

**BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**

**Knowing One's Roots:  
What My Family Kept Quiet About**

**Bachelor Thesis**

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What My Family Kept Quiet About**

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## **Declaration of Originality**

I declare that this bachelor thesis is my own work and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All used literature and other sources are attributed and cited in references.

Bratislava, 22 February 2016

Veronika Flaškárová

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Knowing One's Roots: What My Family Kept Quiet About**

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### **Abstract**

This work focuses on tracing the factors forming a generation within the space of a small town of Galanta and understanding the processes of transmission of memories between the grandparents, parents, and children within my family.

Using oral history method, the data is obtained via structured interviews and synthesised according to the main themes, that is, historical setting of the subjects of the study and memory with its subthemes: trauma, narratives, and forgetting, which greatly shape the process of passing down or keeping in secret certain events happening during one's lifetime.

This short piece of writing offers a new insight into the sociological problem of definition of a generation as well as suggests a different approach to the assessment of the phenomenon itself.

## Poznať svoje korene: čo mi moja rodina zamlčala

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### Abstrakt

V tejto práci sa autorka zaoberá faktormi formujúce generáciu v kontexte malého mesta – Galanty – a zároveň sa pokúša pochopiť a vysvetliť procesy prenosu pamäte medzi starými rodičmi, rodičmi a deťmi v rámci svojej rodiny.

Použitá data boli zozbierané prostredníctvom metódy orálnej histórie, t. j. pomocou štruktúrovaných rozhovor, zlúčených na základe hlavných tém: 1. historické zaradenie subjektov štúdie a 2. pamäť a jej podtémy – trauma, naratívy a zabúdanie – ktoré vo veľkej miere formujú procesy odovzdávania alebo ponechávania si spomienok na určité životné udalosti.

Táto práca prináša nový pohľad na problematiku sociologickej definície generácie a zároveň odporúča rozdielny prístup k vyhodnocovaniu samotného fenoménu.

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Furthermore, I would like to thank my close friends and classmates. Despite the shared struggle of writing a bachelor thesis, applying for Master Studies, and other daily troubles, they were a great source of understanding and help in times of need.

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## Roots Running Deep

Family reunions. One loves or hates them. All sorts of generations of people claiming to be your relatives, few of which you have never seen before, gather in one place and start talking. The stories from the compulsory military service, household troubles, epic failures, shared jokes, friends and arch nemeses circle from one person to the other. Some are spoken with utmost care, some in a straightforward fashion. We laugh, smirk, frown, or shed a tear or two as long as we can relate; or pretend to understand the emotionally laden loudness of the narrator and at the same time feel detached.

In these very moments we are offered a great opportunity to get to know each member of our family, and lastly ourselves. Nevertheless, after listening to countless voiced contributions, it becomes so much harder to find our place. I remember always responding as being a 'Slovak' whenever somebody asked about my nationality. But how should I comprehend the fact that my family consists of both Slovaks and Hungarians – does it have any effect on who I am? And why does it actually matter? It is much simpler to tell the people my regional adherence. However, geographically speaking, Slovakia's south-western small town – Galanta – has been subdued to numerous regime and border changes within the bigger picture of the relations between two neighbouring countries: Czechoslovakia and Hungary (see Demmel, et al., 2013). Being born and raised in this confusing region in terms of its fluctuant features – be it the populations themselves, its use and misuse of public space for memory politics, its belonging to one state or another, well described in the newest publication of the town's history (Berényi, et al., 2008) – one would be sooner or later exposed to the complexity of identity layers of its inhabitants.

On the other side, both my parents and grandparents do not convey all of their experience. Certain stories are everything but bed-time tales, seemingly incomprehensible outside of their peers. The history passed down by the preceding generations lack certain information, which was in my case partially filled in during my studies at the university. Beneš's Decrees, Czechoslovak-Hungarian Population Exchange, Russian Liberation, expulsion of Germans, Communist Land Reform, and many other presumably sensitive topics have left actual scars on the, at first sight, peaceful cohabitation of a variety of people within Galanta's borders. It took a lot of courage to bring these events up and discuss them with both the actual witnesses as well as the re-narrators.

Still, a simple question remained: why did my grandparents or parents keep quiet about certain moments in their life? Why were some memories stuck only within a particular group of



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people and not retold to us, the younger ones? Or in other words: which of the memories constitute a bridging transmission – that is, one connecting different generations – whereas others stay at the level of bonding transmission, meaning only within a particular group (generation)?<sup>1</sup>

### **Augean Memory Stable Unleashed**

What might be seen as an important distinguishing feature in terms of the population is the ethno-centric vision of the authorities, but also the inhabitants of Galanta. The main ethnic groups one tends to focus on and compare are the Slovaks and Hungarians. Even in terms of official history, there are disputes about the 'common history' of these two separated entities. Roman Holec talks about seemingly 'parallel pasts'. Though living in an area, which has been part of a greater, ethnically mixed region, the commonality in terms of sharing the same experience is not held by both of the high-level representatives of the two groups – each of them claims to possess the valid explanation of a period, often clashing with the description offered by the other side (Demmel, et al., 2013, p. 11). Interesting researches have been conducted in order to characterise the nature of Slovak-Hungarian relationship on the level of the population itself, for example by (Bordás, Frič, Haidová, Hunčík, & Máthé, 1995), in which the distance between the Slovaks and Hungarians plays a great role, meaning the further away or less of contact of the two, the more antagonistic the Slovaks tend to become when discussing the Hungarians living in Slovakia.

Nevertheless, these seemingly incompatible groups might actually be not as different as they are portrayed. For a long time, ethnicity has been reflected in a primordial view, as being the defining and historically always present feature, by which a group of people connected by various agents (be it language, traditions, culture, or others) could have claimed a specific position in the modern state.<sup>2</sup> However, for the sake of this work, a different approach will

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of bridging and bonding comes from Varshney's work *Civil Society and Ethnocommunal Conflict*, in which he utilises the idea of Putnam's 'social capital' and operationalizes the term via a distinction between the bridging and bonding social capital – bridging meaning connecting across all communities (in his case study the Hindus and Muslims in India), bonding meaning within a community (the former is more important than the latter) (Varshney, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> On the development of nationalism see (Gellner, 1983) and (Smith, 1991).

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be used, that is, the constructivist one. According to Brubaker's *Ethnicity without Groups*, one of the main fallacies in studying ethnicity and conflicts lies in the fact that we automatically frame the subjects into groups rather than actually analysing how these 'proclaimed' ethnic groups came into being, or simply said who did frame these as 'ethnic'. In the end of our research we might actually not use the term at all – he suggests focusing on 'practical categories, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, common-sense knowledge, organisational routines and resources, discursive frames' and many others (Brubaker, 2002, p. 167). The notion of removing our attention from the overused label is essential especially in terms of the mixed regions, where the people's ethnic identities have been put under pressure from various sides and thus have become less obvious in the sense of popular understanding.

### **Prescribed Alzheimer**

After 1989, the Slovak Republic together with other Central European countries embraced a completely new institutional setting, giving way for the unspoken or tabooed themes, which have been forgotten by some of the people in a state-organised mass amnesia. Though certain grievances had been shut away by the previous regime, it was impossible for the officials to completely erase the memories and experience of a considerable portion of its citizens. Parallel to the official statements and discussion there have always been private, local channels of communication between people, which despite numerous attempts of various governments have not been silenced completely (Smelser, 2004, p. 51).

Using Assmann and Czaplicka's *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*, we operationalize two types of memory – 'communicative' and 'cultural' one. The first one is characterised as informal, not organised, everyday interaction, whereas the latter is detached from the reality and is constituted by 'fateful events of the past (...) maintained through cultural formation and institutional communication' (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995, pp. 126 - 129). Still, the structure of culture from which one's identity is being formed resembles a memory. So, if we are to understand the process of belonging to a group and the reproduction of 'its identity', it is also necessary to pay attention to the characteristics of the cultural memory, as the 'concept (...) comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose "cultivation" serves to stabilise and convey that society's self-image' (p. 132). This means that the content of the cultural memory has to be preserved by means such as museums, public speeches, or other tools, which 'reconstruct' these frozen-in-time events within the actual 'frame of reference' (p. 130).

