



(Post)Memory. How does the second generation remember the war?

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Abstract: Stories of the second generation of Holocaust survivors show how experiences of violence, trauma related to the war are passed on to the next generation. The stories of the survivors show how long it takes to work through trauma, as it can remain in the family for generations. Marianne Hirsche calls the memory of the war of the second generation post-memory, or inherited memory. To date, volumes of literature related to postmemory in the context of the Holocaust have been written. However, what does the memory of subsequent generations look like in other societies which also experienced the war?

This article aims to show postmemory in the context of Bosniaks society. The author will try to answer the question of how the war is remembered by the second generation - the generation which did not experience the war and knows it only from their parents' stories and political propaganda.

Keywords: Postmemory, War, Second Generation

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Introduction

The signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement was supposed to bring a settlement to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Undoubtedly, the conflict was recognized as having ended and systemic solutions were created as a response to ethnic tensions. The question is, however, whether they calmed the public sentiments. More than twenty years after the war, the discourse related to the disintegration of Yugoslavia is now gaining new narrators - people who did not experience the conflict but grew up in the “war vapors”. Their memory of the war was filled with both personal stories of loved ones and ethnic propaganda. As Jerome Bruner notes: “(...) man (...) lives surrounded by both his own stories and the stories of other people (...)”. (Bruner, n. 4, s. 10) When thinking about the past, we use the category of memory, which allows us to immerse into events, but it should be noted that these are never objective memories. This is because they have been filtered through the perception of our ancestors, which determines the specific field of memory.

In this article, the author wants to analyze the perception of the war of the 1990s by the second generation of Bosniaks. It will be an attempt to answer the question of how the conflict influences ethnic relations between the ethnoses of Bosnia and Herzegovina today. Do young people still live in the proverbial “war vapors” or conceivably the trauma of war has already been worked through?

Although the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina has become the subject of analysis in many publications from both historical, political, and anthropological perspectives, the theme of postmemory in the Bosnian context is still an undiscovered topic.

Accordingly, in reflections, the author will rely on her field research conducted between 2017 and 2020. During all tours, the author conducted 67 interviews, of which 39 with women, while 28 with men. The interviews were usually conducted during meetings in coffee shops, but also in private homes or during walks. The interviews were mostly recorded (if the respondents agreed) and then transcribed; a few interviews were only transcribed. And such a prepared material was subjected to interpretation. University towns located mainly within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina² were selected as the research area: Mostar, Sarajevo, Travnik, Tuzla, Zenica, as well as Banja Luka, which is located in the Republika Srpska. Apart from the

2 Based on the Dayton Peace Agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina was divided into the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, inhabited mostly by Bosniaks and Croats, and the Serb Republic, dominated by Serbs.



university centers, the research was also conducted in such towns as Celić, Koraj, Lukavac, Vitez, Visoko, Trebnje, Srebrenica, Srebrenik³. Respondents were obtained by courtesy of university staff. Before the trips, the author sent emails to many units of different institutions asking for help in constructing the research group. Moreover, many meetings were initiated by the respondents themselves, who also invited their friends to the project. The CouchSurfing portal also proved to be a useful tool in establishing contacts.

The average interview lasted between two and three hours, two interviews took nearly half a day (6 hours). Several respondents were interviewed more than once, moreover, they were conducted in different circumstances. Sometimes the first interview was conducted individually, while the next meeting took place in the company of the respondent's friends.

The research was always guided by the principle of honesty, so all respondents were informed about the details and rules of the project. It was extremely important for the researcher to gain their trust; for this reason, she showed them openness and naturalness, which allowed her to build comfortable conditions for conversation, thus allowing learning about the thoughts of the person, not the "respondent". The gender of the researcher played an extremely important role. The fact that the author is a young woman made it easier for her to gain the trust of her talkers, which resulted in her being very quickly recognized as belonging to "their" circle. In many cases, this meant gaining access to the interviewees' private homes, thanks to which the author was able to get to know the other protagonists of the collected stories.

