

Trauma or Entertainment?: Inside and Outside *Symposion*

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Abstract

My research deals with the absence of the trauma of the bombing of Serbia that took place in the spring of 1999, and the creation of a collective memory of it among the community of the contributors of the journal *Symposion*. It explores how the interaction along the lines of the non-acknowledged trauma constitutes a mnemonic community. By looking at their e-mails and conducting interviews with some of the members of this community, I argue that the community is linked through emerging shared narrative patterns that have the function of normalizing the experience, creating shared cultural frameworks for remembering it.

1. Introduction

Remembering an event commonly thought to be traumatic, such as the bombing of someone's country, is not expected to happen in positive terms. After the NATO air strikes on Serbia, however, contrary to the expectations, people either said nothing about the three months of bombing or told stories about it as if it was a great time of entertainment, drug use, social gatherings and illegal clubbing.

The NATO air strikes on Serbia took place between March 24 and June 9, 1999. They broke out as a result of the interference of the international community to stop the Serb military and police repression of the Kosovo Albanians, after a peaceful resolution was not achieved. The

air strikes targeted mostly military and government objects and infrastructure supporting it. The main aim of the bombing was to overthrow Slobodan Milošević's regime, but the solution turned out to be unsuccessful. The Serbian propagandist media, manipulating facts, claimed victory over the NATO forces after the air raids.

The situation was precarious for the Hungarian minority in Serbia who felt that they had no interest to win but only to lose in the war. They feared for their safety as a result of the xenophobia of radical Serbian nationalists, and at the same time felt betrayed by Hungary's politics. What added to the peculiarity of the situation was that NATO airplanes were using Hungarian airspace as the country became a member of the organization 12 days before the air strikes. The Hungarian public discourse was divided between those supporting the bomb raids as the last resort of the international community to the growing tensions in Serbia and those opposing it in the name of defending the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, whom many saw as 300,000 citizens being treated as hostages by Serbia.

This is the situation in which Hungarian intellectuals from Serbia found themselves in the spring of 1999, the authors of the journal *Symposion* among others. *Symposion* is one of the most prestigious literary and social science journals in Serbia written in Hungarian. Its readership and editorial board are mostly young Hungarian intellectuals, who found themselves in a specific situation during the NATO bombing as writers, as liberal intellectuals and as Hungarians in Serbia. It has been a controversial journal since its founding in 1961, and as its editorial board in 1999 issued the journal with the financial support of the Soros Foundation they were almost automatically marked as liberals and anti-nationalists, a position far from an easy one to take during the NATO air strikes on Serbia. In its 1999/0024-25 issue

Symposion published the e-mails that the authors wrote to each other during the bombing with the aim of documenting their ambiguous position.

It seems obvious that the community of *Symposion* shares the experience of the witnessing the bombing and that trauma can be seen as the element that binds them together, and that creates a shared discourse (Weine 1999). However, the discourse of trauma is strikingly absent in these e-mails. Two questions arise then, what is it that binds this group of people together if they distance themselves from defining their experience as traumatic, and how does the absence of the recognition of trauma create a community of memory.

Even though they do not define their experiences as traumatic, which is a striking difference from other cases discussed in literature on war and trauma (see Caruth 1995; Robben and Suarez 2000; Weine 1999) the memories of the bombing for the group do not allow for much variation, their homogeneity being typical for the community and defining its boundaries. As we remember not as individuals but as members of a community that maintain “mnemonic traditions” through “mnemonic socialization” (Halbwachs 1992) remembering becomes a means of shared background and a common identity, and individuals belonging to a mnemonic community recognize the reactions to the trauma of others and orientate their reactions according to them (Ross 2003). The reactions of the mnemonic community are their narratives, written ones during the bombings, and oral ones today. In my research I explored the narrative strategies that create and sustain this mnemonic community.

The literature on narrative analysis of memories (see Bloch 1998; Cappelletto 2003; Skultans 1998) suggests that experiences that are traumatic are normalized, given meaning, order and coherence through narratives. I investigated how this particular community of young

Hungarian intellectuals in Serbia have collectively understood and reflected upon a particular social event during its taking place, and in 2008, nine years after it, how this experience is shaped by a common narrative about it, and how it eventually becomes collective. Therefore, in my research I explored how the non-acknowledged trauma is represented, and how the mnemonic community is created.

