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Serving the Past: The Family Stories of Jasminka Domaš as an Example of Postmemory Narratives[1]

Abstract

The paper analyses a section of the Jewish triptych edited by Jasminka Domaš and comprising *Obitelj–Mishpaha, Glasovi, sjećanja, život: Prilog istraživanju povijesti židovskih obitelji* and *Ako tebe zaboravim: Prilog istraživanju povijesti židovskih obitelji*. The focus is on the most recent volume, *Ako tebe zaboravim* (2018), which presents family accounts from members of the second and third generation of Holocaust survivors, as well as from those who survived the Holocaust as children in Croatia. The paper begins by outlining the defining characteristics of these narratives and the themes recurring throughout the collected stories. These elements allow Croatian narratives to be placed within a transnational model of postmemory storytelling. The article also highlights motifs that demonstrate both the originality of the accounts gathered by Domaš and their dependence on local historical and social contexts. In the final section, the paper provides a detailed analysis of two accounts that stand out from the rest of the volume.

Keywords: postmemory, Holocaust, Croatia, Jasminka Domaš, intergenerational transmission.

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Written, oral, and filmed testimonies of the Holocaust are likely the largest body of material relating to a specific historical event and produced by those who experienced it (Kushner, 2018, p. 215). However, contemporary researchers have jointly observed that in recent decades, Holocaust discourse has been taken over by people with no direct experience of the Shoah (see e.g. Głowiński, 2005; Kertész, 2004; Tippner, 2016; Tomczok & Leociak, 2021). One indication of this shift is the growing interest in stories told by descendants of survivors, who actively contribute to preserving the memory of the victims' fate. The accounts edited by Jasminka Domaš also belong to this category.

Domaš (b. 1948 in Banja Luka) is a Croatian researcher, theological studies graduate, journalist, activist, lecturer, writer, and an active member of the Bet Israel Jewish community in Croatia. She has edited over 250 documentary testimonies of Croatian Jews who survived the Holocaust for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. One significant result of her editorial work is a Jewish triptych published in Croatia between 1996 and 2018, comprising *Obitelj–Mishpaha* [Family-Mishpaha] (Domaš Nalbantić, 1996), *Glasovi, sjećanja, život: Prilog istraživanju povijesti židovskih obitelji* [Voices, Memories, Life: Appendix to Research on the History of Jewish Families] (Domaš, 2015), and *Ako tebe zaboravim: Prilog istraživanju povijesti židovskih obitelji* [If I Forget You: Appendix to Research on the History of Jewish Families] (Domaš, 2018). Julija Koš, who wrote the preface to the last of these books, notes that *Obitelj* focuses on describing the traditional Jewish way of life and is based on interviews Domaš conducted with members of the Jewish community before the breakup of Yugoslavia. The second book, *Glasovi…*, expresses nostalgia for the times of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and for bygone times when Jews were a visible part of the local community, significantly contributing to the country's development. The title of the last part of the triptych refers to a biblical psalm (Psalm 137, verse 5) about the Jewish connection to their ancestral homeland (Koš, 2018, pp. 10–11). A significant part of Domaš's interviewees come from ethnically mixed marriages, in which Jewish affiliation is one of several contributing elements. Although most narrators perceived themselves as Croats, one of the central themes of their stories is the question of the relationship between various aspects of their multiple identity.

Domaš's book exemplify a relatively new type of texts in post-Yugoslav territories,[2] ones that Krinka Vidaković Petrov distinguishes for their hybrid

[2] The researcher analyses intergenerational transmission through literary narratives, using examples from books by Magda Simin Bošan and Nevena Simin (Simin Bošan & Simin, 2009) and Branka Jovičić (2017). She highlights the importance of the gender perspective in both cases – both stories are narrated by women who convey their own

form. According to this researcher, this involves, among other things, a shift "from the initial first person *I* identified with first-generation survivors … to the transformation of this *I* into a third person". She also highlights their metatextual nature (Vidaković Petrov, 2020, p. 50). The hybridity of these accounts arises from combining autobiographical, documentary, and prose fragments. Crucial to their creation is the intergenerational transmission of memory about World War II events[3] and the temporal distance from the war, which implies the diminishing number of living witnesses.

One should bear in mind that the first volume of the triptych was published in Croatia in 1996, after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The communal Yugoslav vision of the past, which promoted the memories of "strong historical entities" who endorsed the political regime and the ideology of fraternity and unity (Jambrešić-Kirin, 2004, p. 133), had been questioned since the 1960s – a process that ultimately led to the gradual inclusion of voices in the public narrative that had been overlooked in the post-World War II official discourse on the past. The three books prepared by Domaš can be considered in this context. They serve both as "substitute" narratives (speaking not only on one's own behalf but also for and on behalf of those who have passed away or are now passing) and as counter-narratives to the unifying Yugoslav narrative. In this sense, the books edited by Domaš have performative potential and could reorient the dominant ways of conceptualising the national past. However, in my opinion, scholars of the region have so far not given Domaš's collections due attention.[4] These books do not occupy a proper place in either the memory discourse or Holocaust studies of the region. Croatian family stories can also serve as a valuable source of knowledge for scholars working on the Holocaust and Jewish identity outside the region. To highlight the significance of the volumes edited by Domaš for the study of the past, I will demonstrate that the postmemory stories of Jews from Croatia align with a broader transnational model of postmemory narratives. At the same time, they contain original elements shaped by local circumstances, including World War II, the Holocaust, and the post-war period in socialist Yugoslavia.

experiences alongside those of their mothers (Vidaković Petrov, 2020; see also Vidaković Petrov, 2018). Domaš's book includes narratives from both women and men. Establishing whether (and how) gender differences affect the form of transmission requires detailed research. Here, this question has been deliberately omitted.