The studied group included Bosniaks aged 19-25, considered by the author as the primary medium of postmemory, or inherited memory⁴. During the selection of respondents, the researcher paid special attention to the fact that they were born at the end of or just after the war (only in this way the author could be sure that they did not have personal memories of that period). Another, already mentioned, reason for the interest in this social group was the fact that it is now beginning to influence the world of Bosnian politics, while at the same time being influenced by strong manipulations of the past.

³ It is worth noting that the interviews conducted in smaller towns took place only with the courtesy of the respondents, who invited the researcher to their family homes. Furthermore, it should be noted that most of the respondents were not from the localities where the author studied - e.g. Sarajevo (only 6 interviews were conducted with native Sarajevans).

⁴ This will be discussed later in the text.



1. The category postmemory

In his introduction to “Topography of Remembrance”, Martin Pollack rightly remarked that “great history will be easier to understand” when we look at it “from the inside, from the perspective of individual experience”. (Pollack, 2017, p. 5) It seems trivially to say that the memory of the past lies at the heart of everyone’s identity, but, without memory, we would not know who we are and who we were. As the Polish researcher Dorota Golańska rightly notes, memory, remembering can create our connection with the past, and the ways of memory define us in the present. (Golańska, 2017, p. 67) The German historian Lutz Niethammer stated that “(...) reality used to be the object of social construction, now it is also the past”. (Niethammer, 2014, p. 37) Katarzyna Kaniowska, a Polish anthropologist, points out that memory is closely related to cultural identity, so it is necessary to know the history of one’s own culture to be able to reflect on individual experiences⁵.

In the context of this article, it is worth asking ourselves a question about the generational transmission of memory and the most interesting aspect related to the memory of the second generation, which Marianne Hirsch called postmemory. Nowadays, the term is explored in many disciplines – very broadly in literary and cultural studies dealing with the analysis of the Holocaust, but also in sociology and political science.

The researcher placed the category of postmemory in the context of the Holocaust. Based on her own experiences – Hirsch was born after World War II into a family of Jewish survivors – she created an innovative theory of research on the memory of the second generation, the so-called “after” generation. Starting from the autobiographical empirics presented in her 1997 book “Family frames: photograph, narrative and postmemory”, Hirsch analyzed her memories of the war, which she adapted through socialization from photographs surrounding her, personal stories of her loved ones, diaries, etc. (Hirsch, 1997, p. 1-5) The author was unusually inspired by Art Spiegelman’s controversial comic strip “Maus. A Survivor’s Tale”. The comic tells the story of the author’s father, who was a Holocaust survivor. (Spiegelman, 2016) The father paid for it significant changes in his psyche, which then had an impact on his loved ones. She noted that Spiegelman links the past and the present highlighting the transmission of the survivor’s experience to the next generation. (Hirsch, 1997, p. 21) Hirsch considered the postmemory as the memory of the second generation of the community affected by the traumatic experience – the so-called “after” generation, whereby she took as a basic element the category of trauma and its transmission to the representatives

⁵ K.Kaniowska, *Antropologia i problem pamięci*, <http://cyfrowaetnografia.pl/dlibra/docmetadata?id=4942&from=publication>, p. 63, [dostęp: 03.10.2019].



of the next generation.

Over the next few years, in many essays and following books, the researcher made the issue of postmemory more precise, she is claiming that:

“(...) postmemory is distinguished from memory by a generational gap and history by a deep personal bond. Postmemory is a strong and very special form of memory precisely because its relation to an object or a source is mediated not by memories but by imagination and creativity. (...) Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who have grown up in a society dominated by narratives arising before their birth. Their delayed histories are abolished by the histories of the previous generation shaped by a traumatic experience that cannot be understood or processed”. (Hirsch, 1997, p. 254)