I argue that for the community I researched the way to express the traumatic experiences of the bombing is through constructing it into a normalized ones, thus distancing themselves from them, i.e. taking part in the mnemonic community, accepting the common discourse of entertainment and everyday 'rituals' and adjusting to each others' narratives in order to be able to make meaning of the war experience through a standardized narration of it.

I explore the contradiction between what is suggested in the literature on traumatic experience such as bomb raids, and what the case of the mnemonic community I studied. My research explains how historical/political events have an impact on particular individuals' meaning-making, and how alternative ways of remembering come about outside the culturally accepted national and historical frames, because "private memories, with high degree of significance for the everyday living (. . .) preempt the publicly articulated ones" (Irwin-Zarecka 1994:55). The results of my analysis lead to an understanding of how an event that that potentially generates trauma is interpreted both individually and collectively through a shared memory of experiences. They contribute to the explanation as to how narrative structures shape the collective memory of an event within a mnemonic community.

2. Inside and Outside *Symposion*: A case study

The debate of collective memory studies that deals with the shift from individual to collective memory can provide insights into how the group of people around *Symposion* re-appropriate each others' memories in order to come up with an understanding of a situation that can be acceptable in their own frames of reference. Collective memory studies are a problematic field though, especially in relation to societies where the relationship between past and present, official state ideology and personal narratives is ambiguous. This is certainly true for Serbia, where the public discourse about the memories of the bombing in 1999 seems either to be absent or reduced to narratives about entertainment, trivialities and everyday practices.

Not only do experiences naturally influence the narration about them, but so do narratives influence the experiences (Kirmayer 1996; Cappelletto 2003; Skultans 1998). And “[i]f ‘experience’, moreover, is always embedded in and occurs through narrative frames, then there is no primal, unmediated experience that can be recovered.” (Olick and Robbins 1998:110). What we do is actually give a narrative structure to our experiences, imposing a chronological order on the events and a causal relationship between them and “bestow[ing] a unity of experience upon the narrated life.” (Skultans 1998; see also Hutton 1993).

2.1. Methodology

The discourse analysis of 104 e-mails published in the journal is a narrative analysis in the sense that I look at texts that narrate, i.e. tell the story about the experience of a specific event. I explore the discursive strategies used in them at the level of the community of the correspondents in general. I define discourse as language use, i.e. as a societal phenomenon

(Schiffrin 1994). This is a functionalist perspective on discourse, which means that I focus on the purposes of the narratives I analyzed: how patterns are put into use in a certain context and how they work as interactional strategies. Narratives have the function of providing coherence and continuity to one's experiences, and have a central role in meaning- creation and communication. My analysis is based on how a certain topic emerges in these e-mails, and if it does not emerge, what topics come up in the 'gaps'. Throughout the discourse analysis I explore the narrators' experiences as made sense of by them, without a clear hypothesis but rather facing textual ambiguity and engaging in constant interpretation.

The conclusions drawn from the discourse analysis served as the basis for the interviews. The general aims of the semi-structured interviews were to provide a wider context of my research, and to check and compare the results of the interview analysis with the findings of the discourse analysis. Also, while the discourse analysis dealt with the ways the immediate experience of the bombing is narrated and the mnemonic community is created, through the interview analysis I was also capable of grasping the 'memory work' that framed that experience anew in a different perspective than at the time of it, and that contributed to the maintenance of the community and the narrative patterns.

2.2. Narrative patterns

The combination of literature written on the relationship of memory, community, history, trauma and narratives offers a basis for the understanding the dynamics of the readers, writers and editors of *Symposion* and their narratives about the bombing. However, none of these alone can explain the specificity of the mnemonic community in and around *Symposion*, namely the silence about the bombing and the narratives about trauma and instead of that, as if filling in the 'gaps', the discourse of entertainment, fantasy and humor, and how they

become parts of a shared narrative and a collective memory. In the following case study I deal with these narrative patterns.

2.2.1. “Let’s laugh about it“: Trauma or party?