[3] For the intergenerational transmission of trauma caused by staying at the Goli Otok camp, see K. Taczyńska (2017, 2018). The Goli Otok prison camp was established after 1948. Tito's opponents were imprisoned there.

[4] The only academic text I know of that discusses one of the stories from *Obitelj* is by Renata Jambrešić-Kirin (2012).

The present paper focuses on the last part of the triptych, *Ako tebe zaboravim* – its chronological culmination. Despite formal similarities between the collections (*Obitelj*, *Glasovi*…, and *Ako tebe zaboravim*), I decided to analyse only the last volume. This decision was dictated by pragmatic considerations. *Obitelj* contains 24 family stories, while *Glasovi*… includes as many as 32 family stories – twice as many as *Ako tebe zaboravim*. The extensive material in the first two volumes of the triptych requires a thorough and more detailed study, which exceeds the space limitations of a journal publication.

Ako tebe zaboravim edited by Domaš contains 16 stories about the past of Jewish families. These are (auto)biographical accounts. Their narrators belong to the first or second generation[5] of Holocaust survivors. A few of the stories are told by those who survived the Holocaust as children. Most of the narrators were born in Croatia after World War II and still lived there when the volume's editor collected their accounts.[6] The stories collected in the volume align with the model of postmemory narratives. They are different from memory because of their generational distance, and from history because of the narrators' deep personal connections (Hirsch, 2010, p. 254; Hoffman, 2004). In these narratives, it is the experience of living with survivors[7] that comes to the fore, rather than direct descriptions of the Holocaust, which reach the indirect witnesses (descendants of the survivors) filtered through cultural codes. The temporal distance separating the narrators from the events and figures they describe, combined with the inability to verify their knowledge with living relatives, results in an incomplete account[8] (the narrators' use of the Croatian word *krhotine* [remnants or debris] is symptomatic in this con-

[5] The second generation concept expresses the experience (feelings and family history) of the children of Holocaust survivors. First coined in the United States, it was later also developed in Europe through Helen Epstein's 1979 book *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors*. Then, the concept gained prominence thanks to Marianne Hirsch's works on postmemory.

[6] Some of the featured authors were born before the outbreak of the war, e.g. Eduard Klain in 1935, Rami Željko Šoreš in 1933, and Miriam Steiner Aviezer in 1935. In turn, Andres Kiss Taussig was born in Chile rather than Croatia. Three of the 16 narrators lived in Israel. Rami Željko Šoreš left as a child in 1949, Mirjam Steiner Aviezer in 1971, and the Bing sisters in 1982. For a more detailed account of the post-war relationship between Yugoslavia and Palestine/Israel, see Goldstein (2022, pp. 425–463).

[7] Ernst van Alphen argues against Hirsch's notion of postmemory. He questions the very possibility of transmitting memory – and, by extension, trauma – emphasising that narratives told by children of survivors are characterised by a disrupted child-parent relationship (van Alphen, 2019, pp. 103–123).

[8] Not all stories provide information about the place and date of birth of the narrator or their parents; some present the history of only one side of the family (either the mother's

text) and uncertain tone (their narratives frequently include phrases such as: "to the best of my knowledge", "I don't remember exactly", or "we were only able to find out that…").

By categorising Domaš's book as part of postmemory narratives, this paper highlights an original example of transcending the dominant pattern of writing about the past, selecting from the 16 accounts those with the most distinctive personal imprint. These include the book's most harrowing story (Mario Braun, "Skupljajući krhotine" [Picking Up the Remains]; Braun, 2018, pp. 23–58) and an account with notable literary qualities (Vlado Obelić, "Nisu nestali" [They Have Not Disappeared]; Obelić, 2018, pp. 235–275).

Historical Background

Yugoslavia surrendered shortly after being attacked by the German forces and their allies on 6 April 1941. Consequently, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was divided into two spheres of influence: German and Italian.[9] In Zagreb, Colonel Slavko Kvaternik announced the creation of the Independent State of Croatia (ISC, Croatian: *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*), on behalf of the Ustasha leader (*poglavnik*). The territory of this newly established state covered almost the entire territory of present-day Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Serbian Srem. According to the Rome treaties (Croatian: *Rimski ugovori*) of 18 May 1941, the ISC had to accept the cession of a major part of the Croatian coast to Italy.[10] At the end of April 1941, the ISC introduced racial laws, modelled on the Nuremberg Laws.[11] However, antisemitic propaganda had emerged in Croatia as early as the 1930s, and became especially prominent in the second half of the decade. It prepared the right conditions for the subsequent, much more radical phases of the "final solution". Mass arrests of Jews, above all in Zagreb, began in June 1941. By the spring of 1942, practically half of the Jewish inhabitants of the capital were already in concentration

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or the father's). The chronological timeline of events may contain gaps, and narrators often point out the impossibility of fully relying on their own memory.