Postmemory, writes Hirsche, “(...) is not a movement, a method or an idea, but a structure for the inter and transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience”. (Hirsch, 1997, p. 154) Given the personal nature of postmemory, it can be considered as a kind of individual memory. However, when the whole community is the bearer of the experience of suffering, it is not easy to escape from other narratives. In other words, the individual's memories make up the collective memory. And collective memory gives it (individual memory) its proper context. Additionally, it should be noted that Marianne Hirsche considered trauma as a constitutive element of postmemory, which, as Tomasz Łysak claims, often becomes a cultural capital, a heritage binding national identities together. (Łysak, 2015, p. 7) As Cathy Caruth notes, trauma causes immense suffering in the individual, but also strongly influences the surrounding environment, consequently shifting from the individual to the group level. (Cartuh, 1995, p. 3 – 5) Social changes resulting from the experience of World War II, decolonization processes, and violence of the 1990s have made the category of trauma a permanent part of the conceptual apparatus of humanities and social sciences. Nowadays, reflection on trauma is the subject of research of many disciplines, from philosophy to broadly understood cultural studies⁶. Traumatogenic changes, which are the aftermath of wars or revolutions, have a considerable impact on society. Trauma, therefore, takes on a symbolic dimension – cultural and social, which often turns into political manipulation. Memories and memorial ceremonies ritualize the trauma and transmit it to subsequent generations. Because of this, the experience of trauma may become an element that reconstructs collective identity, and not infrequently lie at the basis of its construction or consolidation. “Wound culture” which is closely related to victimization, as

⁶ See more: A. Rothe, *Popular trauma Culture: selling the pain of others in the mass media*, New Brunswick 2011, *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*, ed. E.E. Kaplan, B. Wang, Hongkong 2004, J. Kibly, *Violence and the cultural politics of trauma*, Edinburgh 2007.



Tomasz Łysak mentions has become a phenomenon in the contemporary definition of identity. (Łysak, 2015, p. 7) As Wojciech Burszta notes, memory is a certain reservoir of information that constitutes the basis of identity. (Burszta, 2013, p. 100) The moment we combine both notions, thus creating the category of the memory of trauma, we may assume that it has the strongest impact on the construction of collective identity. Therefore, if trauma takes on a social dimension and is closely connected with (post)memory, it should be concluded that the latter also becomes a social phenomenon.

Trauma, which is often the aftermath of war, affects a collective made up of individuals who then transmit their experience to the following generations, often leading to the traumatization of the next generation. Mikołaj Grynberg in his reportage "Oskarżam Auschwitz" ("I accuse Auschwitz"), which is a collection of interviews with the descendants of the "Survivors", shows that they grew up in the shadow of trauma. And, he underlines, that trauma still often has a destabilizing effect on their everyday life. Moreover, the author, who draws inspiration for the story from his own experience, presented the significance of trauma for the shape of the identity of the "after" generation. (Grynberg, 2017) Additionally, Grynberg exposes its responsibility, as many descendants of the "Survivors" also suffered from psychological problems. The American historian Dominick LaCapra has recognized trauma as an extremely destructive phenomenon that strongly affects the individual, disrupting his life and "(...) creating holes in his existence". (LaCapra, 2002, p. 179) In the case of traumatic events, attempts to work through the trauma are crucial for both the generation directly affected and the generation inheriting it. The "after" generation grew up in traumatic memories, often highly emotionally charged, and all too often adopts them, reinterprets them, and then recognizes them as their own. As Hirsch points out, post memory is an extremely strong form of memory, because it contains a strong emotional charge. (Hirsch, 1997, p. 23) Consequently, the idea of heritage trauma, which entered the discourse thanks to psychiatrist Mark Wolynn, seems to be extremely important. The researcher emphasizes that memory never dies and family history is also our heritage, especially when it is connected with suffering. (Wolynn, 2017)

As Golańska notes, heritage is meanings and representations which are inscribed in material objects, which of course cannot be argued. (Golańska, p. 66) In traumatized societies, trauma is reproduced in a way that is preserved through family stories or photographs, and it should be stressed that for the second generation trauma itself becomes heritage. The already mentioned Dominick La Capra, analyzing trauma in the context of the "Shoah" experience, also stated that the suffering is transmitted to



subsequent generations. He stated that:

“The experience of trauma can be vicarious or virtual, i.e. experienced from second-hand by a person who was not there or did not experience the traumatizing events as such. In a vicarious experience of trauma we perhaps subconsciously identify with the victim, become a vicarious victim and relive the event in an imagined way”. (LaCapra, 2009, p. 162)

