Darja Zaviršek (2008), Social Work as memory Work in Times of Political Conflict. In: Shulamit Ramon (ed.) *Social work in the Context of Political Conflict*. Venture press: Birmingham. Pp. 147-168.

Chapter 7

Social Work as Memory Work in Times of Political Conflict

Darja Zaviršek

Introduction

The second half of the 20.th Century was often described as the era of testimonies, the times of remembering and reconciliations (e.g. the Nuremberg trials; Eichmann trial; truth and reconciliation committees in South Africa) (Fentress and Wickham1992, Linton 1998, Ballinger 1998, Niethammer 1995, Horowitz 1997).[i] Victims of the child sexual abuse, people surviving mental health institutions, survivors of wars and genocides, were invited to testify their experiences and to share their personal stories. Not the need for public silence but the need for public story telling and memorizing has become a valued characteristic of modern societies. The victims of political violence got faces and names. The shift from the grand narratives to the minor personal stories, family histories, case studies and traces of a survivors' surviving, are best seen in the modern commemorations sites such as the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin (2005) and the new Museum of Holocaust History at Yad Vashem (2004) which emphasise the victims/survivors perspective. In this respect many people claim that the culture of remembrance has become an important part of the democratisation of everyday life. Personal stories are now recognised as a method to create communities, not only in social work but also in public discourse.

Nevertheless, in post-war situations not all people have the same encouragement for mourning and professional support during their healing process. The canonized construction of national histories and a state/nation building projects make some personal stories as being more important than the others. Some individuals and groups are seen as "official victims" of the political conflict, and have therefore the right for public and official recognition of their

trauma, while some others are seen as "less deserving" to be traumatised and are deprived of public recognition of suffering and professional support. While suffering and loss during political conflict are seen as the heroic acts of some people, the others experience the minorisation and silencing of trauma and personal/collective experiences. In other words, personal memories of many people are deprived of becoming part of public remembrance and narrative. Social workers are therefore confronted with the fact that the memory of one group or individual has become memorized and commemorated, while the victimhood of the others remains unrecognised. This causes a hierarchy of pain and an invisible discrimination.

The chapter will present different forms of memory, such as personal, collective and public recollections of traumatic events connected with wars and political conflicts, as well as the interdependence of different types of memory. It will claim that social workers can initiate and take part in "memory projects". Social workers not only provide scarce resources of living and safety in the times of political conflicts, but also try to ensure that people have the opportunity for "memory work" after a violent conflict.

Memory work against the fuctionalisation of memories

Social workers often are not concerned about what is talked through and re-collected, but with what remains silenced and forgotten. Forgetting is another site of re-collection. This is the political dimension of social work, which will be described as memory work.

Memory work in social work is a professional practice and a personal attitude where social workers as experts are listening to the personal traumatic stories not only to empower the narrator, but to use the re-collection as part of the personal and collective process of empowerment. Memory work means the work against the de-historisation of the personal and collective past. It encourages the re-membering of traumatic events which did not have the right to be placed in the official history or which were not yet narrated at all.

Social workers are often confronted with stories which are not part of public knowledge since their clients are people who have little or no opportunities for public recognition or for voicing their experiences. Therefore, social workers can become the agents of the processes of re-collection of memories which oppose the social construction of forgetting and have therefore a political, social and collective meaning. Social workers who are involved in memory work can be described as advocates for the social service users, who oppose the belief that the professionals have »knowledge« while the users have »feelings«.

In order to get involved in memory work social workers need to understand the different manifestations of traumatic memories as well as to understand the interrelations between personal, collective and public memory.

Many authors have shown that the structure of traumatic memories is similar, regardless if the person survived wars, abusive institutions or family violence (Herman 1992, Caruth 1996). During acute political conflicts and their aftermaths, traumatic memories are selected into desired and non-desired at the public level, and the political context often determines the timing of their appearance. Some traumatic memories become part of the public memory only when they are already functionalised for a particular political meaning. For instance, in Slovenia after the anti-fascist liberation war which ended in 1945 only the partisan stories were having their place in the public remembrance, while the stories of the Roma communities which experienced persecutions not only from the Nazis but also from the local people since they were seen as »the traitors of the partisans«, were not yet being remembered. Similarly, only after the end of the Communist era did the personal stories of the people who experienced the mass killing of their relatives who were not part of the partisan struggle and whose male-relatives were often active or passive supporters of the Nazis, got public permission to be remembered. The diversity of the personal stories was suppressed and the partisan atrocities were denied. The political function of the denial of the traumatic memories of the people who experienced victimisation in war was that after the 1945 the new Communist government needed to construct a non-polluted and heroic image of the partisan heroes who liberated the country from the Nazis in order to justify the rise to power of the one-party system.