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In a similar fashion, there have been two levels on which one could gain information: via the official narrative pursued by state institutions such as schools, local or regional offices, controlled media, or other forms. On the opposite side, there was family, friends, members of smaller communal groups, or even neighbours in one street, who through day-to-day interaction exchanged pieces and bits of their stories, sharing those with their close affiliates. However, what could be questioned is both the quality and quantity of information about the past events, which reaches the following generations of people and stays in the memory of the audience, forming their perception of their environment.

In his work *Seven Types of Forgetting*, Connerton provides us with a division of, as the title itself suggests, forgetting, which can be enforced by varying 'agents' – either the state, corporations, governments, or families – following a different purpose, that is, having 'different functions and values' (Connerton, 2008, p. 69). As the region of my attention has been subjected to a set of changes on several levels, the same can be applied to the nature of memorising certain periods in life of its inhabitants. The activity of removing one's memories has been used as a means of moving on, a way of forging a new identity. It could have been the mere feeling of shame in form of 'humiliated silence', or simply by silencing certain sources of information – quite popular during the communist era – etc. (pp. 60 – 69). Rather than concentrating on one particular type of forgetting, the participants of this study have been subjected to a mixture of these, some not necessarily happening at the same time, others being carried out simultaneously.

Another factor of great impact in terms of suppressing of one's memories and closing them inside of themselves is the feeling of shame and guilt. In his book *Why We Cooperate*, Tomasello offers an insight into human behaviour. There are two forces, which mould our behaviour: 'norms of cooperation (including moral norms) and norms of conformity (including constitutive norms)' (Tomasello, 2009, p. 88). The first type of social norm is ruled by 'mutually recognised expectations of behaviour'. Next, the force of the norm is embodied on two levels: either as possible punishment, or as a beneficial step in order to ensure reaching a common goal. On the other hand, during the evolution of mankind the pressure to conform to a certain standard has been growing. Thus, by the process of acquiring the 'we' in a social group the humans become to a certain extent homogenous within the group and at the same time grow distinct, heterogeneous from the 'others' – the ones outside the group. Both types of social norms are, as Tomasello puts it, 'cemented by guilt and shame' (p. 95). We are constantly balancing between the 'we-ness' and our desires and wants.

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Thus, even our memories are subdued to and moderated by guilt and shame. This might be one of several reasons why certain people are reluctant to convey their experience, and rather forcefully forget it. This does not necessarily mean deleting them literally, but rather keeping them to oneself.

### **So close, yet so far.../The generation gap**

Coming to the core subject of this study – my close family in Galanta, one can observe a very interesting difference: my grandparents have been born just before the Second World War, my parents were making their first steps during the normalization after the Soviet 're-over-take' in 1968, whereas me and my brother have been enjoying new-born democratic free-market Slovakia after its divorce with the Czech Republic. However, is this placement of the three 'generations' in time sufficient by itself? Utilising Mannheim's work *The Problem of Generation*, until a certain age we do aggregate specific ideas about the surrounding world, which means that our worldview at that time is considered to be 'natural', however, the difference between generations can be seen by the way how oncoming life-experience becomes another layer in the overall understanding of the world (Mannheim, 2007, pp. 26 - 27). Our memories are 'built up through myth and images, by the conventions and ideologies around us.' These as part of the culture we live in 'shape even our own first-hand experience and expression' (Finnegan, 2006, p. 180)

Also, the word 'generation' is a troublesome one throughout various scientific disciplines, however, to ease the understanding of it Mannheim offers three subcategories, that is, whether we talk about a generation, we need to consider 'location in lifecycle (or age), location in space, and historical setting' (Mannheim, 2007, p. 11). Nevertheless, David Kertzer (Kertzer, 1983) offers an insight into various theories of generations. Throughout his endeavour into the definition of the concept of a generation and its usage by diverse scholars and social scientists, he maps their problems and shortcomings. He advises distinguishing 'between the transmission of values from parent to child and the society-level processes of social reproduction' (p. 144). Or in different terms, to track the narrators and to determine the quality of the information transmitted from one person to another.

Still, inspired by Mannheim's theoretical framework, Marada introduces a useful notion, that when it comes to generations, we are talking about a 'relational phenomenon'. Being part of a generation is possible only when we are able to identify a different generation. What Marada is trying to come to is the idea that it is not necessary for us to have a first-hand experience of a past event in order to become a generation. Certain historical experience is being passed

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onto others – the ones, who did not overcome the actual thing by themselves (Marada, 2007, p. 82). This penetrating character of certain moments from the past brings us to one of the main concepts, which is in inherently of such nature – cultural trauma.

### **Cultural trauma in few steps – best served cold**

The term trauma has been derived from psycho-analysis. For example, Marada does this via Freud, when he says that a traumatising situation is such, which despite being forgotten for a moment becomes literally real by a hint or even a purposeful reminder and throws the subject back to re-experiencing of the event, unless it has been sorted out (p. 82). However, in case of a cultural trauma, there needs to be more than that.

As Smelser suggests, there are many occasion, which by themselves are or could be traumatising, such as 'natural disasters, massive population depletion, and genocide' (Smelser, 2004, p. 36). Nevertheless, for such an event to become a cultural trauma, the memory of it has to be 'publicly given credence by a relevant membership in a group and evoking an event or situation which is a) laden with negative affect, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural pre-suppositions' (p. 44). The people have to be literally convinced by their respective leaders or representatives that their experience is the experience of a greater number of people and constitutes injustice. Personal memory is reconstructed as a memory of, in the case of my family, an ethnic group or a whole class in a society, by which it gains an almost eternal presence throughout a longer timeline. In terms of cultural trauma, Alexander uses Weber's terminology of 'carrier groups', who are 'the collective agents of trauma process'. These agents 'have particular discursive talents for articulating their claims – for what might be called "mean-making" – in the public sphere' (Alexander, 2004, p. 11). The carrier groups voicing an event and marking it as a cultural trauma do not necessarily consist of elites, the representatives can be of different quality.

However, it is not solely the event by itself, but the emotion, which embodies its message, that becomes prevalent. The impact of emotions and their politicisation in various situations has been forming both the direct victims as well as the oncoming generations. In her book *Postsocialism: Politics and Emotion in Central and Eastern Europe*, Svašek explores the feelings of joy, hope, anger, trust/mistrust, fear, or hatred and shows how the people in the region of her interest 'have been politically motivated and manipulated by [the mentioned emotions] – not as isolated respondents (...), but as positioned, socially embedded, thinking and feeling individuals' (Svašek, 2006, p. 7). Emotions by themselves depend on the broader setting when

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used as a means of comparison, that is, they have to be conceptualised within 'the historical, cultural, political and linguistic contexts' out of which they came to be (p. 6). Therefore, when dealing with personal testimonies it is necessary to bear in mind the emotional aspect. Still, similarly to Brubaker's thesis on the over-usage of ethnicity, the feelings as such are not satisfactory, we have to look for deeper meanings and the agents forming them.

### **Orally Transmitted History**

In smaller areas such as my hometown, the oral tradition of passing down the history of our ancestry and of the local development plays a great role in forming one's primary worldviews. The past is a great means of comprehension of the changes occurring during our lifetime, a possible glue within a family or a settlement. 'Certainly, [oral history] can be a means for transforming both the content and the purpose of history' (Thompson, 2006, p. 26). It can also serve as a space for the individual stories to be told and set within the bigger picture of the official narrative (p. 28). However, what one might encounter are either similarities or differences when listening to stories, retold by either grandparents, parents, or the youngest generation. Being interested in these differences of communicated memories, the main method of acquiring the necessary data for identifying the generations within my family will be through structured interviews.