Patrick Modiano's words “(...) my memory preceded my birth” seem significant. (Thiel-Jańczuk, 2015, p. 23) The French Nobel Prize winner, as a representative of the “after” generation, often refers in his works to the memory of the war, which he did not experience. Mikołaj Grynberg, in turn, stated that “(...) it is a poison that something that happened so long ago is still alive”, adding that “ (...) when these terrible stories started to reach me, I thought that every adult must at some point end up in a camp (...)”⁷. As Hirsch wrote:

“The ‘after’ generation grows up surrounded by other people's narratives, which gradually make ‘their own belated stories get swept away by those of the previous generation”. (Hirsch, 1997, p. 253)

Postmemory leaves permanent traces in the human psyche, often leading to the fact that the person immersed in the memories of his closest ones reinforces his trauma. One of the fundamental features of postmemory seems to be the belief that personal memory, which concerns one's fate, is secondary. The reconstruction of the events of parents or grandparents leads to a strong experience of their trauma in their stead. The question of the memory of the second generation is also posed by the French writer of Jewish origin, Henri Raczymow, who, referring to his own experience, turned his attention to the memory of the “after” generation, and he is creating an alternative concept to postmemory – “the memory of holes” (*Memoire trouée*). Raczymow recognizes that the memory of the second generation is falsified because is constantly reconstructed and is extremely susceptible to external stimuli⁸. The second generation is confronted with the task of reproducing events in their imagination, based on scattered stories, and often filling in the gaps. (Kuchta, 2012, p. 262) The Dutch psychologist Douwe Draaisma comes to a similar conclusion with his concept of ‘limp memory’. The researcher concluded that with age, gaps in memory appear, that are difficult to fill. Hence the second generation faces the challenge of

⁷ M. Grynberg, K. Kubisiowska, *W tym miejscu pękło*, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/w-tym-miejscu-peklo-24846>, [21.10.2019].

⁸ R. Syska, *(Re)konstruowanie pamięci o Rewolucji w nowym kinie rumuńskim*, <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=442854>, [21.10.2019], p.7.



reconstructing the memory from the “scraps” that remain in the memory of their loved ones. (Draaisma, 2010, p. 7) At the same time, they create their imaginations of events that they did not witness and place in them their closest relatives. Such a reconstruction of memory by the “after” generation, as Paul Connerton suggests, is an important element in restoring temporal continuity and, consequently, in developing one’s identity. (Connerton, p. 348) The memory of the second generation undoubtedly provides an interesting field of research, especially when placed in a multicultural context, in which conflicting narratives of the same event overlap. Thus, an extremely interesting area seems to be Bosnia and Herzegovina, where three different postmemorial narratives are clashing nowadays, in which nationalistic political populism often plays an important role. Although in Bosnia and Herzegovina, unlike in the case of the Holocaust, postmemory is still not a dominant element of the national narrative, in the face of the global phenomenon of nationalist sentiments the postmemorial narrative may turn into its most important aspect. Especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is a huge palette of topics that influence the mood of the collective, which politicians reach for, especially in the face of electoral campaigns. Aroused emotions at the level of the community become even more susceptible to manipulation when they are transferred to the personal level because then they affect “me”.

2. Postmemory in Bosnia

“I was lucky enough to grow up in a family where bitterness, hatred, the idea of revenge were completely unthinkable. As a result, my attitude to memory, to the unspeakable, the unimaginable, is more cheerful than that of many of my peers, those who define themselves as the “second generation”. I try to understand, not to fall into the desire for revenge”. (Goldkorn, 2018, p. 51)

The author of the above words, Wlodek Goldkorn, was writing about the second generation of Holocaust Survivors. However, his words are so universal that they also fit into the Bosniaks context which is the subject of our interest. The memory of the war of the second generation consists of personal memories of the closest ones, i.e. it is closely related to the already discussed category of postmemory - inherited memory. The experiences of war trauma are perceived as dark, full of pain and suffering. This is because they refer to a fragment of history that is deeply rooted in the community’s perception as painful events. Family narratives are part of personal biography, we are immersed in family stories from the very beginning and it is these