The question then is whether the bombing was described as a traumatic experience or rather as a period of fun. The word ‘trauma’ never appears in the e-mails, but it came out in the interviews often, and even after nine years of the bombing, those who did not experience it were less hesitant to use it for the situation of those in Serbia than those whom it refers to. Those who were following the events from Hungary use words such as ‘fear’, ‘stress’, ‘suffering’, ‘defenselessness’, ‘traumatizing’, ‘imprisoning’, ‘constant fear of death’, ‘horror’, ‘terror’, ‘brutality’, ‘hopelessness’. In general, these words are much stronger than those used by those who experienced it, who, if referring to the event at all, used (and often still do) words that are humorous and express a distancing from the events, most typically the word ‘party’ referring to the bombing, ‘sex-bombing’ or ‘festival’. The word ‘fear’ is used only once by them, as a „blunt resigned fear“, describing a general atmosphere of the first days of the bombing. In the interviews I was told by almost everyone from Serbia that they were afraid of being called up rather than the bombing itself. The other reason for worries, was that “minorities would be used as a living shield in the crisis.” Especially those writing from Hungary express their worries that the Serbs would take revenge for the NATO ‘aggression’ on the local Hungarians “in a conflict that you have nothing to do with, but still...”

Entertainment though is a common topic of the e-mails from the insiders. Partying, drinking, smoking marijuana and illegal clubbing take up a substantial part of the activities of the authors of the e-mails and are mentioned often. Several of the interviewees from Serbia mention that those were great times, “and everyone from Serbia will tell you so.” As it can be

read in an e-mail “I won’t let the Americans ruin my Saturday night,” meaning that they will take the best out of the situation and try to enjoy what it can offer. The only interviewee from Hungary who visited Serbia during the bombing remembers almost exclusively partying and meeting friends, and the memories of those who spent all two and a half months of the bombing in Serbia are almost always connected to entertainment, which he sees a compensatory activity and a way to “kill time.” He also mentioned his impression that during the bombing there was a “party atmosphere of despair” in Serbia, while another interviewee sees it a more positive way: “War changes everything; positive processes are started too, that have an activating effect.”

One of the e-mails reads: “I don’t like the bombs but the bombs like us.”¹ Ironic statements of this kind, such as this are very common in the e-mails, they can be found almost in each and every of them written by people in Serbia. If mentioning the bombing, it is almost always in a humorous way. Many are aware that they are means of keeping the illusion of normalcy and keeping distance from the situation, as if they were not happening to them. At the first time of the bombing one author of an e-mail tells how they were watching the reactions of the people, and concludes that “this nation is strange,” as if he/she did not belong that that nation: “I was trying to keep distance.” However, some are also aware of the fact that “one is deceived by irony. Although he knows that behind the unidentifiable (masked) face there is a fucking big heart beating,” acknowledging the function of irony to be a way of concealing one’s emotions and fear. “The horror could be sensed in the form of irony, literature, not as complaints – they didn’t even write about the situation.”

2.2.2. “I am trying to continue my life without disruption”: Everyday practices

¹ Reference to Marilyn Manson’s lyrics: “I don’t like the drugs but the drugs like me” (also the title of the song).

“All miracles last for three days, we slowly get accustomed to it,” as someone writes, “the adrenalin doesn’t come from fear any longer; it became a routine,” or “from the basement to shelter, from the shelter to the basement, and life goes on.” The phrase “we get used to everything” becomes a commonplace of the entire correspondence. „As we don’t have a basement, I am trying to continue my life without disruption,” and indeed they keep describing in the e-mails the ways they spend their days rarely referring to the war going on around them. An author claims that after the first few days a routine was established. Another writes that his friends from Serbia did not write about the situation but about everyday activities that seem to “create an illusion of normality”. Towards the end of the 78 days the e-mails about the daily activities of those in Serbia seem “frightening, they held on but they obviously flipped out, even if they did not mention the situation.” The strangeness of the e-mails is noted by those abroad: “weird e-mails from there; they couldn’t watch themselves with an outsider’s eye.”

A considerable amount of the time of those in Serbia was consumed by watching the news on television and surfing for information on the internet. Especially at the beginning of the bombing, many e-mails report constantly following the events various TV channels and different news portals. However, towards the end, some report an “overdose of news,” and write that they do not care any more about what had been bombed and the analysis of the potential further targets and outcomes.