Portelli points out a paradox of structured dialogue – it is the interviewer who picks up the interviewees, therefore when the set of question is too rigid just for the sake of confirming a thesis, such a dialogue tends to omit previously unknown information, which could have changed the whole outcome of the interview (Portelli, 2006, p. 39). Another problem of relying on oral history is the impossibility of becoming completely detached and unbiased in opposition to the claims of traditional written-source-relying historians as 'oral history can never be told without taking sides, since the "sides" exist inside the telling' (p. 41). Still, even the official versions of the past cannot claim complete objectivity, as they are also explained in a story, subdued to either the government, publisher, or the very personality of the writer.

Another possible obstacle might be the influence of the interviewee on the interviewer. For example, in case of mentioning a traumatising situation in the person's past the conductor of the dialogue is being contested in terms of their empathy, emotions, or reactions. Nevertheless, with enough caution and sensitivity even such a problem can be more or less moderated (Klempner, 2006, p. 208). Still, for me as the person interviewing my family, the dialogues have to be carried out with twice the care.

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Nevertheless, the testimony as such is not enough. When carrying out any research, the memory put on paper needs to be applied within the framework of a thesis. In terms of validity, Lummis identifies a common mistake – we are prone to identify the interviewed individuals as 'representative samples' (Lummis, 2006, p. 257). However, it is the very nature of any dialogue to choose people, who actually seem to be representative – as in my case, the choice of interviewees is intentional. Still, Lummis does acknowledge the usefulness of comparing 'small accidental samples' and their placement within 'wide historical trends' (Perks & Thomson, 2006, p. 213). Here, we are shifting from 'individual account to social interpretation' (ibid).

### **Research technique**

Having stated the criticism of oral history and its refutations, the approach despite its shortcomings fits best in terms of obtaining data from my family members and the understanding of the generations and their differences, or their similarities. The people participating in this short research will be the following ones: for the youngest generation – my brother Richard Flaškár; for the generation in between – my parents Milan Flaškár and Gabriela Flaškárová; for the oldest generation – my father's uncle Štefan Grell and his wife Zuzana Grellová. The choice reflects the common distinction between age groups, as well as offers a variety of life-stories, intertwined with the region and constituting different basis for the first memories.

The technique used for the research is the so called *three-phase interview*, described in Vaněk, Mücke, & Pelikánová (2007). As the name suggests, there will be three meetings with the interviewees. During the first one, a set of open questions will be discussed (see Appendix 1). For the second meeting the questions from the first one will be deepened. Which ones are to be brought up again depends on the need for clarification, or even potential new question building up in the course of the first meeting. The third and last interview is then to be used as a confrontation of information gained from other interviewees. All of the meetings will not take more than 90 minutes. The set amount of time will provide for better control of the meetings and also encourages both the interviewer and the interviewees to use the time space effectively and convey their thoughts within the limits (pp. 101 – 107).

Additionally to the interview, a visit will be paid to the Galanta's Local History Museum. Also, the book *Galanta* by (Berényi, et al., 2008) is to be used when explaining the individual experience within a bigger picture of the events happening in the whole region.

## Tracing the Unspoken

People tend to see generations in terms of their grandparents, parent, peers, or children, whilst immediately assuming great gaps between the younger and the older ones. However, when exploring various factors operating in the space of a small town, which has been subdued to great historical changes within a quite short time span; or to more explicit, within my family, the general distinction seem not sufficient. Therefore, the aim of this work is to grasp the differences in narratives of each of the presupposed 'generations' and trace the over-reaching, bridging elements, ranging across members of different age, or the bonding ones confined only within a particular group, not passed down to the oncoming offspring.

Therefore, for the sake of completing the operational thesis, the following areas will be explored:

### *Historical and political setting of generations*

The subjects of this study have experienced different 'beginnings'. Thus, as Mannheim points out, the first worldviews are seen as natural, however, the real difference between generations lies in the layering of new experience (pp. 26 – 27). The events happening in Galanta in respective periods of time voiced by the interviewees are to be set within a bigger picture of political decision-making.

Another crucial aspect is the importance assigned to history and impact of family-communicated history/history learned via other institutions (especially at school) – in other words to determine the narrator of history. In order to become a member of a generation, one is not required to experience an event in person, as the actual essence of the experience is being passed onto us by others (Marada, 2007, p. 82). Therefore, the next issue in line to be explained is the memory.

### *Memory*

According to Assmann & Czaplicka (1995), we operationalize two types of memory – the everyday 'communicative' and the long-term reality-detached 'cultural' one. The distinction is necessary for the understanding of the nature of stories, which are able to reach a younger or an older audience.

### *Trauma and Narratives*

Through the endeavour into different pasts along the lines of the structured interview, the subjects are supposed to speak about the most vivid experience, which still seems to be alive



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even after several decades, constituting part of the framework for their identity. One of such momentums with great formational potential in terms of connecting different people together is a traumatic one – however, as there are many occasions bearing the label traumatic, the distinction between a trauma and cultural trauma needs to be made. According to Smelser, the traumatic experience is articulated as a cultural trauma only if it is imposed by respective institutions as an event reaching wider number of people and bearing certain injustice against the victims, reconstructed over time (Smelser, 2004, p. 44).

However, it is not only the sole event, which is being reproduced, but the complexity of the problem is embodied in a simple emotion, such as anger, trust or distrust, hope, joy, and others explored by Svašek (2006). Still, using Brubaker (2002) and his criticism in overuse of ethnicity, the feelings will have to undergo much deeper analysis.

### *Forgetting/Keeping*

The aim of the whole work is tracing the transmitted and non-transmitted memories, which are being reproduced, or on the other hand, not passed down by the subjects. Connerton (2008) defines various types of forgetting, which could be identified as a result of the interviews with my family members. Tomasello's view on shame and guilt is also an important means of determining the quality of transmission and its reproduction.

### **Possible Outcome**

The outcome should provide me with a clearer understanding of differences between the participants of this study; that is, what sort of memory and is being given away and why, as well as the one which has penetrated the memories of the ones not directly experiencing an event. By distinguishing the sources of knowledge of history and the bridging and bonding memory transmission in the following pages we will be able to provide a definition of a generation. I also presume that the connecting type of memory is the communicative one, by which we express everyday life experience, whereas the cultural memory – the great events – might actually be less penetrating, if not absolutely confined within a particular group of people within the family.

## 1 Chatting About History

When meeting and observing family members, one sooner or later catches either a nuanced, or extremely different way of thinking and acting. As this work is dealing with three generations of people who have been born at different points in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the knowledge of history of the locality is undoubtedly essential. Thus, next paragraphs in this chapter will provide for a simplified introduction into the setting of Galanta, the changes of regimes, the movement of population, and other issues with great formational potential brought up by the interviewees in the process of assessment of oral history data.

### 1.1 Galanta on the crossroads

The readings on town's history go quite far – first settlements have been built some 5000 – 2000 years B. C. (Nováková, 2007, p. 25). Nevertheless, for the purpose of this work, the examined period will be most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: 1930s until present day. The choice of the time span matches the presence of the interviewed generations, therefore will provide for enough insight into the set up forming each of the interviewee.