The traumatic memory is the memory which has a form of numbness, absence and is frozen, which Laub (1992) calls the »record which is not yet done«. Trauma is caused most often by a shock and a sudden event. For Caruth (1996) the very essence of the traumatic event is precisely the fact that the person is not able to fully comprehend or even to fell the event in its wholeness, but can only experience the traumatic event after a delay. Similarly, Laub (1992) speaks about a cognitive contraction which in the traumatic event limits what the person is able to notice, seeing and feeling, while Caruth (1996) speaks about the preventative nature of the traumatic memory, which is based on denial and repression. The repression depends on the complexity and the cumulative impact of the armed conflict, as suggested by Frederico Picton, Muncy, Ongsiapco, Santos and Hernandez (2007). In the case study about community re-building in post-war Philippine they emphasised that the trauma suffered by a person or communities will depend on the cumulative effect of disruption (2007, pp.178).

The traumatic event is most often followed by the person who suffers questioning: »Why did it happened?« The repetitiveness of the question which people ask themselves long after the events shows the traumatic nature of the event. The expression: »I still can not understand«, contains a similar symbolic meaning. Not-understanding of a traumatic event is an important part of the traumatic memory. Not-knowing suggests the need to repress the known knowledge, the realisation of the brutality to which the person has been exposed. Not-understanding something which does not make any sense at all (e.g. violence), is an expression of the repressed knowledge and the deepness of trauma. The listener in such moments listens to the story of »not-knowing«.

Memory work of social workers is important since it gives the place for different voices to be heard. For social workers it is important to know that the denial for memory divides people long after the end of the armed political conflicts and encourages ethnic and religious hatred. The trans-generational trauma continuously influences people's everyday life, their interpersonal relationships, interactions and life decisions. Not having the right to the personal memory is a form of civic disability which transmits the invisible form of discriminations and causes a hierarchy of the pain.

Social workers rarely were educated in any kind of historical knowledge. The consequence was that social work knowledge and interventions were based on a de-historicized understanding of the situation in which the social work client was seen as being responsible for the situation. Such an individualisation of the situation instead of historization of it, has thwarted advocacy and empowerment work of social workers. Doing memory work helps to use historical knowledge in every day social work practice. Something similar is described by Duffy and Campbell, in chapter 3 of this volume, when they analyse the work of social workers in Northern Ireland. They emphasised that social work students are asked to study history and to explore the history of the sectarian conflict in order to understand the social work context historically and to attempt an in-depth analysis of the essence and the roots of the conflict.

Public memory and the struggle for the public truth

As was already demonstrated, post-modern societies too – as in the earlier historical periods - face the selection of the public memory as well as the dis-empowerment of the victims of

their right to testify. The public memory is the one that is allowed to be re-membered and re-collected. Each public re-membering incorporates unequal relationships of power, in which the powerful groups silence the memory of the marginal ones, and conduct censoring in order to establish the master narrative. Social institutions including the welfare institutions create their own public memory, and therefore they assist the processes of the social construction of forgetting. Out of many events which had happened only those remain the "truth" which are re-collected, me-morised by state institutions including the welfare institutions.

The written history recognises only those historical events that »really happen«, which become part of the public memory. The institutions (especially educational institutions) transform the public memory through the erasure of the historical events, favorising one group of people and devaluating the other, publishing books which re-produce the dominant story-telling with text and visual material. In the formation of the new state of Israel in 1948, the Ghetto Fighters' House (museum established in 1949 by a Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot) was one of the first visual representations of the history of the Holocaust, which pictured a heroic uprising of people living in the Warsaw ghetto. The commemorated history pictured a heroic story of the resistance in order to create the new state on the memories of heroism and not victimhood. Even Yad Vashem, established in 1953 which has gradually become the most important Holocaust museum is called Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority. Only in the second period of the Israeli public remembrance during the 1960s, were the most disturbing, personal traumatic memories allowed to be re-collected and commemorated.

