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Bosnia and Herzegovina



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“Culture of Remembrance: Twilight or New Awakening”



International University of Sarajevo
12—13 April, 2014 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

CULTURE OF REMEMBRANCE

Book of proceedings

I INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

*“Bosnia and Herzegovina – Culture of remembrance:
Twilight or new Awakening“*

Editors

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***“Bosnia and Herzegovina – Culture of remembrance:
Twilight or new Awakening“***

**I MEĐUNARODNI SIMPOZIJ
KULTURA SJEĆANJA**

***„Bosna i Hercegovina – Kultura sjećanja:
Sumrak ili Novo buđenje“***

**И МЕЂУНАРОДНИ СИМПОЗИЈ
КУЛТУРА СЈЕЋАЊА**

***„Босна и Херцеговина – Култура сјећања:
Сумрак или Ново буђење“***

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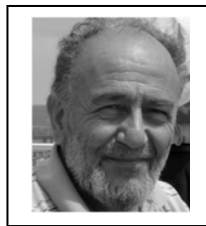
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RED JACKET WITH A HOOD

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Abstract:

The purpose of this article is to analyze the novel „Red Jacket with a Hood", from the point of view of Culture of Remembrance. The author of the novel was a child of four years in July 1995. He witnessed his father being taken away from the family from this accursed factory complex in Potočari. For years he had lived among the people who were getting apart, dying, starving, but also gathering, singing, playing, going to a wedding ceremony, participate in other small celebrations by which he was defying his harsh reality. These contrasts were decreasing tension of his memory, but still could not completely eliminate it. When he grew up to a youngster, he started to remember, and think over his father's final words. While looking at him as he progresses, holding red jacket with a hood under his armpit, father put his forefinger up to his lips signaling to his boy: "Keep silent, stay strong and carry on!". Young man reinterpreted these final gestures as "Shut up and go on living!". Soon he realized a link between living, and writing. Just as in 1001 nights stories, hadn't story tellers taught us that the story can save lives? Characters of 1001 nights tirelessly recite their stories in order to save their lives. At first hesitated to start writing about what had happened, but eventually decided to write so that he can avoid death, and fulfill his father's last will. About this imperative to write, in order to live, the whole novel was knitted.

Keywords: Memory; Trauma; Socialization; War

When an enemy force attacks one country, its dignity, its statehood, its independence and its people, that country will do all it can to defend itself. And when that country succeeds to preserve all its values, one of the most important things it can do after, is to remember, is not to forget, and also to keep the memories alive. Because these memories will teach the oncoming generation important lessons; lessons about importance of their country and people who gave their lives to protect it, and lessons that would prevent anything similar to happen in the future again. The known fact is that at the period between April 1992 and December 1995, there was a war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In a 4-year occupation around 100 000 people were killed and more than 2 000 000 had to leave their homes. The war in Bosnia is known to be the first most recorded war by the time. Numerous international news corporations, agencies and independent reporters, including also domestic news televisions and papers, covered all the events almost at the moment they were happening. But that serves good only to a cold database of facts. That's why evidences in form of narration are something most valuable that a nation as well as every individual can have by itself. The memories and recollections, give us the human note to the trauma, and give us knowledge on how the trauma affects the social threads in the community. One of the many disasters that

happened during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the Srebrenica genocide, in which more than 8 000 people were killed. And after all of this, people who stayed alive want two things: justice to be satisfied and happenings not to be forgotten. And one of the witnesses wrote a book, and coauthors this paper.

One jacket and a memory: Social interaction

This paper is based on a novel „Red Jacket with a Hood“, written by, at time when war started, a 6-years-old boy, who in July 1995 witnessed as his father was taken away, carrying his red jacket with the hood in his hand. As boy and his mother tried to stay together with him, he has just put a forefinger to his lips and wove his arm aside, which meant: „Shut up and go!“ (Jusufović, 2008). They never saw him again since then. And after many years, the boy saw his father in dreams who asked him to write a book, not too big book, just a simple book that will serve as a reminder of what happened to them. Boy gave promise that he will. At that time he realized that his fathers' last words actually meant that he should continue to live, no matter what, and that he should not turn round for the past or step back in front of anybody but go forward.

Basically, this book represents an autobiography of a writer, based on his autobiographical memory, which describes period in which war took place. Modern theories of psychology claim that autobiographical memory is a social construction, meaning that its origin is in experience but it is elaborated and maintained through social interaction with others (Nelson, 1993, 2000, Cordon et al., 2003, Fivush et al., 2003). In this paper we will try to explain how an autobiographical memory was created at this child, how he was able to convey his memories to the book after that much time, and how his memories were influenced over the time, that is, how his memory might be disturbed.

Autobiographical memories are created under influence of many factors: person's age at the moments when the event(s) took place, some characteristics of an event itself, but also the way in which that person reminisces the event, that is, when, in which occasions, and in front of which people he had described it most, as well as if there were any other reminders about that event present (Cordon et al. 2003).