[9] For more information, see Jareb (2007, pp. 61–74). The northernmost region of Croatia (Međimurje) was incorporated into Hungary in 1941.

[10] In several stories presented in the volume, the Italian occupiers are clearly contrasted with the German ones. It should be emphasised that during the Italian occupation of Split and Dalmatia, the Italians displayed a much more humane attitude towards Jews than the Germans and their satellites.

[11] For more information on the subject, see Goldstein and Goldstein (2001). The "final solution to the Jewish question" in the ISC took place between 1 May and 1 June 1942 (Israeli, 2013, p. 55).

camps. In August 1942 and May 1943, the Ustasha police carried out two major operations which resulted in the capture of most of the surviving Jews (Goldstein, 2011, p. 143). Jasenovac, a concentration camp complex that operated from 1941 to 1945 on ISC territory, is very important for the history of the (post-)Yugoslav Holocaust. According to Slavko and Ivo Goldstein, Croatian historians, more than half of the Jews from the ISC territory, including over a third of those from Zagreb, lost their lives in Jasenovac (Goldstein & Goldstein, 2001, pp. 302, 342).

The Sequential Order of Stories

Genologically, the stories edited by Domaš represent personal documents[12] centred on family history related to Jewish ancestors (there is very little information about the other, non-Jewish side of the family).[13] Despite their intrinsic diversity, it is possible to identify a common model to which they generally conform. Each story presents both the specifics of a singular experience and broader characteristics of the Jewish fate during World War II. The shared formula arises from an autobiographical approach and an attempt to derive individual experience from the fate of one's ancestors. Consequently, the collected accounts exhibit certain recurring, dominant themes.

Most of the stories begin by recounting the most temporally distant events in the family's history, often set in the late 19th or early 20th century, when the storytellers' ancestors arrived in the Triune Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia, which formed part of the Habsburg Monarchy until 1918. The central moment of each account typically involves a detailed description of the relatives' experiences during World War II. An epilogue often follows, containing either information about the author or generalised reflections on memory, the responsibilities borne by the descendants of survivors, and hopes for the future. The relatively unified structure stems from shared family

[12] This category extends to include "the vast area of autobiographical writing in all its genre varieties" (as cited in Leociak, 2005, p. 15). I intentionally refrain from defining the accounts collected in the volume as testimonies. In recent decades, this term has implied a description of events that potentially amounted to genocide (Marszałek, 2014, p. 473). Although World War II represents a significant moment in family histories, the Holocaust is not the central theme in all of them.

[13] Many accounts concern Ashkenazim from different parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, who came to the Croatian territory (until 1918 called the Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia) at the turn of the 20th century as clerks, engineers or unskilled imperial workers. It is worth emphasising that some of the interviewees' ancestors originated from Austria, present-day Hungary, Ukraine, Poland, or Serbia.

experiences, with a central focus on events forming a trajectory.[14] The loss of control over one's life, tied to the outbreak of the war, represents a turning point in family lives, reorienting their fate and, in most cases, shaping the identities of future generations.

The scattered details of wartime realities in these personal accounts collectively paint quite a comprehensive picture of life in the 1940s (first in Croatia, then in the ISC). They reference repressive measures introduced by racial laws (forced interruption of studies, the ban on participating in public events), obligatory labour such as clearing streets of mud or toilet maintenance, unsanctioned acts of resentment from local communities, seizures of Jewish property, arrests, deportations, and ultimately death in the camps. The family narratives also describe assistance provided by Croatians to Jews, stories of hiding during the war, and instances of obtaining false documents. Some accounts include elements typical of the Jewish experience in Yugoslavia, such as escapes from the ISC to areas under Italian control or experience within the Partisan movement. Some also contain information about post-war returns to former places of residence[15] and later life in socialist Yugoslavia.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of accounts edited by Domaš focus on the Holocaust as their central theme. Transmitted by family members or pieced together from fragments of memories, nonverbal signals, or preserved photographs, the narrative of World War II violence represents a collective, formative experience for subsequent generations.

> Sooner or later, each of us will ask ourselves: 'Who am I?' At that moment, not only does personal history come to life, but also the history of extended family members, because this question cannot be answered without considering the entire history of the Jewish people. The roots of this trunk run deep, and what keeps its branches

[14] The notion of trajectory reflects a state of being overwhelmed by external circumstances that are independent of individuals' will and beyond their control. In these biographical situations, the subjects remain under the dominant influence of external forces: independent of their intentions and limiting the possibilities to act freely. As a result, their previous life situation becomes destabilised, and their orientation system collapses. Such experiences often lead to communication barriers in transmission and understanding, which affect current and future social relations (Rokuszewska-Pawełek, 2002, pp. 48, 69–70, 84 and ff.; see also Schütze, 1997, pp. 11–56).