However, the perspective on the current events is an ambiguous issue. The political affiliation of these young intellectuals and the general ideology of *Symposion* predisposed them to be supporters of the NATO air strikes, as its aim was to bring down a dictatorial regime of the country they were living in. Theirs is a peculiar case if one takes into account the position of

the Hungarian minority within Serbia and the different perspective on certain historical and political issues they have from the Serbian society. In this respect, the circle of young intellectuals of *Symposion* can be seen as a group with an alternative ideology and alternative memories representing the perspective of the Hungarian minority of Serbia in general. Almost all of my interviewees report their enthusiasm for the bombing in the first days, and it is clearly visible in the e-mails too. However after the first “collateral damages” (as one interviewee used this impersonal and distanced phrase for civilian casualties), many of them clearly turned against the NATO forces, even if they did not take the side of the Serbian propaganda. For those from Serbia, whether they were in the country or abroad during the bombing, it was extremely difficult to take a side in that “schizophrenic situation.” An author claims that he “hated both the NATO and Milošević.” His opinion is shared by another who adds that even those who were not, became increasingly patriotic, including himself. The reason for this is said to be that „the NATO propaganda had no validity; its strategy was as absurd as the strategy of the Serbian police and military.“ Of those who were in Hungary, only two said they were on the side of the USA, seeing the bombing as the only possible solution, the others, even if not as explicitly as one who “asked for explanations of the bombing on their Hungarian acquaintances.”

2.2.3. “As if time stopped”: Community and time

Apart from meeting friends in pubs, the frequency of social interactions also heightened in the streets, “as if we are locked in a broken elevator for a very long time.“ Many interviewees believe that there was an enhanced need for communication, one of them retelling that when he went from Hungary to Serbia, “everyone wanted to talk, everyone was waiting for visitors.” Some e-mails report talking to strangers in the street, even singing with them, about current news, about whether there is electricity, water, but also about issues not related to the

situation. An interviewee claims that his friends from Serbia told him that if there were any animosity between Hungarians and Serbs, these ceased to exist, as „neighbors of different nationalities invited each other’s for drinks, knowing that it might be the last pálinka they are drinking, although after the war national conflicts were settled, which was to be expected.“ This is in total opposition of the expectations that national conflicts will be enhanced in Serbia.

The bombing introduced new ways of measuring time. Not only did people in cities organize their daily activities according to when and where it was the least dangerous to be out, even in smaller places which were not potential targets, hours became unimportant. The shared sense of reality involved a specific perception of time that is influenced not only by the objective events (the bombings) but also by the “perceptions, intentions and actions of individuals” (Aminzade 1992:460), because events depend not only on the number of days they lasted but also on the perception of its duration of those involved. Activities were structured in accordance with whether there was electricity and water, and the ‘normal’ time to do certain things became irrelevant. “The world turned upside down, and it became unimportant when something was said or done.“ The new calendar rather followed the patterns of the distinction between days that were long and with nothing much to do, and nights, when there were illegal pubs, friends gathered, watched the bombing and had a greater interaction with each other than during daytime. One interviewee says for instance that he does not really remember days, „nights were much more memorable.“

Together with a new way of measuring time, a “new value system” came into being, as the “things of life and death got considerable reinterpreted, the structure of their value system changes.” The reason why it is seen by many as a great period is that “the coordinates of time

changed.” Someone from Hungary retells his impressions from his visit to Serbia during the bombing as “they knew the dangers, and they wanted to live life in its totality.”

The new value system was much more focused on the present and past than on the future. As social actions are embodied in remembering and anticipation of the actors (Aminzade 1992), it is crucial not only to look at the collective remembrance of the community but also at its orientation towards the future. Making plans is an ambiguous issue in the e-mails. There are almost no long-term plans mentioned and not one of the authors wonders about life after the bombing: “What are we going to do and how when all this ends?” “How to behave after the war? Look in the eyes? What to say? What to wear?” There are all the more plans about getting together after the war, drinking and remembering together. One author writes about his friend calling him from Hungary. “It was as if he called from the neighborhood, and our conversation was like that as well. What’s up, when are we going to have a beer together.” Another author thinks that awful as it seems, the war is a good excuse for not having plans, motivations or ambitions for the future: “it’s terrible that everything will be normal again.” Almost all of the people who experienced the bombing claimed to be unable to think about the future. It was a period when they had all the time of the world and could enjoy activities that they had no time for before, such as biking, fishing, or just “hanging out” and watching the lights of the bombings from a railway overpass – “it was like a fireworks.”

2.2.4. “I am numb”: Speechlessness inside and outside

The e-mails from Hungary are loaded with worries, solidarity, questions of how they are, what they need, should they do anything for them: “I am worried for the whole company,” “I am trembling from worries because I don’t know anything about you,” and distancing themselves from those Hungarian intellectuals who supported the NATO bombings. They

condemn those Hungarian public figures who engage in commenting the events in Serbia, and think that “normal Hungarian people should talk to people from Serbia and write what they say without commentary.” A common feeling is guilt that that their country participated in the bombing of their friends’ country. A very typical sentence in which this can be read is “We are going, we are bombing. You.”