stories that provide us with knowledge about the world. Consequently, we interpret the world and order experiences through their prism and then assemble them into a coherent unity - our being intimately connected to the family stories that are part of our biography. They are our roots, of which we are an extension. As Marianne Hirsch has noted, these are memories “permanently connected by an ‘umbilical cord’ to live, they are that medium that links the memory of the first and the second generation. (Hirsch, 2010, p. 255) Biographical narratives show the continuity of us because they are based on the knowledge that the individual has about both himself and his ancestors. Important stories are not infrequently retold, allowing them to become embedded in the individual’s consciousness. Traumatic events related to the war, although often impossible to express in words, are deeply embedded in the perception of the community, being subject to generational transmission. They lead the second generation to glorify the memories of their parents rather than their own experiences - this was often the case with the second generation of Holocaust survivors. The perception of the world through memories, the experiences of the parents are authentic, but they are only a fragment of the memory of the next generation.

Positive memories

While in the case of the second generation of Holocaust survivors we are immediately confronted with the trauma of war, in the case of the memories of the Bosniaks we are confronted with the “positive face” of the time of conflict. During interviews with the respondents, the author noticed that when asked about the family and the war, about the experiences of relatives during the conflict, the focus was not on the crimes, harm, suffering that had befallen either family members or the entire community, but with memories of the parents’ youth. The respondents’ statements were almost nostalgic, concerned a very intimate sphere, and often omitted the war activities, which seemed to be somewhere nearby.

“My mother talks all the time about those discos in the underground. When everyone was partying, celebrating every day, dancing”⁹.

“In Sarajevo, it was a completely different life. My parents met during the war at a party that was held in the basement at their mutual friend’s house”¹⁰.

9 Nemira age 25, interviewed 10.12.2019, Sarajevo.
10 Lejla age 24, interviewed 10.12.2019, Sarajevo.



“My parents met during the war. My mother still remembers how my father used to come to her despite the shelling. She says that this is a love that will never end”¹¹.

Although, from the perspective that the interviews were conducted about the war, it was surprising that the respondents referred to extremely joyful events in their lives. However, when we think deeply, it is worth asking ourselves, what did we ask our parents about? What parts of their story were most important to us? - Those that concerned getting to know them. Our story begins with them, with how they met. Therefore, this is an extremely important moment in our autobiography. So it should come as no surprise that for the respondents, taking part in the project, it was this moment that was the most important¹².

Trauma

Although these private stories are extremely nostalgic, this does not mean that they do not contain pain and trauma. However, these are not the stories that the de facto author thought they would be. Stories in which there was a constant evocation of tragedy and experiencing pain did not appear. The transmission of intergenerational trauma certainly occurred, but it is worth noting that it was not through a direct relationship. As in the case of Holocaust survivors, war tragedies were not spoken of in the respondents' homes, but these unspoken words were equally capable of transmitting trauma to the next generation. The research on Holocaust survivors enabled us to see the “survivor syndrome”, which involves the transmission of trauma to the next generation – this is when the term transgenerational transmission of trauma (TTT) was coined. At that time the basic mechanisms of this phenomenon were described. (Kellermann, 2013, p. 33 – 39) The main feature was considered to be the lack of communication – “(...) in this silence, they pass on wounds but not memories”. (Prot, 2009, p. 23) The second generation absorbs the sadness, fear, tension accumulated by the parents, often discharged through hysteria or aggression.

Concerning the above and from the perspective of the conducted research, it can be concluded that the situation of the Bosnian second generation looks quite different. However, the author would like to point out that she is far from taking an unambiguous view on the category of inherited trauma, as mental suffering is an extremely complex phenomenon. Psychological damage, caused in this case by the cruelty of war, cannot be

¹¹ Nejra age 24, interviewed 09.12.2019, Sarajevo.

¹² It is extremely important to highlight that 59 respondents began their statements with private stories.



buried, cannot be denied. Although it can be concluded from the interviews that the transmission of trauma occurred in a “soft” way, this does not mean that there were no family tragedies as a result of trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder.

Returning to the issue of trauma, however, it was noted, in the context of the interviews, that the narratives of the respondents were filled with an irrational fear of a new war. Nearly 90% of the respondents plan their future outside Bosnia. There are always two reasons – firstly, the lack of perspectives and secondly, the fear of war. As many as 62 respondents mentioned that the conflict might happen again.