[15] Many returns were dramatic, as it often transpired that the home abandoned during the war already had a new owner. Government decisions regarding the nationalisation of private property were equally difficult for families. See Anić (2007, pp. 25–62); Brandl (2022).

> moving … are the people who form this unique mosaic of the great Jewish saga, of which each individual is an inalienable part. (Radinger, 2018, p. 145)[16]

Knowledge of one's family history is essential to a sense of continuity, which, in turn, is crucial for both personal and collective identities. By nature, the wartime experience – especially the Holocaust that profoundly marked the Jewish people – is a communal experience. Thus, the accounts compiled by Domaš frequently interweave narratives centred on the "I" or "we" of the family with a broader story constructed around a collective subject (Jews). The legacy of the past – embracing both family histories and the memory of group experiences – acts as a foundation upon which individual identity rests. This leads to specific implications for many narrators, who feel an obligation to preserve the memory of their ancestors and to bear secondary witness. Consequently, the very act of transmitting these stories is inherently future-oriented.

Postmemory

As indicated in the introduction, the accounts in the volume represent postmemory narratives that encompass the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and experience. Citing Eva Hoffman's reflections, Marianne Hirsch writes that "[t]he formative events of the twentieth century have crucially informed our biographies, threatening sometimes to overshadow and overwhelm our own lives. But we did not see them, suffer through them, experience their impact directly" (Hoffman, 2004, p. 25, as cited in Hirsch, 2008, p. 106). One of the protagonists in Domaš's book highlights his connection to subsequent generations of survivors in the opening sentences of his account: "I belong to the generation born in the 1950s, whose adolescent and formative years were closely tied to the personal fate of our parents from before and during World War II. We grew up with a greater or lesser burden of the acquired past" (Braun, 2018, p. 23).[17]

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[16] *"Svatko od nas prije ili poslije sebi postavi pitanje: 'Što je moj identitet?' I u tom trenutku kao da oživi cijela povijest ne samo osobna nego i šire obitelji, pa čak na to pitanje nije moguće odgovoriti bez da se ima u vidu cijelokupna povijest židovskog naroda. To stablo ima svoje duboke korijene i ono što njime kola po granama* […] *su osobe koje čine izvanredan mozaik velike židovske sage čiji je čovjek nerazdvojan dio".*

[17] *"Pripadam generaciji rođenoj pedesetih godina prošloga stoljeća koja je rasla i formirala se, ovisno o osobnim sudbinama svojih roditelja prije ili tijekom Drugog svjetskog rata, s manje ili više 'tereta' stečene prošlosti".*

The effects of wartime experiences have an enduring and profoundly deep impact on those who lived through them.[18] In this context, Eduard Klain writes of his father: "In January 1946, my father, as the poets would say, died of despair" (Klain, 2018, p. 231).[19] As shown in the volume, the experience of war can lead to a persistent feeling of survivor's guilt or an obsessive questioning of whether family members' deaths could have been prevented. This impact extends not only to the individuals directly involved, but, years later, also influences the behaviours of subsequent generations. For instance, when speaking about her grandfather, who was from Lviv and whose siblings perished in the camps, Jela Godlar states: "We never asked Grandpa about it. Back then, right after the war, it seemed to us that we would have disturbed an unhealed wound. And he was also silent about it" (Godlar, 2018, p. 216).[20]

Due to the traumatic nature of the Holocaust experience, intergenerational transmission is often marked by interrupted communication and challenges with subjective expression. The fundamental impossibility of fully conveying this experience has often resulted in either a lack of intergenerational communication or communication that is fragmented and incomplete. Nevertheless, these testimonies did reach subsequent generations. "Nonverbal and noncognitive acts of transfer occur most clearly within a familiar space, often in the form of symptoms" (Hirsch, 2008, p. 112). In this context, Mirjam Bing-Drempetić's statement is telling. She concludes her account by noting that her parents did not speak much about their wartime experiences, but "we felt ["we" meaning the three sisters – S.G.] their pain and that's why we didn't ask" (Bing-Drempetić, 2018, p. 194).[21]

The collected accounts show that silence regarding wartime experiences was common in families.[22] Children lacked knowledge about family histories, but the silence of parents and grandparents was often so poignant that they avoided asking questions to prevent causing additional suffering.[23] On the oth-

[18] In Poland, the impact of camp experience on the psyche was studied by Antoni Kępiński's team starting in the 1950s (Masłowski & Ryn, 2017).

[19] *"U siječnju 1946. otac je, kako bi pjesnički rekli, umro od tuge"*.

[20] *"Nismo Dedu nikada pitale o njima. Činilo se da bismo tada, odmah poslije rata ozlijedile živu, bolnu ranu. A i on je šutio"*.

[21] *"Osjetile smo da trpe veliku bol, pa nismo puno ispitivale"*.