The right to remember and the right to testify are constitutive processes of the democratisation of everyday life. The public memory can enable the processes of individual and collective remembering or can prevent them. The right to remember is the right to have someone who listens; who testifies to what has been remembered. At the same time, remembering remains the "shadow work" of all democratic processes since it remains invisible and un-recognised.[ii] As Hartman, who has analysed the importance of the Holocaust memories, emphasised: "Maybe the cultures could be differentiated from each others from the level of its memory tolerance"(Hartman 1994, pp.15). His idea of "memory tolerance" (without being critical on this point about the idea of "tolerance" itself), includes the recognition of numerous personal experiences, which do not appear in the "heroic stories". The "heroic narrations" do not encompass the personal stories (Zerubavel, 1995). The newly established state of Slovenia

(1991) for example, deprived 18.000 persons of their citizenship rights (Zorn 2005). The individual stories of these people embedded with injustice and formal as well as everyday deprivations, are still not accepted in the master narrative of the Slovenian story of independence. The invisibility of their experiences has caused a gap between the public representation of a new democratic state and the everyday experiences of exclusions of some members of the society. In 2002 they established a non governmental organisation which is called The Erased in order to fight collectively for their rights. This example shows how not only story-telling but also the memory itself has been contested, censored and repressed. In the times of political conflicts and their aftermaths, the struggle over the "right memory", as well as its proper recollection, has an important meaning.

Maglajlić Holiček and Rašidagić described in this volume (see chapter 6) that after the opening of the renovated famous bridge in Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was bombed by Croat forces during the 1992-1996 war, the new tourist guide from 2004 describes who has built the famous old bridge, when and why, but also all about the new re-built bridge. The story which the tourist guide does not tell is that the bridge had to be renovated because of the ethnic war. What the people of the Croats ethnic background forget, the Muslims remember. The public memory of the Croats, in this particular case, is the normative memory which selects, filters the personal and the collective memories which are excluded from the public memory. Therefore some events become de-historicised, invisible and "did not happen". The main characteristic of public memory is that it is based on the power relationships between the one who has the right to write about "our past" and the one who has his/her history absent from being part of the public remembering.

"Dealing with the past" in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where more than 150,000 thousand people were killed (including 16,000 children), with many more injured, experienced torture and displacement, has a form of a collective and public silence. The socially and politically correct way of a new society demands silence, like in the above mentioned example of the building of Israeli society, which has become a public and state strategy of forgetting. Neither the personal nor collective remembering of the past ethnic diversity but a public silence is a normative pattern of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina.

There was a freezing silence in 2002 in a classroom of 50 social work students in an ethnically cleaned Serb part of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republica Srbska), when it came

out that one social work student was a Moslem woman. The war in the 1990ies did not only transformed ethnically diverse territories into a ethnically cleansed communities, but also created ethnically "cleaned" schools of social work in order to keep the ethnical homogeneity of the social work students, with the exception of one school which appeared after the year 2000 (Zaviršek et al. 2007). The diversity of traumatic memories becomes cleansed as well. Such orchestration of the public memory influences the personal memory and prevents the processes of remembering. This is one of the very important links of the public and the personal memory. For future social workers it would be of extreme importance to explore among themselves the ethnic and religions diversities.

Personal memory and its re-collection

The personal memory which has the right to become part of the public commemoration is the allowed memory. It can be claimed that most often the right to contribute in the public memory allows to the personal memory to remember.

In his interviews with Holocaust survivors Lawrence Langer (1991) differentiates between the common memory and the deep memory. Every process of memory re-collection is interplay of memories, the common and the deep one. The common memory is the normative memory of the traumatic events, and includes common statements, "parental voices" and creates an emotional distance between the event and the narration. It prevents the person to get closer to the deep memory. It is a linear memory which stops deep memories to appear in the narration. In opposite to that, the deep memory touches the most painful memories of traumatic events and is therefore fragmented and often contradictory. A deep memory causes often several changes in the story, which makes the clients of welfare services appearing untruthful and dishonest. The deep memory of the person who survived political conflict often makes social workers unable to listen to the stories.

Being a witness listening to the story means as well a form of advocacy work. The advocate who listens gets some emotional understanding of what the person who survived the traumatic events went through. Being a witness often means writing down the story. One of the characteristics of the traumatic events is that the events often happen without witnesses. People surviving concentration camps, torture, rape, abusive welfare institutions or severe personal loss often did not have witnesses who would verify their story. In Slovenia which accepted up to 70.000 refugees during the former Yugoslavia ethnic wars in the 1990s, only a