However, the word 'crossroad', which makes up part of the name of this subchapter, explicitly marks a certain aspect of Galanta. After the First World War, the old Austro-Hungarian Empire ceased to exist and fell apart into several states. Thus, the town became part of the newly established Czechoslovak Republic, embracing new political setting until the Vienna Award. On November 2, 1938, due to its geographical position (South-West of Slovakia), Galanta was added to the Hungarian Kingdom, but still remained a regional administrative centre. According to Pukkai, until 1944 the town had not been struck by the Second World War as such, though some of the locals back then had to face the harsh reality of war. To put it in different words, several people did not come back home alive, as they were killed on the front. Nevertheless, it was not only the soldiers from Galanta whose lives were in danger as the town's Jewry was also subdued to great atrocities (Pukkai, 2007, pp. 209 - 213). On June 5, 1944, all Jews were collected and transported to a camp in Nové Zámky and later on divided and sent to concentration camps (Korčok, 2007, p. 110). Thus, the town lost a substantial amount of its citizens (approximately one third). Nevertheless, the suffering hit not only the Jews, but also Galanta's Roma population, who faced similar persecution. Some of its members have met their ends in concentration or labour camps (Nováková, 2007, p. 203).

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The ethnic aspect of state-level decision-making has been further reflected in the upcoming years after the 'liberation' of the town by the Soviets in March 1945<sup>3</sup>. As the Second World War came officially to an end, the re-creation of Czechoslovak Republic as the state of predominantly Czechs and Slovaks took place. State borders shifted again, consequently Galanta was re-added to the Czechoslovak Republic. As it has been hinted in the previous sentences, the measures, on which the population was to meet the aim of the government – that is, via which the state would meet the goal of consisting of primarily Czechs and Slovaks (Šutaj, 2011, pp. 623 - 634) – several reforms were carried out also by Galanta's local administration and commissions.

Continuing with Pukkai's report on the impact of nationalistic state-building on Galanta, the main means of ethnic homogenisation was inner colonisation of southern Slovakia, the Second Land Reform, recruitment of labour force (which essentially became pure deportation of ethnically unwanted population), Reslovakisation, and population exchange between Czechoslovakia and Hungary (Pukkai, 2007, p. 220). The inner colonisation has to be understood as moving ethnic Slovaks to settlements, which were inhabited by ethnic Hungarians. During the interview with my father's uncle, he mentioned several of such people in terms of replacing various public officials, such as the head of the police department, headmaster at the local primary school, head of the tax office, etc. who have been transferred to Galanta.

Next, the Second Land Reform was launched 'between the years 1945 and 1948 (...) and did not exclusively affect the land properties owned by ethnic Germans and Hungarians' (Šutaj, 2011, p. 627). The 'Act 46/14 brought the complete restructuring of property and came into force in 1948 when the Communists seized power' (p. 628). Nevertheless, considering the number of Galanta's inhabitants and their ethnic affiliation, most of the people hit by the reform were the Hungarians as a consequence of owning most of the land (Pukkai, 2007, p. 211).

The so called recruitment of labour force in its very simplified essence meant transportation of ethnic Hungarians from Galanta to the Czech borderland – Sudetenland – which has been lacking workforce. Thus, according to the official plan, Hungarians from southern Slovakia

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<sup>3</sup> The word 'liberation' has left a quite bitter aftertaste by its over-usage for four decades of communist rule. Using Tony Judt's work *Postwar*, rather than 'liberated', the Soviet troops have at the same time 'reoccupied Hungary, Poland, and most of Czechoslovakia' (Judt, 2010, p. 103). For the full account on the Soviet presence in its dominions I suggest reading the whole of *Postwar*.

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were to replace the Germans, who had to flee the country leaving all of the arable land and factories empty. Despite initial complications with the transportation per se, several families were deported to the borderland between February and March 1947 (p. 222).

Reslovakisation, as the term implies, was a process, by which a person of a different ethnicity claims to be Slovak. The problematic aspect of it was the forcefulness of such action. Deriving from the memories of my father's uncle, the Hungarians were given a choice either to Reslovakise, or be deported. In order to stay in Galanta, most of the Hungarian inhabitants together with uncle's family applied for Reslovakisation. Nevertheless, all of these people, in fact whole families had to attend lectures of Slovak language at the local culture house and until September 1, 1947 education was provided only in Slovak language (p. 219).

The Czechoslovak-Hungarian population exchange took place between 1947 and 1948. The aim of this agreement signed between the two republics was to, at least from the Czechoslovak perspective, match the state borders with ethnic borders (Popély, 2009). Slovaks living in Hungary were given the opportunity to 'come back' to their motherland. The Hungarians could decide voluntarily as well, or, as in most cases, were forced to pack a limited amount of their belongings, board livestock wagons, and leave for Hungary. Though the numbers of the resettlers should according to the logic of any exchange be the same on both sides, '89,660 Hungarians [were] settled... to Hungary [whereas only] 71,787 Slovaks arrived from Hungary to Czechoslovakia' (ibid).

According to the local census on May 2, 1945, in Galanta, there lived 2,488 Slovaks, 1,434 Hungarians, and 3 Germans (p. 217). Thus, all of the abovementioned measures have been deployed on the town's ground. By April 3, 1948, the numbers changed quite dramatically: out of the total population of 5,079 people, 3,485 were of Slovak nationality, 1,341 Reslovakised, and 253 remained Hungarian (Pukkai, 2007, p. 220).

On February 1948, after the Communist takeover, Czechoslovakia embraced a new political setting and a new era began, the era of building new social relations, the era of building a socialist society (p. 224), which lasted until November 1989, that is, the Velvet Revolution. Ethnic politics was seen as unwanted and only causing rupture in the society, thus the processes of population exchange and Reslovakisation were put on halt and Hungarians, who had been deprived of their citizenship, were given their citizenship back (Pukkai, 1987, p. 62). Nevertheless, let us not forget that this welcoming gesture has been followed by unfortunate adjustments to the Soviet model: most notorious was the collectivisation of land, dissolution of

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private businesses, and industrialisation. Ethnic purge was overshadowed by class purge. During the 1960s there was a certain movement towards possible reform of the regime, not necessarily its dissolution. However, all of the attempts to change the system were crushed in 1968 by the Warsaw Pact invasion. Since then, Czechoslovakia 'suffered under one of the most orthodox leaderships' (Henderson & Robinson, 1997, p. 12). A period of 'normalisation' was installed by the Soviet centre and all of the actions taken by the Czechoslovak government was supervised by Moscow.

Despite the harshness of the regime, one cannot oversee certain 'prosperity' in terms of development of Galanta. As a consequence of growing agricultural and industrial importance, Galanta experienced quite rapid inflow of people from various parts of Slovakia, especially after the 1970s. For instance, in 1950 the town was inhabited by 5,539 people, in 1970 by 8,933, and in 1980 it had reached the number of 16,530 inhabitants (Pukkai, 2007, p. 85). Mixing of newcomers with the 'old settlers', numerous blocks of flats blooming either on the outskirts of the town or replacing old buildings around the town centre – all this altered the face of Galanta. Within this melting pot, a different generation was born and nurtured.

On November 17, 1989, after forty years the communist rule came to an end. On January 1, 1993, Czechoslovakia ceased to exist, as it broke up in two separate entities: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. However, this was only the beginning of a period of transition towards market oriented economy and democracy. Every change, no matter how big or small is a double-edged sword by nature. Hence, despite the positives of acquiring political pluralism, Galanta faced a great difficulty in terms of new economic framework. As Pukkai mentions, 'in Galanta, 15 factories and economic subjects have been closed. (...) In the years 1993 – 2007, unemployment became present again. Whereas in the year 1989 14,000 workers had been employed in industrial production, because of the already mentioned changes in the given years, the unemployment rate in Galanta reached from 14 – 20%' – that is, between 1993 and early 2000s (Pukkai, 2007, pp. 249 - 250). It took another few years for the numbers to change for better. In 2002, one of the greatest investors – Samsung – built its plant on the outskirts of the town and consequently reduced unemployment as well as attracted several small parts-providers to settle in Galanta (p. 250). Still, if we imagine the shutdown of several companies as well as an unfamiliar mode of living in a democratic society, it seems quite natural to be overwhelmed by nostalgia and to compare the new setting with the regime prior to the Revolution. This atmosphere of a rupture between the rule of one party and a pluralistic work-in-progress democracy thus constitutes a different framework of relations and perception of history.