[22] One sign of unspoken experience can be the number tattooed on the arm. Mario Braun stresses that his father never talked about his Holocaust experience. However, the tattooed number on his forearm clearly distinguished him from other people (Braun, 2018, p. 26).

[23] Descendants of survivors usually acquire fragmentary knowledge about their parents' experiences during World War II and the Holocaust through other family members

er hand, existing relationships were incomplete or inconsistent, filled with evasion, understatement, and omission. Such disturbed communication is typical of what is known as the trajectory experience, accompanied by the "emergence of systematic communication barriers in the sphere of transmission and understanding, which affect both the current interaction and enduring social relations" (Rokuszewska-Pawełek, 2002, p. 84). The trajectory experience becomes the basis for understanding certain behaviours and is often used to explain or justify family members' actions. For example, one narrator attributes her father's abandonment of the family to his camp experience (Pichler, 2018, p. 110).

Evasion is also a typical strategy in postmemory narratives, consisting of shifting attention away from topics that are inconvenient for the speaker or changing the subject at critical moments. This method of acquiring knowledge is described by Mario Braun, whose father spent over three years in Nazi camps (Auschwitz, Birkenau, Jaworzno, and Buchenwald). His father only discussed these experiences with friends – former fellow prisoners. The shared language of this communication was German, which his son did not understand well enough to follow. Here, the narrative of camp experience faced a double barrier: both deliberate avoidance of the subject (to shield the child – the narrator notes that during these visits, his father's friends would mostly tell him anecdotes; Braun, 2018, p. 26) and the language barrier. Nevertheless, the son could read nonverbal cues indicating his father's inability to fully express the experience: "There were moments when [the conversation] ended in depressive silence or raising a glass of Istrian grappa – a medicine with which they occasionally cured the bitterness of the moment" (Braun, 2018, p. 26).[24] Reading the hidden message required a different mode of reception and involved tracing an event that had never been fully articulated. However, the gaps in the story and the shifts in subject or tone were unmistakably recognised as echoes of past trauma.

Memory Prostheses

In the context of a fragmented message that needs completion, Domaš's book introduces the notion of remnants or debris (*krhotine*) through which one may attempt to reconstruct a more or less coherent narrative of the past. "I create my family tree from the debris" (Alujević, 2018, p. 59),[25] one of the

(e.g. Pichler, 2018, p. 110).

[24] *"Bilo je i trenutaka koji bi pokatkad završavali tužnim tišinama ili dizanjem čašice istarske grappe, tog povremeno korišćenog lijeka za gorčinu trenutka".*

[25] *"Obiteljsko stablo gradim na krhotinama".*

women says. However, due to the incomplete nature of this story, it must rely on "memory prostheses". These may take the form of photographs or the imagination, which draws on cultural clichés. Both of these elements – photographs and culturally transmitted images of the past – activate a simultaneous mechanism of idealisation and a sense of loss. Other elements of these stories also have the character of memory prostheses: those reproduced in the book in visual form as well as those mentioned in the authors' narratives. This applies to documents (both those preserved in family archives[26] and those retrieved from various institutions[27]) as well as material artefacts[28] that evoke the past.

The influence of culturally transmitted images is evident in Jela Godlar's account. She situates the unknown fate of her grandfather's siblings within the visual narrative of the nameless, exhausted crowd transported by the Nazis to concentration camps, where they are forced into gruelling marches and their lives end in the image of bodies cast into pits (Godlar, 2018, pp. 215–216).

In this context, it is worth noting that state-controlled narratives of World War II placed the Holocaust outside the official framework.[29] The gap between ancestors' personal experiences and the ingrained patterns of thought and imagery in public discourse is explored by Mario Braun (b. 1952): "I did not hear 'heroic' or 'wartime' stories at home; I learned about them at school or through mostly propagandistic war films"[30] (Braun, 2018, pp. 23–24). Elements of cultural memory became a natural component of postmemory narratives (including both culturally assimilated images [Godlar] and content omitted in official discourse [Braun]). As a result, intergenerational Jewish memory, though incomplete and limited in scope, filled the gaps and silences

[26] The last postcard sent before transport to Auschwitz (Braun, 2018, p. 39) or a postcard from Jasenovac (Sasson, 2018, p. 83).

[27] Eva Pichler lists the documents that helped her write the story of her mother's family. Among them are records preserved at Yad Vashem and excerpts from the birth register and the civil registry office (Pichler, 2018, pp. 111, 120).

[28] Reproduced in the book are labels from alcoholic beverages produced by one of the narrator's ancestors (Morpurgo, 2018, pp. 99, 100), as well as the gold buttons that the narrator's grandfather, while being led in a column toward Belgrade, managed to pass to his son through a friendly passer-by (Klain, 2018, p. 231).

[29] In note 1 to her paper "Vrijeme traume, vrijeme svjedočenja. Testimonijalna literatura i književni kanon tijekom dvadesetog stoljeća", Natka Badurina sheds lights on the dynamic transformations of camp memories from World War II (Badurina, 2010, pp. 190–191).