handful number of social workers were doing memory work. In social work training the students are still today not trained to support people surviving political torture.
Laub (1992) speaks about the totalitarian nature of Holocaust, where people did not have anyone who could bear witness from either inside or outside. The history happened without witnesses. During the Pinochet regime in Chile the totalitarian government was kept alive with the use of witnessing. One of the survivors of torture remembered, that Villa Grimaldi, the central place for torture from 1973-1978 (which was placed not far away from the eyes and the everyday life of people in the capital city), was organised in such a way that the victims stayed there for days or weeks and were then removed to another place where they could met family members in order to tell what were done to them. This was the strategy to spread fear and horror among the whole population (personal visit, Villa Grimaldi commemoration site, September 2006, Santiago de Chile).[iii] The de-humanisation of the people living in concentration camps in every wars, the de-personalisation of the people surviving large welfare institutions, creates an atmosphere where nobody was recognised as a subject, as everyone was objectified and commodified. Laub has emphasised that the Holocaust made such a world into one which nobody could say "you" to another person, and therefore could not say "you" to oneself (1992, pp.82). Even more so, the destruction of identity constructs the impression that the events did not happen at all in the first place. Not bearing witness to oneself is the destruction of one's history, and the erosion of the person's identity. If there were no witnesses nobody could transmit the events to other people, to the communities and to the next generation. The consequence of not having anyone who bears witness from outside is the silence. The silence of the marginalised stories means that some pains are allowed and the others are not allowed to be expressed. This is the link between the public and personal memory, since only memories which are allowed and socially accepted, become part of the wider social memory.

The memory itself is not purely the re-collection of what had happened, it is also socially constructed. It is constructed by the public sphere, by what is allowed to be re-collected and what is not allowed. Also the listener is not only the witness but becomes part of the story.

A meory without official history is a disabled memory, the silenced memory without a recognised story of the "truth". The historisatiton of the memory can only encourage the personal memories that they are published, becoming a text, and therefore get access into the public sphere.

Freud's understanding of memory

For psychoanalysis memory is always already a way to avoid the memory of the traumatic event. Traumatic events get a form of telling, silence or bodily memories. According to Freud a traumatic memory causes a mental wound which can not be healed like a physical wound, and therefore has continuity in time, becoming timeless. In the context of psychosocial services and social work, traumatic events often get a form of pathology, psychiatric diagnosis and illnesses. If the society does not want to hear the stories, they appear as a sick body and a problematic behaviour.

Freud's analysis of memory has influenced the later work on memory. In his text "Screen Memories" Freud (1986 [1899]) made a difference between remembering and memory. Remembering is what the person does in regard to some fixed events in the history, which she or he remembers. This is the way how the events get preserved. However, for him memory is the way by which the person avoids the memory of the traumatic events and therefore creates a substitute memory. Dealing with early childhood memories he showed that the memory is the way the person avoids pain, leaves out the elements of the event which are the most important parts of the story and which the memory intends to re-collect. The most important part of the memory is the one which the person would not expect to find at all, and which the person actually does not remember. The memory actually leaves aside the most important parts which are responsible for the creation of this very memory. An early event gets covered by the later memory. At the same time, the fact that an event is preserved in our memory as memory shows its importance.

The memory in psychoanalysis is therefore never a re-collection of the traumatic event, but it is already a new memory, which makes it possible for the real trauma to remain repressed. The screen memory covers some elements, but not others. It covers the most traumatic parts of the events which a person actually remembers, and discloses a new memory which shows the important but repressed links between the memory and the event. The memory therefore is never a full memory of the traumatic event, but it is already a new memory which allows the repression of the trauma. This does not mean that the memory is false. On the contrary, precisely because the earliest childhood events are prone to the unconscious choice: the

person can “choose” a particular event to become a memory which s/he can re-collect, while rejecting others.

The consequence of these often conflicting forces is that the person creates a particular memory not because of the content which is the core of the particular memory, but because of the link between this content and another content which had been repressed.

Also Langer (1991) has come closer to the psychoanalytic interpretation when he stresses that the testimonies of the survivors are constructed. Only socially constructed memory makes it possible for the victims who survived things that can not be described, to articulate them into memories, which would otherwise not be able to re-member. The socially constructed memory stands for the suppressed traumatic memory. These memories are necessary that the person is able to incorporate the feelings of sorrow, loses, futureless and hopes into a story. Langer was also criticizing the »cleaned« version of the traumatic memory, the stories which are already censored and minimize the feelings of being lost and horrified.

While doing memory work social workers have also to know that the personal memory is also a bodily memory. Traumatic events create volatile bodies, disciplined bodies. The materiality of the body contains the silenced memory which gets manifested as somatic symptoms. “Healing through talking” (the “talking cure”) demands an active listener. The person who talks does the work for him/herself and for the others (“I tell for the others to know.”).