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Overall, the members of the tree generations have been born at various points in the big history – be it the Second World War, Communism, or Democracy – hence, they have acquired different foundations for the assessment of the past. Still, one thing is to personally experience certain events, the other is how and by whom this experience is – if at all – reproduced and conveyed to others.

## **1.2 Who is the narrator of history?**

For us to better comprehend the interviewed subjects and their relation to history as such it is of vital importance to notice the sources of their knowledge of the past. Thus, one of the questions posed during the interviews has also dealt with the institutions building the very foundations of the subject's awareness of certain events or periods in history. The following outcomes are based on the interviewees' responses.

Of course, the results were not that difficult to guess. Logically, the subjects of the study identified several sources: the history classes at school, family via storytelling, friends, media (mainly television, newspapers), and literature. Nevertheless, we have to look at the setup of the historical periods during which each of the family members acquired their respective factual basis on the past. After all, the information obtained in the course of the last eighty years has been subdued to several changes.

The oldest generation has lived through the Second World War or at least directly experienced its aftermath. Depending on the social standing of the family, the means of learning about history have been set. All of the elderly respondents have received basic education in Slovak schools, and my father's uncle Štefan has spent a short while at a university. Complementary to the formal education taught at state schools, Štefan's family had built up quite a resourceful library – for example, during the interview with him I have been provided with a set of books about the history of Hungarians, out of which the oldest issue dated back to 1895. Thus, at least partly there has been a source of historical knowledge outside the classroom. On the other hand, aunt Zuzana and her family, who had moved from Hungary to Czechoslovakia in 1948, have not been that well off, and in terms of knowing the past she had to rely on either the testimonies of her family members (which, as will be noted later, were mostly concerned with memories of the place they left in Hungary rather than the big history as such), or the material provided at school. Of course, personal experience, that is, 'living' the history as in the time of the war, Reslovakisation, population exchange, collectivisation via the reform in 1947, change of the regime, modernisation of media – radio, television, newspapers – all this

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framed foundations of the oldest generation, who later in the process by themselves became also the narrators of history.

Born into the normalisation period of socialism, meaning after the suppressed attempts to reform communism in 1968, the generation in between has been relying on both the history taught at school as well as stories of their parents. Nevertheless, the nature of the learning about the past is well reflected in the dialogues carried out with my parents. When interviewing my mother, she confessed that history has not been much discussed at home as it was not 'safe enough', thus for the main means of knowing the past consisted on the textbooks provided at school: 'For my oral school-leaving exam from social studies I had drawn the theme *Years 1918, 1948, 1968*. I came home and talked to my parents about it, and described these as the *Crisis Years* and my father mumbled with anger "What crisis?!" That was it, he did not explain any further his reaction'. 'Well, unfortunately, everything was censored,' my father admitted. Still, the reflection of being 'fed' censored facts came later on, especially after the change of the regime in 1989. Despite the state-prescribed line of teaching, there have been several family gatherings at my father's house, where he would listen to countless stories of his parents and uncles. However, he still felt limited.

The limits of acquiring information have been breached, as has been noted above, after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Abolishing censorship, reforming the content of history classes, and most importantly the dissolution of the fear of being reported to the Secret Police when talking about certain periods of the past, the upcoming post-communist generation of democracy-enjoying citizens has been born into a new interpretations of history. Still, the narrators remained the same: family members, teachers, and friends. However, the quality (and let us not forget the quantity) of the information provided has changed tremendously. Despite enjoying more open discussions, the narrators themselves, be it the grandparents, parents, friends, or teachers, bear certain legacy of the past as well as are confronted with the openness provided by the new regime. For my generation, which is represented during the interviews by my brother Richard, the sources are to a certain extent limitless. Nevertheless, personal testimonies and stories, as well as subjects dealing with the issues of the past at school (such as History or Literature) seem to be still relevant just the same as they were relevant for the previous generations.

Overall, the changes on the political level, that is, shifting of borders, legislative processes dealing with various spheres of public life based on different criteria – be it ethnicity, class, or

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others – all this has been reflected in the assessment of history. Though the content on the official level has changed in accordance to the ruling regime, the stories of our ancestors – whether still living as our parents or grandparents, or dead but becoming alive via the memories – are presented as quite appealing in terms of believability and validity by the narrators during family gatherings, thus complement the knowledge of the past received through the media or educational institutions. Still, this work examines the spoken and unspoken, the content of the stories as such, and their repetition or seclusion within a particular generation in one family. Therefore, bearing in mind the locality and different 'beginnings' of each of the selected group of people, the next chapter will precisely tackle and analyse the themes and references derived from the in-depth interviews.



## 2 Remember

Having set the starting points of different generations in my family within the history of Galanta, it is possible for us to move towards the analytical part of the thesis and its implications. The following chapter will lay the basis for the evaluation and interpretation of the interview as well as define and track what is to be called bridging and bonding memory transmission.

### 2.1 Interview analysis

In his work *The Problem of Generations*, Mannheim gives us premises on which a generation needs to be analysed: 'location in lifecycle (or age), location in space, and historical setting' (Mannheim, 2007, p. 11). Nevertheless, for the purpose of identifying generations by his definition in a family additional tools are required. This claim is based on the notion that within a family the history is acquired via different means, one is through oral history in the form of storytelling carried out by different family members or relatives, other is by official history taught at school, and also there is the moment of direct experience of the past. These might complete each other or even present confronting worldviews. Thus, the quality of the knowledge of history has to be considered as well. Therefore, the in-depth interviews, which were carried out with the subjects of this study of generations, are a useful method of accessing the narrators of history. The search for the bridging and bonding elements in memory transmission is a complementary method of distinguishing between the formation of the knowledge of the past inside the family as well as outside. It is also necessary in terms of the fact that there are certain periods or events, which are not talked about, thus are not formative within the family. These might be learned through outside actors or institution, or not at all.

Thus, a framework for the distinction between bridging and bonding memory transmission had to be established. Both bridging and bonding memory transmission have been briefly described in the *Tracing the unspoken* part of this work – that is, the bridging element is to be understood as stretching over members of different generations, thus creating a 'bridge' between these people, whilst the bonding one connects only the members within a particular generation, thus is confined within. However, the definitions need to be given a broader account for the sake of completion of the analysis to provide us with a clear picture of the nature of the memories explored in the course of the interviews.

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The very questions posed during the interviews are in sense organised in manner, which sets a certain framework of topics. The main focus is placed on events or periods of the past as well as present and the emotions attached to them by the interviewees. Therefore, attention is paid to the very mentioning of events of personal importance and its reproduction by other members of either the same or other generation. Consequently, the reference is noted down as either acquired via personal experience or through other means, such as stories of other family members, friends, or as information taught at school. It is necessary to note that one of the questions prior to the very interview was the question of nationality. Out of all of the respondents the only one being of Hungarian nationality is father's uncle Štefan, and even though his official status is Hungarian, he himself prefers to be regarded as European. Nevertheless, his perspective as well as the perspective of his wife Zuzana is more sensitive in terms of ethnic labelling. Other interviewees stated their identity and nationality as Slovak. All of them attended Slovak schools and speak at least two languages at home (Slovak, Hungarian, and in the case of my father and brother German). In terms of religion, which might seem as one of the decisive cleavages next to ethnicity, all of the family members are Catholics except aunt Zuzana, who is an Evangelist. However, none of them underlined their religious affiliation. The only practicing believer is the uncle, but even he himself does not emphasise him being Catholic and suggests tolerant coexistence.

Hence, considering the repetition and the source of information, a *bridging memory transmission* has to be such, which is openly repeated by all of the members of the generations, bears similar emotional connotation, and has been passed down within the family. Thus, an event, a situation, or a figure is present in each of the speeches of the interviewees. On the other hand, a *bonding memory transmission* is an event, a situation, or a figure strongly present in one generation, or might reach another generation in line, however, it is considered a tabooed theme, therefore not re-told further, and sometimes acquired through actors outside of the family (e.g. school). The emotional attachment is unsteady and fluctuating, or none in other generations or its particular members.

