system, shows a variety of practices. Although some of them are organized and lead to a protest, many are part of the interviewees’ everyday actions that have no certain intent. Nevertheless, they reveal the discontent with the hegemonic system and discourse and must be seen as a valuable source for democratization and anti-nationalism in post-Yugoslavia.

## **CONCLUSION: EVERYDAY RESISTANCE THROUGH VARIOUS MEDIA USES**

The results of the study based on qualitative data show that knowledge about the recent wars is very important for the “Children of the Balkan Wars,” and conversely, they feel the need to pass along their own knowledge and re-interpretations of certain historical narratives about it. The post-war generation is commonly characterized by their skepticism toward media reports on war-related topics, which can affect their trust in news reporting as a whole. They observed and criticized the intersection of political issues with war-related narratives from the collective memory in traditional media channels.

We can organize our findings into two main practices of media use: (1) Selective Media Consumption: Historical knowledge is sought and processed. This starts with intergenerational transfers within the family narratives and includes more and more external sources, along with the avoidance of traditional media use. (2) Active Media Use: Once historical facts are exposed, this generation aims to inform the public and disseminate knowledge through various channels and formats. They intend to bring topics or perspectives to the surface that are usually silenced by more traditional or nationalistic media.

In short, this generation mistrusts war-related media reports and tries to resist official media channels by creating their own perspective of the past, re-interpreting the narratives found in the collective memory. The past is perceived differently from one generation to the next, and the communication and exchange in media discourse about historical heritage play a major role in identity formation ([Welzer](#),

2010), as was also reflected in the story of Nora, the then 22-year-old woman we met in Pristina who talked about the problematic media system in Kosovo.

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## NOTE

1. The Children of the Balkan Wars: Getting to know a crucial generation for Europe (2015); 2. How civic engagement leads to political participation. Learning from young active Europeans in Bosnia–Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Serbia (2016–2017); 3. Youth in the Balkans. Their cultures of communication and non-communication, and their notions of reconciliation (2019–2020).

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