[30] *"'Herojske' ili ratne priče kod kuće nisam slušao; o njima sam učio u školi ili stjecao određene spoznaje gledajući većinom propagandno 'obojane' igrane filmove ratne tematike"*.

of official discourse, adjusting the position of public memory (Tippner, 2016, p. 81).

Photographs serve as a foundation for these unlived stories, accompanying all the accounts in the volume. To illustrate their role in intergenerational transmission, we can focus on Mario Braun's narrative. Some photographs included in his account depict the world before the catastrophe. These are conventional family portraits: two show the narrator's father, Boris Braun, as a child in a studio pose (dated 1921); another, from 1938, taken during Purim, shows costumed participants of the fun, while a 1940 photo captures family members at a wine harvest. Notably, the text is also accompanied by images directly invoking the Holocaust, such as a photographed postcard Boris sent before being transported to Auschwitz or a photograph of the Birkenau barracks, taken during the author's visit to the former camp in 1987.

For the purpose of this discussion, the pre-Holocaust photographs are the most compelling. They "open the window to the past and materialise the viewer's relation to it, they also give a glimpse of its enormity and its power. They can tell us as much about our own needs and desires (as readers and spectators) as they can about the past world they presumably depict" (Hirsch, 2008, p. 117). The images preserved in these photographs help fill gaps in family histories and provoke questions of identity. The photos connect narrators to their ancestors, while also trapping family members in the past. This tension is evident in the words of Andres Kiss Taussig, who states that his "life has long belonged to the past; a world drowned in the storm unleashed by World War II. … Occasionally, a faded photograph of someone from my extended family – the only thing that survived – will emerge. Nothing else" (Kiss-Taussig, 2018, p. 198).[31]

Pre-catastrophe photographs hold clear affective power. They "*touch* the viewer, who *feels* rather than simply sees the event" (Bennett, 2005, p. 26, as cited in Hirsch, 2008, p. 117). They encapsulate the viewer's anxiety (unlike, for instance, the panoramic photograph of the barracks reproduced in the book). Aleksandra Ubertowska aptly diagnoses this paradox, noting that the foundation of a new ethics of seeing in relation to the Holocaust lies in anti-mimicry, an absence of direct reference, and "phantom aesthetics" – qualities that proponents of classical, documentary-based testimonies have viewed negatively (Ubertowska, 2013, p. 284).

[31] *"… život odavno već pripada prošlosti, to je svijet koji je potonuo u buri Drugog svjetskog rata … Od cijele moje brojne obitelji tek tu i tamo pojavi se u papirima neka već pomalo blijeda fotografija. I to je sve".*

The spontaneous or studied poses of family members in pre-war photographs have a powerful emotional impact. Conventional family photos evoke horror not so much through the images themselves as through the surrounding narrative, which is painfully familiar to both the viewer and the narrator. This sense of dread arises from the dissonance created by awareness of the impending catastrophe of which the smiling Mrs. Braun, immortalised in a 1940 photograph, is blissfully oblivious.

Mario Braun's Dual Story

Typical of postmemory narratives are stories that emerge at the intersection of the experiencing subject's history and the individual living in their shadow. One formal means of achieving this dual perspective is the inclusion of an ancestor's story within the main text, juxtaposing two timeframes: wartime and post-war. Events from the ancestor's past (the direct experiences) clearly affect the narrator's life, chronologically closer to the present moment of reading. Consequently, the narrative constantly oscillates between life and death, becoming a document of both memories – those of the survivor and their descendant.[32]

In the volume edited by Domaš, we encounter this narrative layering twice. Mario Braun's story, which opens the book, contains the autobiographical account of his father, titled "Borisova sjećanja" [Boris's Memories],[33] embedded within his own memoir. Braun thus becomes both the recipient of the survivor's account and the author of a story that intertwines both perspectives. This structure creates a hybrid narrative, juxtaposing the postmemory text (the son's story) and the survivor's account (the father's), which complement each other.

Mario Braun's story is among the most harrowing in the volume, precisely because of his father's memoir, which provides a detailed description of his time in the camps. Boris's entire account is shaped by a pervasive sense of danger, with the catastrophe foreshadowed by his words: "The outbreak of the war changed and destroyed everything" (Braun, 2018, p. 32). The story

[32] Perhaps the most widely discussed example of this type of narrative is the graphic novel *Maus* by Art Spiegelman (2001).

[33] In the volume, the same measure is employed by Darija Alujević (b. 1972), who wove her grandfather's three-page account of his stay at Stara Gradiška camp into her account (Alujević, 2018, pp. 66–68). Other stories feature paratexts (excerpts from newspapers concerning the family, such as congratulations on the birth of a grandchild, condolences, or an encyclopaedic reference concerning an ancestor).

reaches a climax with the family's arrest in the autumn of 1942.[34] After spending eight months in a Zagreb prison, 20-year-old Boris and his relatives were transported to Auschwitz. He was eventually taken to Birkenau, while his parents – likely immediately upon arrival – were sent to the gas chambers.