Another aspect of the assessment of the data is the distinction between communicative and cultural memory provided by (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995). Differentiating between day-to-day experience and the great historical events plays an important role in the overall outcome of the thesis, as the second aim of the research is to determine whether the bridging events are constituted of communicative memory and the bonding ones of cultural memory, or vice versa.

## 2.2 Build a bridge

Having set the criteria, by which the interviews will be assessed, let us finally move to the actual search for bridging memory transmission. During the talks with my family members, several themes came up in the course of answering my questions. Despite the age gaps, difference in acquiring the knowledge about past events, all of the respondents have regarded one particular period with similar emotional connotation: socialism. Or put in different words – the period between 1948 and 1989.

There are several reasons why socialism as a theme offers a uniting potential, a bridge, if we were to say, between the three generations of people. First and foremost, at least two of them – the oldest together with the middle one had spent a considerable amount of their lives within the communist framework. For the generation of my parents, the period after 1968 was basically the beginning of their existence as such, thus it constituted, in Mannheim's words, their 'location'. For the older members, my father's aunt and uncle, the communist period partly covered their early socialising as well as most of their working life. However, a question remains: how is socialism connected to my brother, who was born 1996, seven years after the Velvet Revolution, which marked the end of the communist rule?

The answer is rather simple: through the narrators, who have experienced socialism, that is, members of both generations. Both the parents and the elderly relatives tend to speak a lot about the period during various gatherings. 'I think it is good to know [the history]. (...) When we talk to you [children], we compare how it was like in the past and how it is like today,' said my mother during the interview. Nevertheless, another important source of brother's knowledge of the pre-Revolution times is the school curriculum with its History and Literature classes. Still, it would be a false statement to take the whole of the period of socialism as a completely bridging one.

Frankly speaking, we need to make a distinction between the every-day experience (the communicative memory) and the events preserved in the cultural memory. Keeping the division in mind, the representative of the youngest generation conveyed an important distinction: of course, the stories told by our parents and grandparents have given him a clear picture of socialism, however, these stories presented the very life with its daily struggles, hours spent in queues waiting for fresh meat: 'I went to buy the meat at five in the morning,' aunt Zuzana sighed. 'Something like buying three kilograms of tangerines? During socialism? The whole family had to be ready, my sister went, my father went, my mum went, and in case we wanted four kilograms, I had to go, too...now tell me, was it not funny?' My mum shook her head. Or

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the stories of obligatory military service, which every man had to go through – an evergreen whenever there is an opportunity to point out some type of tragicomic mismanagement. Therefore, the connecting – bridging – element is to be found in the every-day experience of the previous two generations.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that my brother has absolutely no idea about the themes outside of the daily, repetitive activities carried out by the members of the preceding generations during the communist rule. However, the cultural memory, that is, the great events are not something he came to know from the narrators inside our family. In this case, the information provided about the issues brought by other interviewees, such as the Second World War, Population Exchange, failed attempts to reform communism in 1989, the Velvet Revolution, or others stem from another source – from the content of the subjects taught at school. Although he did learn about these events, it took him some time and eventually he needed help to actually remember being taught about them.

Thus, even a period, which in a sense touches upon the lives of all of the members of different generations, does not fulfil its role as being a bridge with all of its content. Continuing with disparity between the communicative and cultural aspect of the memory of the period of socialism, another dividing line can be made on the level of emotional affiliation. The daily reality of the 'perks' of a command economy and bureaucratic omnipotence are regarded as no more wanted, unjust, laughable, or, simply said, with negative connotation of similar intensity by all of the respondents. However, certain moments in the history happening at the very same time, or before in case of the oldest generation, seem to offer a less nuanced emotional attachment, thus constitute a possible bonding memory transmission.

### **2.3 Access denied**

'We do not talk about bad stuff happening in the past.' 'Do not talk about it, you do not know anything, so do not stuck your nose into this.' These are only two out of several sentences one can hear when they are denied the possibility to discuss certain topics. The first one comes from the interview with my mother, the second from the interview with my father. Both deal with, as my father said, 'a topic, which had hit a lot of people and for many of them it left a much deeper scar than you could think'.

One of the sensitive and 'taboo' issues voiced by the members of the oldest generation was aftermath of the Second World War with its ethnic politics and growing power of the Communist Party. Reslovakisation, Czechoslovak-Hungarian Population Exchange, collectivisation

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of private property – all these have left a bitter aftertaste among both father's uncle Štefan and his wife Zuzana. Both of them experienced several obstacles because of their backgrounds – uncle being Hungarian, aunt being part of the exchanged Slovaks coming from Hungary to Slovakia.

Nevertheless, because both were of different nationality, they had experienced slightly different events. Also, age-wise, Zuzana was born in 1946 at the beginning of the transfers, thus she could not remember moving from Hungary, but as she was growing up, she had to face a lot of mocking from the locals. She said: 'all that mockery...mainly boys, those...and then Slovaks: you, who are not one, nor the other, you are the worst!'<sup>4</sup> Štefan was born slightly before the beginning of the War and had been subdued to Reslovakisation. Still, the Population Exchange connects both, as for uncle the Reslovakisation was the only possible means to stay in the town and not be transported to Hungary or Czech borderlands. Also, both had the experience of being treated as second-class citizens for some time.

In terms of the connection to other generations, this theme was not discussed at home. Though at least my father knew something like this had happened in the past, he was always discouraged for bringing it up and getting to know more about the Exchange. Despite having her father almost displaced, my mother got to know this story of him in her forties. During her childhood, she was completely unaware of the topic of displacement of Hungarians or Land Reform, which has stripped her father and his family of a considerable amount of their property. My brother was rather surprised, when I asked him about the Reslovakisation, Exchange, and Land Reform. At least in terms of the Exchange, he had some information provided at school, however, he did not know that there were actual family members, who had been through, or at least in a way affected by the mentioned points in the history. So, considering limited knowledge of the content of the event, strong emotional response on the side of one generation, but none on the side of the other two, the Population Exchange is by nature a bonding memory transmitted within the oldest generation.

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<sup>4</sup> Slovaks moving from Hungary to Slovakia had been well known for a very distinct dialect, which consisted of a mixture of Slovak, Hungarian, and German language. When I asked my father about the topic of the Exchange, he said, that one could guess who was transferred to Galanta by their way of speaking, especially the older ones. In case of the children it was nearly impossible, as these were immediately socialised language-wise and did not speak the dialect anymore.

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The year 1968 was another event directly experienced by my uncle and aunt, but not my parents. The interview showed again a great lack in terms of knowing what did actually happen during that time. Despite being very vivid for uncle (he was working in the local administration at that time), and for aunt as well, especially through the panic, which caused a rapid shortage of goods, the rest of the family members had very scarce information about the event. As has been noted in the first chapter, my parents had to rely on the education provided by the regime, thus had been receiving censored or altered versions. For my brother, the topic of the 1968 has never been present in the stories of other family members, and acquired only via school – though, as he confessed, he was not sure about the content at all. After 1968, the queuing for goods has become an indispensable routine and ended by the Velvet Revolution in 1989 – but, as we have already proved, the every-day experience constitutes a bridge rather than a bond.

Lastly, both of my parents have mentioned the Velvet Revolution as an important episode in the town's history. The feelings of joy of change were underlined by a bit of fear of the USSR repeating its strategy from 1968. It might seem as an event bearing of a lot of bridging potential – after all, it meant the ending of the communist regime and the beginning of democracy, in which the members of the youngest generation in the family were born. Nevertheless, it did not occur in neither of interviews with other respondents. Thus, we have to ask ourselves why. And if it is not a bridging memory, can we call it a bonding memory?