Generally, “ambivalence” and a feeling of loss of words haunt the e-mails, because as an author poses the questions, it is not easy to decide “what to write to be neither pathetic nor insensitive?” Those abroad, in spite of all the good will, felt that they could not do anything to really help, nor could they really understand the feelings and thoughts of their friends on the other side of the border. A journalist from Hungary feels that it was a major disappointment that he could not write a good report on what he experienced in Serbia, because it could not be described with words. “I often feel that these e-mails are efforts in vain, too,” writes someone from Hungary, because “you see the despair, but you can’t help.” Some of the many examples for the nonexistence of expressions or ways of communication with those in Serbia are sentences such as “you know it better, I can’t even imagine,” “I don’t know how I would behave in such a situation, I would be afraid for sure,” “I am naïve, I am numb, I am stupid,” “it would be stupid to say anything,” “to love, to be afraid, these are only your rights.”

The authors from Serbia also often oscillate between daily writing of circular e-mails and complete silence for days, and “some became mute for that period.” Some of them report themselves and their friends talking less and less. Generally, when it comes to talking about oneself, it seems to be more difficult than talking about others. In many e-mails, the authors write about their friends in a very objective tone, rather than reporting about themselves.

Together with the objective report of news it is a substitute for revealing one's feelings and thoughts.

2.2.5. “This is a fiction, too”: Literary templates and imagination

Given that most of the authors of the e-mails are writers, journalists, students of humanities, writing and reading are important activities in the daily lives of the authors of *Symposion*.

They often mention reading out of boredom, “because there is nothing else one can do.” The authors they read are telling: Marquez, Borges, Rejtő Jenő (P. Howard). Marquez's and Borges's magical realism is a good analogy of the genre of the e-mails and some other wrings of some of the authors of *Symposion*: the e-mails also seem to take place in an imagined community (Anderson 1991) where there is no clear-cut border between fiction and reality. Several e-mails start with objective facts and finish with fictitious situations, without marking the difference between the two. The humor of P. Howard is also easily reconcilable with this kind of neglect of the differentiation of fiction and facts. As the events and activities are rarely retold chronologically, time is often marked by when one started a book and how long he/she read.

Expressions referring to literature and literary genres are often used to describe the atmosphere of the bombing, which is natural taking account the profession of many of the members of the group. Those who experienced the bombing and those who have imagined it from the other side of the border alike refer to it as 'surreal', 'dream-like', 'unreal', 'utopistic'. An interviewee said that everything he read at that time “seemed to be about the bombing,” while others refer to specific literary works to compare their memories about it: Camus's *Plague* illustrating the isolation they were in, Boccaccio's *Decameron* conveying the same feeling, Dezső Kosztolányi's “The End of the World” to describe the atmosphere, or a

Hungarian adventure novel, *Tüskevár* by István Fekete, because it is “about adventure, nature, jokes, with a dictatorship going on in the background, but that’s not the most important thing.”

The participants of the community felt that “maybe it’s not important for a poet how thin the line is between reality and imagination.” In many e-mails there are references to partisan films, and the experience of the Second World War as represented in them demonstrates the oscillation between real experience and fiction, that is typical of the mails from Serbia. „The border between reality and imagination was blurred.“ Imagination plays a key role for those abroad as well, trying to map the virtual reality of their acquaintances through their e-mails, and creating an almost mythical picture of the region, based on their readings from authors from there such as Géza Csáth and Ottó Tolnai, and the dance theatre of József Nagy, whose performances are much like the period he experienced in Serbia: “about life, death and frenzy.”

2.3. Analysis

I have proposed a conceptualization of mnemonic community as a process, because it is a common strategy of its members to relate to their conditions, and because they kept several of these patterns to refer to the event now, nine years after. However, they are a mnemonic community in another aspect as well: already at the time of it they shared certain patterns related to their past, such as references to places they have visited together, a common ‘myth’ of only virtually existent villages and towns, people they all knew, references to literary works they have read or written, etc. The combination of these elements have contributed to

the construction of a shared discourse and a collective memory, that were put into everyday practices, and led to a link between the members of the community of those who corresponded regardless of whether they had a direct experience of the air strikes or not.