The subsequent sections of Boris's memoir focus on life in the camp. For instance, Boris describes the crematorium, to which he had access as part of the group of camp electricians. The factual narrative is interwoven with the narrator's existential questions and reflections offered from an *ex-post* perspective. Boris examines his behaviour in the camp from a vantage point defined by the burden of survival. Returning, years later, to the fundamental camp experience centred on the struggle to survive generates a question about the man he was in the camp: "Were my despair, pain, and horror so great that they prevented me from understanding what had happened to my parents? I truly don't know. I don't know how I coped with that" (Braun, 2018, p. 43).[35] These reflections culminate in his sombre assertion that, under certain circumstances, people behave worse than animals (Braun, 2018, p. 57). Ultimately, Braun concludes that the extreme camp experience[36] renders conventional moral judgments no longer functional in its context.

Vlado Obelić's Literary Narrative

Noting the structural similarities between the accounts compiled in *Ako tebe zaboravim*, we should focus on a text that diverges from the dominant narrative model: the account of Vlado Obelić, the most original story in the collection.[37] It is the longest account (42 pages), and the reader senses that the author's personality permeates the narrative, lending it unique character. Bearing the significant title "Nisu nestali" [They Have Not Disappeared], the story has a form resembling a text with literary aspirations. Right from

[34] That same day, the father's sister and her husband were sent to Stara Gradiška, where they were murdered (Braun, 2018, pp. 35–36).

[35] *"Da li su zaprepaštenje, bol, užas bili toliki da je to što se dogodilo roditeljima bilo potpuno nemoguće shvatiti, na znam? Ne znam kako sam to sve skupa prošao"*.

[36] Braun mentions cases of cannibalism in the Buchenwald camp.

[37] The originality of this story stems not only from its specific form but also from the facts related to the ethnic identity of the narrator's ancestors. Obelić's family was not Jewish, but his mother was. The narrator's mother, who was born in Osijek, moved to a smaller town – Donji Miholjac – out of love, married a Croat, and lived in a Croatian peasant family. Some additional information (i.e. that the narrator's father was employed by a local Jew whose wife was related to Obelić's mother) may suggest that such relationships were rare in Croatia.

the start, Obelić's approach is unconventional: rather than introducing family history, as is typical of other narratives in the volume, the story begins abruptly, without a prologue or factual background. It opens with an image of two marching men – one of whom, we soon learn, is the narrator's father, probably returning from military training with a friend in the spring of 1941. The opening resembles a light-hearted, anecdotal tale of return. The narrator then transitions to depict the joyous life of a multigenerational family, integrating comical elements[38] that highlight the idyllic, pre-war countryside life. Notably, this life is disrupted not by the outbreak of the war but by the later repressions against the Jewish inhabitants of Miholjac.

Obelić's account is further shaped by its shifts from factual discourse to literary storytelling. The author achieves this through the use of various stylistic devices, especially tropes such as metaphors, which allow him to convey superimposed meanings that extend beyond factual knowledge. The literary, though conventional, quality is evident in descriptions such as the atmosphere in the house after receiving news from Prague about "a journey" the narrator's father's sister "had to take". Obelić writes: "something strange slipped into the house that day; everything seemed to be going on as usual, but you could feel the despair" (Obelić, 2018, p. 258).[39] The depth of emotion here is conveyed through metaphor, enabling the narrator to express what is difficult to articulate literally, and what reflects both existential and historical dimensions (Chmielewska, 2005, p. 27).

Another element distinguishing Obelić's narrative is the unique position of the narrator. The story is told by a third-person narrator who observes himself (as a child) from a perspective above the depicted world. The two-year-old (corresponding to the narrator) lacks any awareness of or knowledge about the events unfolding around him (Obelić, 2018, p. 258). This knowledge is only acquired *ex-post*. This third-person perspective allows the narrator not only to describe events and cite dialogues[40] but also to indirectly comment

[38] One such amusing passage recalls a plot devised by the author's grandfather, who could not get used to his daughter-in-law getting up late. He asked the cowherd, who herded the animals out to pasture early in the morning, to signal his presence by sounding a trumpet under the daughter-in-law's window. Such elements indirectly refer to the social context of the time. Here, they also indicate differences between rural and urban dwellers (the daughter-in-law followed her husband to the countryside from Osijek and found it hard to give up the urban pleasure of spending her mornings in bed).

[39] *"Od tog dana nešto se čudno uvuklo u kuću, sve se odvijalo kao i obično, ali se osjećala tjeskoba"*.

[40] Unlike the other accounts in the volume, Obelić frequently includes dialogue, giving his narrative a decidedly more dynamic tone. This distinctive storytelling style creates an impression of immediacy for the reader.

on his ancestors' decisions, enabling a more nuanced representation of events than objective factual discourse would allow. Furthermore, it helps create distance between the speaking subject and the events described.

The final sections of the text reveal the author's self-awareness regarding the unconventional nature of his account. This self-reflective quality is evident in the following sentence: "I couldn't just write a *Memoir*; I found it too delicate, [I thought] that it did not sufficiently convey all those feelings that are associated with it" (Obelić, 2018, p. 275).[41] Although he primarily refers here to the choice of title, he also acknowledges the limitations of classic factual storytelling in expressing his intended content.