Now, we have to come back to the foundations of each of the generations. The dominant narrative in the case of the oldest generation was and still is the ethnification of relations, meaning receiving different treatment according to one's ethnic affiliation. This is especially true for father's uncle, however, he has developed a strong European identity and claims to despise nationalistic politics. For aunt Zuzana it is not an issue anymore. She said: 'Well, but it ended, and one forgets it. Whatever, I take it as it comes, I have to get through it – I do not see it as a problem anymore...' What we can observe here quite clearly, is the phenomenon of forgetting defined by Connerton (2008). For example, forming a new identity might in their case be a way of compensating for the past mistakes done to them because of their ethnic background. However, this does not diminish the narrative of ethnicity. In any event, the Velvet Revolution was at least for Štefan overshadowed by the upcoming nationalistic ruling of the newly established Slovak Republic's government.

To be a good socialist person was the official summary of the communist rule during the upbringing of my parents. Confronted with the shortages of the regime, surrounded with posters

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propagating the Soviet rule, and having a limited access to the West (through Radio Free Europe or Austrian state television ORF) both of them saw the Velvet Revolution as 'the' change for better. Opening of borders was another important mark, as my father together with his brother left for Austria to find work. Being still quite young, my parents have entered a newly patched-up democracy and adjusted pretty quickly.

And what about my brother and his relation to 1989? Well, for him all of the events happening before his birth seem rather distant. Though he is on par with other members of the preceding generation when it comes to talking and comparing the life from back then (socialism) and now, interestingly, he has not heard much about the Velvet Revolution from our parents. When he was asked about the year 1989, his response was rather unconfident: 'Um, it was the breakdown of socialism, right? The division, um...' Though being such an important turning point in history for both my father and mother, none of them have been telling him about their role during the Revolution or their experience of the year 1989.

So, according to the criteria set at the beginning by which we are to distinguish between a bridging and a bonding memory transmission – repetition, similar emotional attachment, and the willingness to actually discuss the specific issue – the Velvet Revolution should be added to the latter one.

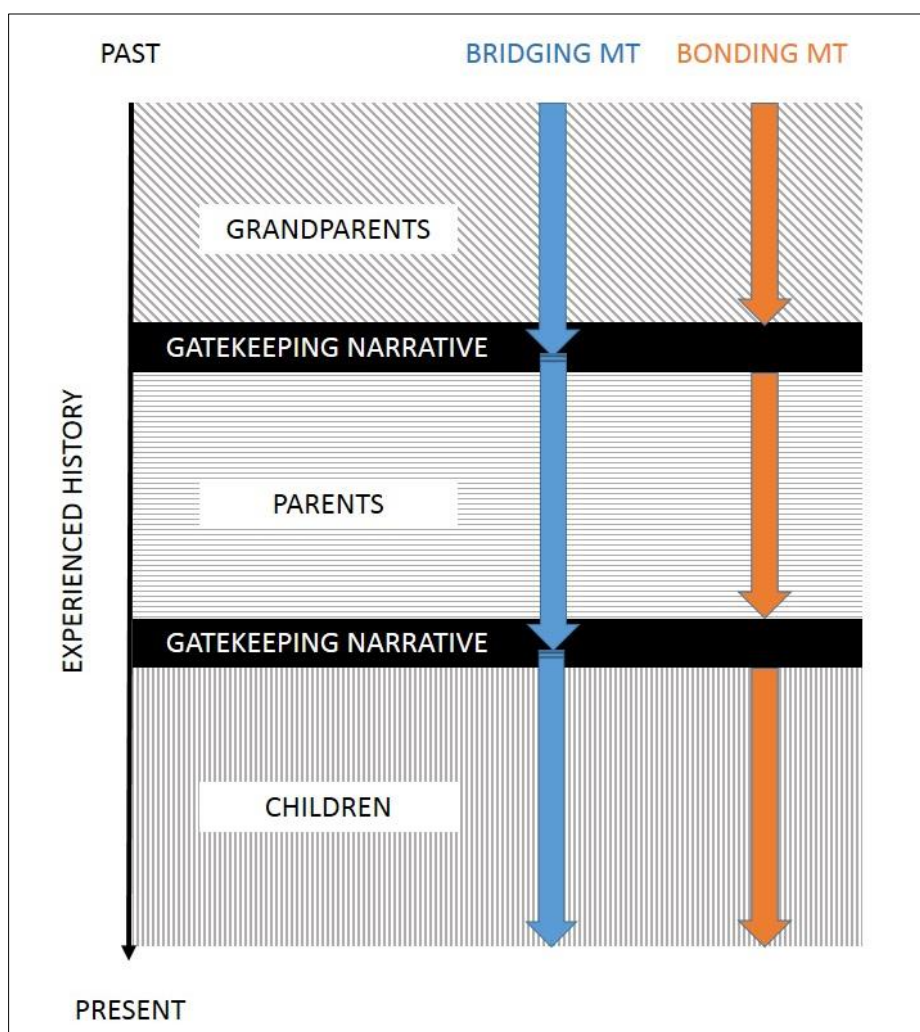
## **2.4 Narratives as the 'gatekeepers' of memory transmission**

Having identified the bridging and bonding memory transmission within the interviews, an important question remains: why do certain types of events connect people of different 'locations', whereas others remain confined within a particular group?

Although the research sample in this work is rather small – five people – it offers enough material for determining the transmission-framing mechanism. All of the interviewees have experienced a variety of beginnings. However, is it only the event itself, which frames the nature of the memory transmission? According to Mannheim (2007), there exists a possibility of parallel generations within the same age group. This means that people born in the same year do not necessarily become part of one generation, as their socio-historical location is different. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study this definition seems incomplete. Rather than the experience of 'big' history, it is the overall narrative, which provides for quality of memory acquisition.

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It has been clearly showed, for example, in terms of the oldest participants, who have experienced the aftermath of the Second World War and its ethnic politics. Though other interviewees had very limited knowledge of the measures executed in Galanta, the question of ethnicity did not play any important role in their lives. However, for father's aunt and uncle is still very much present, thus their reaction to nationalistic policies carried out by Slovak governments is more sensitive. Thus, we can see how the official narrative pursued during their growing-up frames their understanding of the world around them even today. Therefore, we can say that the master narrative of the particular period during which one acquires their first memories and experience serves as a framework determining the bonding and bridging memory transmission. Said in different words, the dominant narrative acts as a 'gatekeeper' preventing certain topics, events, or figures from becoming bridging elements.



1 Memory Transmission

However, the bridging and bonding memory transmission identified within my family does not automatically generalise the content of memory transmission for all of the people, who have



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'experienced' the same events. Several works have proved that for example the question of Czechoslovak-Hungarian Population Exchange, Communism, or other topics are regarded in different connotations, that is, for some these constitute bridging memories whereas for others bonding ones.<sup>5</sup> Thus, narrators providing for the knowledge of history, or in Alexander's terms the 'carrier groups', frame the narrative according to their 'ideal and material interests' (Alexander, 2004, p. 11). Bearing in mind Tomasello (2009) and his writing on guilt and shame, which provide for the maintenance of social norms, the narrators themselves are influenced by these emotions – therefore they shape the nature of the memory transmission as well.

Although we have traced the bridging and bonding memory transmission as well as determined the narrators and the framing mechanism in the form of the master narrative, a question remains: how do these findings reshape the definition of a generation, or whether we can actually talk about generations at all?

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<sup>5</sup> One of such examples is the research done by (Bordás, Frič, Haidová, Hunčík, & Máthé, 1995), who have examined the relations between ethnic Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians. Another interesting example is Trančík's documentary *History Lesson* (2013), where he maps the difference in perception of the Trianon Treaty by students at Slovak and Hungarian schools in Slovakia.