“Of course I want to leave here. My parents sent me on various language courses whenever they could, especially English and German. They kept repeating that when I grew up I would leave so that I wouldn’t accidentally experience the same things they did”¹³.

“I decided on German, I would like to go to Berlin or somewhere in Switzerland. The situation in Bosnia is terrible both in terms of work and, you know, you never know”¹⁴.

The fear of conflict has been generated by parents, who often encourage young people to leave Bosnia. Of course, an important aspect is also the usual lack of prospects, the growing unemployment in the country. However, it was repeatedly stated in 53 interviews that “my parents do not want me to go through what they went through”¹⁵. It is extremely important and worth emphasizing that parents do not generate in their children a fear of a particular ethnic group, but of the war itself.

When talking about war and war crimes, it is always important to refer to the perpetrators and their contemporary perception. Worth noting is the fact that the “evil Serb” rarely appears in stories. This applies to only 11 interviews, and it should be noted that these were not offensive statements. The term “Chetnik” appeared in the interviews, which of course connotes a negative term for the Serb community, but it always referred to the past and not to contemporary relations between communities.

“Playing ‘war’ was the game of my childhood, for the rest, my dad said that he too played with a rifle made of sticks when he was a boy. The girls

¹³ Bedra age 22, interviewed 14.12.2019, Koraj.

¹⁴ Nadim age 25, interviewed 13.12.2019, Tuzla.

¹⁵ It is worth mentioning that not every respondent had a precise plan of departure. Some of them stressed that they wanted to stay in Bosnia because it is their country, but it was their parents who often are mentioning better prospects in the West.



would play ‘classes’, playhouse, and we would kill the Chetniks”¹⁶.

Here again, an interesting relationship emerges. As the respondent points out, they used to “hunt” the Chetniks when they played war. However, in the case of the statements concerning the war and the father, the term “Chetnik” was not mentioned even once, only Serb or Croatian.

Symbols of war

More emotional references to war are evident when talking about “war symbols” – Srebrenica¹⁷, the Siege of Sarajevo¹⁸, or the destruction of the bridge in Mostar¹⁹. However, it is worth noting that information about these events is the result of historical education, political propaganda, the media, not the memories of the family.

“The crimes committed against us were horrible. Their appearance is in Srebrenica. This massacre clearly shows that They wanted to destroy Us. And now they try to deny. It is pathetic, take responsibility for your actions (...). I live here, we are in minority and this is in a place which is so important to us”²⁰.

¹⁶ Nadim age 25, interviewed 13.12.2019, Tuzla.

¹⁷ The Srebrenica massacre – the takeover of a safe enclave by the Serbian side led by Ratko Mladić and the mass execution of Bosnian civilians (mostly men and boys), and the complete displacement of the remaining population, which the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague in 2001 during the Radislav Krstić case described as genocide; Case Information Sheet – Radislav Krstić, https://www.icty.org/x/cases/krstic/cis/en/cis_krstic_en.pdf, [10.06.2021]. It is therefore not surprising that Srebrenica has become a foundation of the memory of the war in Bosnia and a symbol used by politicians in their propaganda narratives. The Srebrenica massacre has become the overarching point of Bosnian martyrdom.

¹⁸ In the Balkans, there are not only the places of mass murder but also individual symbolic cities such as Sarajevo and Mostar, that have become places of memory. Sarajevo has become a unique place in the narrative of war because the whole city can be considered as a kind of museum. Its siege, which lasted an exceptionally long time - from 5 April 1992 to 26 February 1996 - left an incredible mark on its architecture, but most important are the stories of the people who spent almost four years under siege, cut off from the world, food, water, and electricity. Nowadays, Sarajevo can be considered a unique place of memory, because it contains memories of several important events in the history of Bosnia and the world, of which the war of the 1990s is a fundamental one.