Creation of memory: Trauma and recollection

It is proved that memories are formed from the early ages (Cordon et al., 2003). Memory itself consists of multiple interaction systems, which make different contribution to our ability to store and recall information. This entire story is difficult in terms that its path leads us through the war destructions. This story didn't choose its characters, it simply happened. Even if the main character of this particular story is small boy who is not spared from any single situation; simply he had to be there and to live these events in a way that is known only to him. He was forced to watch fearsome scenes and listen to even darker stories of other people. We can conclude that most of his memories are actually a trauma: dozens of painful experiences, both emotional and physical, which most of the times were leaving him without any way to cope with them. It is discussed that trauma experienced in this age might affect memory in many different ways (Cordon et al. 2003). It can be engraved in child's mind or it can be suppressed by it; it is only up to how mind "decides" to cope with it. Writer had also lived some nice events: gatherings of the family, singing, playing instruments, weddings, which was attempt to try to keep the normal flow of life and to defy the brutal everyday life. These moments were like the ray of light in everyday darkness. Because of that, these eventseven can be remembered easier; they can be seen even more precious than they would be in normal situations and they actually represent structures which form specific episodes of this story within the whole.

When it comes to the writer, all of the events related to war were surprising and scary. In the year when he supposed to play carefree around with other children, to explore the world he has been in, to start to school and enjoy it, he was waking up with the sound of grenades, sleeping at the floor in some kind of shelter, watching how dozens of people were hurt and transported to the hospital, he was witness of situations when there was lack of food, basic needs for living, when people had to leave their homes with the knowledge that they maybe never come back there, and at the end when he was taken away from his father. If this child lived normal life he supposed to, maybe he would not remember many events or details. But since he had lived a childhood like this one, it is more possible that all of the stressful, painful, and extraordinary event memories will be impressed to his mind even more intense. So most important thing for establishment of long-lasting memory is function of retaining memories that are meaningful to the self; as the writer lived these events in a way particular to him only (Fivush, et al., 2003). Any horrific experience is unforgettably engraved on the mind, but mind can also defend itself by banishing traumatic memories from awareness. In this way a person will not be able to remember them until many years later. However, memories are there and that is the key how such small child at that time is now able to remember all the things he had lived. Constructing memory has also to do with explaining to the self why certain things happened the way they did; via his mind, the boy has been sending messages to the aggressor to stop shooting as he was trying to understand why they are doing it, why his mother looked so frightened and worried, and why did they have to leave their home.

Small details - big memories: Subconscious

Young children have extraordinary ability to store information and retrieve them later on. Even if memory of one event is suppressed at the moment of happening, it is highly possible that he will remember it later, when he grows up and sees, feels, smells, experience, or live something that will remind him to what happened long time ago. But that memory can change over time, some details, like time of the event can simply be forgotten or unable to be recalled. Most important details like what and where happened, are often remembered. Traumatic experiences generally appear to be remembered better over longer delays than is typically the case for other experiences (Bernstein, 2002). In the same manner, writer often states that he cannot remember the date, while he clearly remembers events, and even how he felt during that time. How one will recall event is related with many factors: his language skills, socialization, and his cognitive development. Also, the numbers of times he has told his story is important as well: each time the story is told some new details can emerge from the sub consciousness. In this process, conversation with adults is also very important where child's memory is able to emerge; this is referred to as social interaction theory (Fivush et al., 2003). Talking with adults about happenings in the past serves as a framework for reconstruction of child's own specific memories which leads to the preservation of memory over the time. Mother-child post event conversations especially play extremely important role which leads to remembering, as they are able to freely talk about their experiences and feelings (Fivush, 1997, Fivush et al., 2003). It is known as maternal reminiscing and we can say that in writer's case it was out of crucial importance, especially because he lost his father and was unable to communicate with him. At this very point we can conclude how much remembering of war events is valuable: it serves as indelible proof.

Writer himself stated that he had tried to tell his story many times but had lived such things that he was afraid to tell them to anybody. At first he hesitated to start writing, but then his fathers' command „Shut up and go!“ has been replaced by „Write!“, meaning „Live!“. Then he realized that only in that way he could continue to live, to avoid death, and save his identity. As a result of such thinking this book has appeared to remind us on what happened and to be writer's link with the life, which is difference between “to die” and “to live”.

Author gave us a portion of his memories in the “Red jacket with the hood”. An argument to that is the fact that the story was told in numerous flashbacks to times of war.

We might find several reasons to it. First of them being that the mind of a young boy chose to selectively store only defining moments he experienced, moments that were not a part of a day-to-day routine (Fivush et al., 2003). For instance, we cannot find mentioning the habits of daily meals, but we can most definitely find a memory of scarcity in meals. A simple association to a notion of memory gives us understanding that mind is not wired in a way to “think” of creating memory, but rather is programmed to retrieve, by association, events in different durations. The book itself is written in associative manner, where a recollection of a certain memory of the author provokes even older memory, or a memory that came afterwards (Nelson, 1990, 1993).

An associative connection in memories, as we speak of “The red jacket with a hood”, has only one purpose – to find an explanation of why certain tragic events are happening, stretching also to lengths as to understand an abstract, spiritual and, we may say, metaphysical notions, such as destiny, and its role in one person’s life.