## The Search for Generations

Until now the word 'generation' has been used in a rather free manner, describing the group of the oldest participants, parents, and the young. Through the use of bridging and bonding memory transmission, we could grasp the differences in the narratives, which determined the nature of the transmitted memories within and between 'generations'. However, as it has been noted before, there have been numerous researches done on the perception of history within same age groups, which have shown varying emotional attachments to certain periods or events. Thus, we can see in a sense parallel groups, which have been formed by qualitatively diverse narrators. The question is whether we can actually talk about completely separate generations living next to each other or whether such distinction is not too far-fetched.

We have seen that experiencing the same event directly or communicated in the cultural memory does not necessarily provide for a unitary view of the event itself. Still, the big history does have a great formative potential in terms of adopting a certain narrative. Operating and nurturing the feelings of shame and guilt according to its needs, the narrative frames one's sensitivity towards the upcoming 'layering' of experience, pointed out already by Mannheim (2007). Thus, for the term 'generation' it would be essential to keep the focus on the age group formed by the same events, which constitute either a bonding or a bridging memory transmission. However, rather than talking about parallel generations, who have different content of bridging and bonding transmission of memory, it is suggested to refer to these narratively different, but age-wise connected groups of people as cohorts of a generation.

The analytical tools introduced in this work – that is, the bridging and bonding memory transmission – should together with proper evaluation of narratives provide for clearer identification of generations and their cohorts. Nevertheless, the concept of a generation and its cohorts is useful for a wider spectrum of the academic world, be it sociology, political science, anthropology or others. It would be essential to reproduce this study and cover a greater number of respondents in order to see to what extent and under what condition is the model of memory transmission sustainable, as the sample in this study was rather limited. Still, the core function of the narrative underlines the importance of critical assessment of history and careful observance of the narrators themselves, as they greatly shape not only the perception of the past, but consequently the future as well.

## Resumé

Úlohou tejto bakalárskej práce bolo porozumieť transmisii pamäte medzi členmi mojej rodiny, žijúcimi v meste Galanta a pomocou nej ponúknuť model vysvetľujúci tvorbu generácie. Nakoľko samotná pamäť podlieha rôznym činiteľom, úvod tohto diela sa venoval témam generácie, etnicity, naratívu, zabúdania, emócií, kolektívnej traumy, histórii a samotnej pamäte.

Nakoľko členovia mojej rodiny, ktorých životné príbehy tvoria podstatnú časť tohto výskumu, prežili celý svoj život v Galante, a teda vnímali prevažne dianie v samotnom meste, prvá kapitola uvádza stručný prehľad histórie prevažne dvadsiateho storočia, ktoré mesto zasiahli. Išlo hlavne o udalosti, ktoré boli spomínané v samotných rozhovoroch. Táto lokálna história bola prepojená s veľkou históriou, odohrávajúcou sa na štátnej úrovni. Išlo prevažne o československo-maďarskú výmenu obyvateľstva, reslovakizáciu, kolektivizáciu, nástup komunizmu, rok 1968, normalizáciu, rok 1989 až po súčasné dianie.

V údajoch zozbieraných metódou orálnej histórie – t. j. pomocou hĺbkových rozhovorov s vybranými členmi rodiny – boli identifikovaní „rozprávači“ (narátori) vedomostí o dejinách. Ako hlavní narátori boli uvedení samotní členovia rodiny, výučba v škole a informácie poskytované rôznymi druhmi médií – prevažne išlo o televíziu, noviny a knihy.

V druhej kapitole boli položené základy pre klasifikáciu transmisie pamäte, ktorá mohla byť buď „premostujúca“ (*bridging*), čiže spájajúca všetkých rodinných príslušníkov skrz rôzne generácie, alebo „zväzujúca“ (*bonding*), čiže spájajúca len členov určitej generácie. Určujúcim faktorom pri rozlišovaní typu transmisie bolo reprodukovanie tej-ktorej udalosti a zároveň samotné emócie spojené s reprodukciou.

Po zaradení udalostí vymenovaných v rozhovoroch pod korešpondujúce typy transmisie bolo potrebné zodpovedať otázku: prečo vlastne niektoré spomienky zostávajú zakonzervované iba v určitej skupine ľudí a prečo sa iné objavujú vo všetkých rozhovoroch? Tri skupiny/generácie v tejto krátkej štúdii prežili rôzne „začiatky“ – pre starých rodičov to bola druhá svetová vojna a jej koniec, pre rodičov normalizácia po roku 1968, pre moju generáciu obdobie po vzniku Slovenskej republiky v roku 1993. Vychádzajúc z tohto poznania, títo rodinní príslušníci zažili odlišné naratívy obdobia, v ktorom kumulovali vedomosti o minulosti. Čiže vzhľadom k tejto skutočnosti môžeme tvrdiť, že hlavný naratív nevyhnutne pôsobí ako mechanizmus rozlišujúci typ pamäťovej transmisie. Zároveň ovplyvňuje vnímanie reality prebiehajúcej počas života jednotlivca. V kontexte to znamená, že spôsob, akým vyhodnocujeme dianie okolo seba v súčasnosti, podlieha vstrebanému naratívu v minulosti. Ako príklad si môžeme vziať najstarších

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účastníkov rozhovor, ktorí na vlastnej koži prežili etnickú politiku po druhej svetovej vojne. Táto skúsenosť ich poznačila zvýšenou citlivosťou na tému etnicity, ktorá sa preklenula aj do súčasnosti na rozdiel od mojich rodičov, ktorí vyrastali v naratívne dobrého „socialistu“ – teda otázka etnicity bola odsúvaná na druhú koľaj.

Na základe rôznych výskumov bolo však zrejmé, že udalosti charakterizované ako „premostujúce“ a „zväzujúce“ môžu byť obsahovo odlišné v rámci vekovo si blízkych ľudí. Táto skutočnosť dokazuje úlohu naratívu ako ohraničujúceho mechanizmu transmisie. Avšak je otázne, či sa majú skupiny vekovo príbuzných, ale kvalitou pamäte odlišných ľudí definovať ako samostatné generácie. Veľká história a jej udalosti, ktoré ovplyvnili jednu veľkú masu ľudí, je dôležitá pre určenie generácie ako takej. Na druhej strane je potrebné si uvedomiť naratív spájajúci skupiny v rámci jednej generácii, ktorý vytvára kohorty generácie. Kohorty sú chápané ako zoskupenia ľudí, ktorí boli formovaný nejakou dejinnou udalosťou, ale naratív slúžiaci na vysvetľovanie reality definoval túto skutočnosť rôzne.

Táto práca prináša nový pohľad na problematiku generácií a mechanizmy pôsobiace na jej tvorbu. Napriek malej vzorke respondentov – päť osôb – bolo možné vytvoriť model prenosu pamäte medzi jednotlivými členmi rodiny, ktorý je aplikovateľný aj na iné prípady. Zároveň bola zdôraznená úloha emócií, hlavne pocitov hanby a viny, ktoré vo veľkej miere determinujú proces odovzdávania spomienok medzi ľuďmi. Model by mal uľahčiť identifikáciu generácií a ich kohort, čím by mal poslúžiť nielen v sociologickej praxi, ale aj v rámci iných vedných odborov, ktoré s touto témou pracujú.

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## Appendix 1<sup>6</sup>

1. Is history important for you (in terms of your family, in your personal life, in your town)? Do you think that history greatly shapes your present situation? Why do you think so?
2. Do you think that it is important to know the history of the place we live in?
3. Which sources of important knowledge about history do you use the most? What/Who forms your opinions the most?
4. Could you name some important historical events or eras in Galanta?
5. Could you name the emotions connected to that event?
6. Which of the named events is still lingering in your memory/is still very much lively in terms of feeling as if it happened just yesterday?
7. Who was the greatest hero in your history?
8. Could you name an era or an event in the history of your nation, which makes your feel ashamed? Why?
9. Which monuments, sculptures, buildings, or part of the town embody Galanta for you? In what way are they connected to your memories?

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<sup>6</sup> The questions might be subjected to change