Collective memory

The concept of the collective memory has been developed by Maurice Halbwachs (1992 [orig. 1950]). He was interested in how memory is being transmitted; who are the transmitters and what are the ways to do so. The collective memory is for him a socially constructed one, which needs a group or a collective in order to be transmitted. It is a trans-generational process since the collective memory is getting transmitted from one person to another, with the help of memory carers (grandparents, elderly, the wise person in the community, the religious leader). He claimed that the past is not remembered as the “true event” was, but is always already socially constructed. The past is always already based in the present, it is selective, fragmented and has many breaks. The memory has a meaning only if the person is connected with a group of people who share a consensus about a specific memory. Halbwachs

argued that social groups create their own versions of the world through a creation of their own socially and collectively acceptable versions of the past. Since memory is always already a shared re-membering, memory cannot be only a personal memory, and therefore most of the people remember their childhood only through the family album.

Memory is thus constructed through the memory mediators who are carrying "memory blocks" of the past group memories into a personal memory of the individual person. The person then takes these memory blocks and incorporates them into his/her personal memory. Halbwachs claimed that the memory cannot exist if there is only one person who remembers; these events fall into oblivion. The power of collective memory is to enable the personal memory not to fall into oblivion. The existence of the collective memory can help a person to bear witness to her/his personal memory.

Therefore, he emphasised the fact that collective memory is part of social life, it is of common interests of people and groups. In opposition to this assertion, he sees written history as being the canonised past which has been carried out through academic work. Collective memory and written history are perceived by him as two different and sometimes oppositional representations of the past. However, Zerubavel (1995) advocates for a more dialectic relationship between collective memory and history which is for her a historicised memory. Both influence each other and interrelate. The written history (the historicised memory) is especially important when it gives the individual persons the right to remember.

The collective memory as well as the written memory can help the individual to redefine what s/he lived through. Not only do people in different stages of their lives remember different parts of their life, but they also re-define themselves and their own identity. When some topics get de-tabuised some people have the personal allowance to remember. Ballinger (1989) showed how some people first defined themselves as victims, and later on as survivors. The re-definition has often happened during the process of memory work. At times the person gets for the first time the right to tell and to remember. The collective memory can create the culture of remembering, and assures that the memory get transmitted from one generation to another.

Some writers, like Laub (1992) , believe that collective memory is a positive process, which results in a collective catharsis and makes events less important, since they are often re-

collected. Collective memory can create a community. The remembering is important and has its collective power. Yet other writers emphasise negative aspects of collective memory, seeing it as a symbolic repetition of a traumatic memory in a group. Niethammer (1995) claimed that the collective traumatic memories do not help to overcome the feelings of horror; but instead that past memories make people into frozen human beings who are not able anymore to feel a connection with other people and events.

Kai Erikson (1995) has stressed that the traumatic memory can create a community, since thorough sharing similar experiences people can overcome the feelings of being »different« because they experienced unbelievable things. She equated the process of creating a community on a basis of common traumatic experiences with those people who create a community on the basis of language, acquaintances etc. Trauma might in such a context be a base on which people create their own value system. Trauma might be a bond which might create a community and can even be a source of political changes. In such circumstances the traumatic events which are memorised in a safe environment might become a source for empowerment and healing. Kai Erikson speaks about the »connections of the wounded« (1995, pp.187), which is the first stage that enables people to come back to the collective although their lives will be never the same anymore. The social services user movement is an example of such collectivisation of the memory, which created a community and at the same time created political changes.

In the small town of Paine, social workers are involved in an important community memory project which includes the trans-generational healing of the survivors and memorising the seventy men who disappeared during the dictatorship in Chile because they objected to the the regime's land distribution policy (personal visit of the commemoration site, Sept. 2006).[iv] The community erected a large monument which is a collective work of the families of the victims. Each family of the victims from Paine got a small piece of land within the boundaries of the monument to make its own picture which would commemorate the individuality of the disappeared person. The stones for the monuments were brought from the whole country to symbolise that the totalitarian regime influenced the life of every person. The building of the memorial is a collective process of sharing the collective memory, which is getting transmitted to younger generations. The family members, often consisting of three generations, are involved in a collective building of the monument as well as a collective sharing and building a collective memory of not forgetting. In addition to that, near the

monument the community has built a place for professional and lay advocacy work with individuals and for doing memory work.