¹⁹ Mostar has for years been a symbol of peaceful coexistence and was often called “little Bosnia” because it exemplified the multinational character of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Conflict-free coexistence was symbolized by the Old Bridge, which played the role of a link between “East” and “West”. This image of the city ended with the war, which turned out to be surprisingly perverse for the city. In Mostar, the conflict began in April 1992 and initial fighting took place between the Serb-dominated Yugoslav National Army and the allied Bosniaks and Croats until the former withdrew. In the next stage, the former allies, Croats and Bosniaks, took opposite sides in a struggle for territory. In May 1993, the conflict between Bosnian and Croatian forces escalated into a brutal war. Mostar was the most important city for the Croats, who sought to create the quasi-state of Herzegovina within Bosnia and Herzegovina. The conflict resulted in the expulsion of non-Croatians from western Mostar, thus leading to the division of the city into an eastern part, dominated by Bosniaks, and a western part, controlled by Croats. This led to a 9-month siege of the eastern part, the greatest tragedy of which was the demolition of the 16th century Ottoman Old Bridge connecting the banks of the Neretva River.

²⁰ Adela age 25, interviewed 20.10.2019, Zenica.



It is worth noting that all respondents when they were asked about the crime, immediately mentioned the Srebrenica massacre. Moreover, it is important to note the collective approach to Srebrenica – ‘our tragedy’, ‘we were killed’, ‘they wanted to destroy us’. While in the case of the private narrative the individual character of memories was emphasized, at this point, a collective memory emerges in which the collective victim is encoded. Moreover, in the statements about Srebrenica, the word “Serb” appeared more often, as in 55 interviews, already acquiring an emotional meaning – as if it implied a crime in itself, even as if it was a synonym for a criminal, a traitor.

Another place recorded as a center of memory is Sarajevo, which is an extraordinary symbol of post-war Bosnia. The siege of the city has become a permanent part of the Bosnian identity narrative, which is also referred to by second-generation representatives. For, when talking about war crimes, this event, right after the Srebrenica massacre, is the second most frequently mentioned war crime. The siege of Sarajevo has become one of the national myths, showing the resilience and strength of the Bosniak people. Although it is undergoing revitalization work, new buildings are being constructed that gradually strip the Bosnian capital of its face of a destroyed city, despite these efforts it is constantly filled with cultural and national meanings and is a kind of space of memory.

“One of the greatest crimes, next to Srebrenica, was the siege of Sarajevo. I don’t know if you know the exact way (...). I am leaving aside the fact that the architecture was destroyed, but how many people died every day here, in these streets where we are now walking. How the Serbs, cutting people off from the world, destroyed their lives. It is impossible to forget”²¹.

The most important bridge in the world, that is, the memory concerning Mostar, which is, however, different from the one related to Sarajevo, because in this narrative two oppressors are revealed – Serbs and Croats.

“What happened here is comparable to Sarajevo. Here too, one of our most important symbols – the bridge – was destroyed. I don’t want to point out who is to blame for all this. But I think the answer is fairly clear. If the Serbs had not started the war, none of this would have happened. – The bridge was demolished by the Croats, are they not equally guilty in your opinion? – Of course, they are! There was a huge betrayal in this case! We fought side by side in the beginning and then they came against us! You do not forget that”²².

It should be stressed that these memories of symbolic places are created

21 Kenan age 21, interviewed 12. 07. 2017, Sarajevo.

22 Dino age 23, interviewed 10. 01.2020, Mostar.

by the politics of memory, and are not family memories. It is clear that the families who have been directly affected by the war - through displacement, torture, or the death of their loved ones - pass on their traumatic experiences in the form of memoirs. However, they write their stories in such a way as to least burden their children psychologically²³.

Summary

Postmemory in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a current phenomenon, but not comparable to postmemory in the context of children of Holocaust survivors. In Bosnia, we clash with nostalgia for parents' youth. As has already been pointed out, the memory of ancestors is part of our history. That is why stories about their lives during the war are so important. Of course, trauma has certainly been passed on in some way. But it manifests itself in the fear of another conflict and the desire to escape the country, not in hatred for the nations that built Bosnia. The mood of nationalism that persists in Bosnia has been developed more by historical narrative and the politics of memory than by the memories of parents. And antagonism between nations is evident, but it was not developed by one particular group, it is the aftermath of long-standing ethnic relations and the propaganda of individual ethnic groups that influence public sentiment.

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