Hence, the group of *Symposion* is a mnemonic community in the sense that Halbwachs (1992) and Olick and Robbins (1998) used it, that the members of the group share the experience of a past event and have common cultural frames to refer to it; while on a discursive level, in the way Skultans (1998) and Gedi and Elam (1996) refer to it, a common “myth” (Gedi and Elam 1998) or a common “cultural grammar” (Skultans 1998). In both senses though the community is created and maintained through the process of interaction, and narrative patterns create a shared discourse of its members.

The normalcy of the event was created by common narrative strategies of avoiding the acknowledgement of the trauma, and filling in the silences with irony, humor, narratives about everyday activities, literary experiences, social events, political attitudes etc. All these narrative patterns are substitutes for the non-existent discourse about trauma, fear and danger, and give coherence and order to the experience (Schiffrin 1994) that does not fit into the existing cultural schemas (Hutton 1993). As these patterns are shared and are re-appropriated by the members of the mnemonic community, they become formative of the collective memory as a collective discourse. Hence, narratives about the event shape the perception and the recollection of the event itself and constitute a “landscape of memory” (Kirmayer 1996) to be lived in that is specific to the group, both in the sense of its social positioning and the shared strategies for the creation of a common cultural framework for remembering.

3. Conclusion

In my research I brought together the literature from the fields collective memory studies, focusing on the creation of mnemonic communities, on trauma and war experience and on narrative memories in order to explore the puzzling case of the group around *Symposion*.

First, I investigated what is there in the place of the missing cultural frame for remembering the bombing of Serbia in the spring of 1999, i.e. how is the non-acknowledged trauma represented in the e-mails I have analyzed and how it is referred to in the interviews I have conducted. Second, I explored how this community emerges into a mnemonic community through discursive practices.

My research into the creation of the group around *Symposion*, their written and oral narratives therefore demonstrates that the creation of the collective memory and the mnemonic community is a process that is embedded in interaction and exchange of mnemonic resources. I argued that the mnemonic community is created through the interaction among those in Serbia and in Hungary, the shared discursive practices and the everyday ‘rituals’ of the group that have the function of normalizing the trauma that is represented through various shared narrative patterns.

I believe that the empirical case of the group around *Symposion* contributes to the understanding of the process in which narratives influence the memory of an event. This is especially important in the case of events for which there are scarce cultural frames to remember them (Appadurai 1981), usually provided by the state and ‘official’ history. In this sense the memory of the bombing and its construction into a ‘normal’ and positive event can be seen as an alternative to ‘official’ history and public remembering. The case of *Symposion* also sheds light on the disputable issue of how individual memories become collective in the

sense that they are not merely aggregates of personal recollections, what Olick and Robbins call “collected memory” (1998). It explains how individuals resort to each others’ memories and appropriate them, out of which process a mental map of memory emerges (Bloch 1998) that in turn serves as a material for future experiences for the members of the community. Lastly, it explains the dynamics by which extreme situations are integrated into the cognitive schemas in order to give them meaning, i.e. the process of normalization of experiences that are potentially traumatic or disturbing for the self and the internal cognitive order of individuals, and how this process becomes characteristic of a group, not only on individual level.

Due to the length and limitations of my research, I have focused on the issues of normalizing traumatic experience through narrative strategies, and the creation and the sustaining of a collective memory and a mnemonic community. However, there are several other related questions that deserve scholarly attention that came to the surface of the research problem while analyzing the e-mails and conducting interviews with their authors. Some of the most relevant and interesting ones are: How is the collective memory of the bombing in the case of *Symposion* different from the ‘mainstream’ memory of the event in Serbia due to the relative social position of the group (Bourdieu 1985), i.e. the fact that they are the representatives of the young intelligentsia of an ethnic minority? A research of a scope much larger than this would also explain the role that *Symposion* played in the perception and self-perception of the Hungarian minority in Serbia. My approach was a case study, not a comparative one, but this case could also have been compared to other historical situations in which a mnemonic community emerges out of a traumatic experience, and by placing the experience of the bombing in Serbia in the framework of other similar events, it would be possible to contextualize and compare the construction of narratives, communities and shared memories,

and arrive to more general conclusions. I believe that all these empirical issues are important and interesting not only in themselves but also as key research sites that enable us to further develop the theoretical fields of collective memory studies, research on traumatic experiences and narrative analysis.

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