What does a live memory mean to a survivor?

It is quite unordinary to have a person store his/her memories from the deepest of his/her childhood. As we noted previously, in order to have a memory, or that some event becomes a memory, it is necessary that the event is of significant magnitude and effect on the person witnessing it. Therefore, the psychological reason to have such deep memories of the author of this novel is clearly understood, knowing that the novel describes a life of a child who was forced to witness and live through the worst of what a mankind can give – the war. Jasmin Jusufović was only a child of four, when he was forced to leave his home with his family, since the Serbian aggressors came to claim his village. As he writes in his book, the boy is from that point on thrown into a four years long chain of incredibly tragic events, which his child mind could not comprehend. In the ages when the boy was supposed to get acquainted with the world, and how the world works, his mind was forced to witness a war and to crunch on thoughts of why would they, meaning the boy’s family and himself, be targeted, why they would be hated, what was so special about them, etc... In the occasion of such events, a mind turns into a recorder. The sole purpose of the mind becomes to clear the space for storing every detail sensory system grasps. Yet, even at the moment when the event is recorded we do not have a memory, but rather some sort of data. Once this data is revisited in some other time, revived, narrated, then it becomes a memory.

Person recollects memory selectively. If we look back at the testimony in the novel, we may see that there is almost identical balance between the good memories, and the bad memories. The reason for that is not that the mind skipped recording something, but rather it allows access only to some of the stored data. The reason might be that the boy from “Red Jacket with the Hood” just could not accept all those atrocities he was witnessing and therefore subconsciously tries harder to recall the good memories, to outweigh all the bad he has witnessed.

The novel is therefore only a portion of what this boy has witnessed. It gives us a significant but still a portion of all recorded mind data of the war and Srebrenica massacre. Not even the boy will access all of them.

As the war ended and until the time the boy saw his father in a dream, who told him to write a book, there was a phase of denial. As it is said in his words, when he was speaking to his father in a dream, “what had happened to us” (that requires a book as a permanent record), it is a good

example of a denial in affect. It took several years to finally tackle memories, and write them down in a novel.

The significance of memories reflects in the fact that they provide a unique source for personal development. Namely, when this boy's father was taken away, and as he signaled to his boy to "keep silent" and continue, he actually signaled that the primer goal of his boy's life should be to always stand tall, to always raise after he falls. This being one of numerous examples shows us that the good memories can be the source of life optimism. On the other hand, bad memories can be the source of moral improvement. As the boy has been seeing all the tragedies in the war, he witnesses to feel the wrongness in what he was seeing. Hence he accepted his memories of a bad events as a guidelines of how not to behave, how to be the good-different. Knowing that those memories are the vast source of many life-directing lessons and signals, one can conclude that for that reason it is very important to keep them alive. Therefore, the task of writing a book was almost a natural thing to do.

Memories, or the process of revisiting, recollecting, never stops, or should never stop, if we choose to keep our memories alive. But, just by talking, narrating them, one cannot assure their long lasting. One cannot also find and attachment to them if they remain in this abstract, "virtual" form. Therefore, every memory tries to find a physical embodiment, as a sort of a trigger, a physical token of the memory. The little boy from the novel, besides loosing numerous male members of his family, also lost every physical evidence of the existence and trace of his family and himself in times of war and before. His house was burnt down, and with it all photos were also burnt. The magnitude of his survival never let him keep anything he possessed in the times of war. Even the remains of his murdered family took a long chain of years to be found. After a long period of time seeking closure, and seeking the memory token, the boy found a little blue toy shovel, buried under the rubble of his destroyed home. This is thus far the only physical embodiment of his memory.



Picture 1 - Plastic blue toy shovel - the only surviving embodiment of the memory

Conclusion

Being a boy who has to face the worst of people's suffers in ages when everything in the surrounding world is supposed to be nice, easy and beautiful, results in a great deal of disappointments. Thus the boy was forced to quickly learn of a set of true life values, home, family, religion, morality, et cetera. Strong evocation of those memories is reflected in the fact that they are the source of the important life's lessons. In that line of understanding, the notable balance in "good" and "bad" memories in author's testimony is his mind's battle to keep alive "bad" memories as a source of life's lessons, and "good" memories as a proof that, with all those disappointments a boy had to face, life still brings some beauties and joys with it. Even the memory of last gestures of the boy's father was flavored with the optimistic tone, to go on with life, and not succumb to despair. Namely, the events that the boy suffered were the empirical foundation to set of life values to be learned.

As a final thought we may say that the more proper answer to the role of memory in the boy's recuperation, post-traumatic coping, is to seek an answer to a question "What if the boy was not able to recall his memories?"

The character-defining attribute of the survived tragedy gives an important role to the memory of is, since, the boy, if he had not been able to recall memories, would not have a juxtaposition to which he can compare the events he is encountering. The life lessons of optimism, moral, faith would not have its empirical foundation. Memory is, additionally, the only "place" where people dear to person, and who were abruptly separated, are alive and close.

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