The author's tendency to aestheticise the narrative allows it to be categorised as figurative (White, 2009, pp. 199–218). Obelić's text approximates a broadly understood autobiographical form, where "referentiality is mixed with fictionality, and factual account is inseparably intertwined with the creation of fictional reality" (Lubas-Bartoszyńska, 1993, as cited in Leociak, 2008, p. 34). This mode of storytelling, mediated by metaphors and anecdotes, lends an original form to an experience that demands articulation but resists straightforward expression.

Conclusion

Transmitting stories about ancestral experience is seen as a necessity by Domaš's interlocutors. The sense of obligation to preserve memory is characteristic for postmemory generations. "Aware of our origins, some of us today are active members of the Jewish community… We cultivate the memory of our ancestors… We also protect our father's artistic legacy from oblivion" (Alujević, 2018, p. 70),[42] says Darija Alujević, speaking on behalf of herself and her sisters. This imperative to remember stems from a future-oriented (at the same time also future) obligation. Descendants speak on behalf of the witnesses – against their silence or their incomplete, omission-filled stories, which they have "inherited".

In engaging with the narratives left by their ancestors, the speaking/writing/transmitting subjects recognise them as part of their own histories, centred on the Holocaust. Thus, the intergenerational transmission of trauma takes on a formative dimension. The past becomes a foundational element

[41] *"Nisam mogao napisati samo Sjećanja, učinio mi se da je to preslabo, da ne održava dovoljno one osjećaje koji su uz to vezani".*

[42] *"Svjesni svoga porijekla, neki od nas aktivni su danas kao članovi židovske zajednice… Čuvamo uspomenu na svoje pretke… Zaboravu otimamo i umjetnički opus našeg oca".*

of individual identities, shaping their present and future. This relationship is clearly expressed by Andres Kiss Taussig: "My Jewish identity will forever remain marked by the attempt to exterminate the Jewish people" (Kiss Taussig, 2018, p. 204).[43] Descendants act as a medium through which the memory of a traumatic past is combined with hope for the future, a connection evidenced in practices like naming children after deceased ancestors or in actively preserving memory.

However, the stories compiled by Domaš transcend individual acts of witnessing the past. The publication's aim is to commemorate a vanished world, and, perhaps more significantly, to convey knowledge of the Jewish community's presence in Croatian society and its contribution to the country's cultural, scientific, and economic development. In this context, it is particularly significant that, as Domaš notes, the texts she edited are used in academic settings, particularly in oral history and "living history" courses.[44] This use of Jewish family accounts highlights their forward-looking potential: through these stories, the past becomes part of collective consciousness (Assorodobraj, 1963, p. 9), encouraging communities to open up to otherness and to critically reflect on exclusionary visions of society that remain prevalent in the region. This aspect also testifies to their future orientation.

There is a paradox in the accounts compiled in the volume: they are suspended between life and death. They affirm the irreversibility of the past while simultaneously embodying, in the very act of transmission, the need to integrate the traumatic experience of minorities into a supra-individual community discourse.

Translation into English
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[43] Andres Kiss Taussig described himself as a secular Jew. He spent most of his life in Chile. Some protagonists of the book under discussion live in Croatia, others emigrated to Israel. Some were raised in the Jewish tradition and, for example, learned Hebrew, while others came from fully assimilated families in which only the father had Jewish roots. Given these diverse backgrounds among the authors of the stories in this volume, it could be said that their only unifying factors are the memory of the Holocaust and a shared, future-oriented obligation to bear witness.

[44] Jasminka Domaš talked about this when answering my question about the projected/assumed reader of these texts (interview from 24 September 2024).

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W służbie przeszłości. Rodzinne opowieści Jasminki Domaš jako przykład narracji postpamięciowych

Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu analizę jednej z części tryptyku żydowskiego zredagowanego przez Jasminkę Domaš, na który składają się następujące książki: *Family-Mishpaha*, *Glasovi, sjećanja, život. Prilog istraživanju povijesti židovskih obitelji i Ako tebe zaboravim. Prilog istraživanju povijesti židovskih obitelji*. Analizie został poddany ostatni z opublikowanych tomów, a mianowicie książka *Ako tebe zaboravim* (2018). Zawiera relacje rodzinne przedstawicieli drugiego lub trzeciego pokolenia ocalonych oraz tych, którzy przeżyli Holokaust jako dzieci w Chorwacji. Artykuł rozpoczyna się od przedstawienia charakterystycznych cech tych narracji oraz powracających motywów w zgromadzonych opowieściach. Elementy te pozwalają wpisać chorwackie narracje w transnarodowy model opowieści postpamięciowych. W artykule podkreślone są także motywy świadczące zarówno o oryginalności relacji zebranych przez Domaš, jak i ich zależności od lokalnych uwarunkowań historycznych i społecznych. W końcowej części tekstu dokonano szczegółowej analizy dwóch relacji, które wyróżniają się na tle pozostałych.

Słowa kluczowe: postpamięć, Holokaust, Chorwacja, Jasminka Domaš, przekaz międzypokoleniowy.

Note

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