Social workers doing memory work are also working against the processes of »cultural anastesia« in which people do not want to listen to the experiences of violence and suffering of the others, they are not able to hear about them. »Cultural anastesia« was described by Feldman (1996) as a condition where the society at a collective level is not able to be confronted with the pain of the other and cannot bare it at all. Feldman has based his analysis on Adorno's understanding of processes of Holocaust, where the objectification of "the other" was the precondition for afflicting the pain to another person (Horkheimer, Adorno 1973). In social work one can speak about »institutional anastesia«, which is seen in the ways the professionals speak about the clients and write their files in an impersonal way. These processes cause a specific form of the »ghetoisation of violent experiences« and therefore also the ghetoisation of the victims. In such situations the survivors often feel that they are causing discomfort to the listeners who are not able to bear the witness of those who suffer.

The authorised silence within the memory work

Social workers deal with silence in several situations and in different circumstances. It is important that especially social workers who are doing memory work are able to contextualise silence and understands its different functions. The possibility of being silent is not the same as being incapable of talking. Silence can be an expression of personal strength, a form of punishment of the other, a form of self-punishment or a heroic act. Almeida's article in this volume is a dramatic example how people use silence and even the renouncement of the personal and family history for the struggle for democracy. Social workers are encouraged to understand silence as a particular form of talking.

Silence might be a socially accepted behaviour in societies where speaking about pain and suffering can only be a collective encounter but not an individual one (singing mourning songs when someone dies collectively, but not showing individual suffering). Anthropologists differentiate between societies where people somatise their emotional pain and societies where people psychologise everyday suffering. In traditional societal structures, talking about traumatic events is not a common behaviour, and being silent shows personal strengths and

dignity. In some eastern European societies for instance, people still share proverbs, which glorify silence over talking: “silence is gold” (in Slovene language: *molk je zlato*) or “the one who is silent answers to the thousands” (in Slovene language: *kdor molči, tisočerim odgovori*!”). In these societies silence can be seen as culturally constructed response towards emotional suffering. In such cultural contexts silence can not be interpreted by the professionals as weakness but as a culturally specific response to trauma.

Additionally, silence might be the way to keep people’s “positive”, un-contaminated identity, if surviving particular traumatic events might become a personal stigma. Silence is a way to freeze the positive socially accepted identity. In such circumstances again, silence is not a sign of weakness, but of self-protection, resistance or even a protest. There are many testimonies of Muslim women surviving war rape in Bosnia who had to choose among telling the story of the trauma and being expelled from the extended family and the community or being silent and not sharing the traumatic events with anyone.

One of the most dramatic visual representation of the different meaning of silence and re-collection of traumatic events can be viewed in the well-known film Esma’s Story (original title in Bosnian language: *Grbavica*) made by the Bosnian film director Jasmina Zbanić in 2005. In one of the Bosnian trauma-recovery centre financed and led by international donors, women met in order to share and speak out about their traumatic events of war rape. Esma’s silence is as dramatic as her traumatic re-collection when it occurred. Her silence is a culturally appropriate response of women's experiences of rape while the money she receives from the western donors as a »war victim« creates the expectation of doing memory work in a collective setting and through talking. Here the film pictures a cultural gap between the western-talking culture and the post war eastern European culture of silence. The process of healing through talking is not culturally appropriate social behaviour in a Bosnian community. In addition, the public non-acknowledgment of the victim of war rape endangers the persons’ social integration in the society in which the victim is as much stigmatised as it is the perpetrator.

The cultural gap which social workers might face during the memory work was well expressed by a group of young social work teachers from Bosnia in 2007, during a meeting of a network of former Yugoslavia social work teachers at the University of Pristina in Kosovo. One of the young Bosnian social work teachers said: »Always when we are discussing social

work with western people, they are asking us about ethnicity and racism in our country. We don 't want to talk about the diversity all the time, we want to forget what we went through and want to look at sameness among us and not about the differences.« (personal communication, February 2007, Kosovo). Forgetting and not talking through is what is learned and practiced as a culturally appropriate behaviour in the times of suffering and aftermath of a war, or a political conflict. At the same time, the young social work educators want to restore a sense of normalcy for themselves as well as for their own communities and for the students, which means focusing on the daily routine and every day activities instead of the past. In addition their response shows also that in a post Communist society differences and diversity are still seen as a threat, while sameness is seen as a situation which might prevent people from conflict.

Silence might also demonstrate the personal deprivation, as especially people who are devaluated, discriminated or their traumatic stories are not part of the public remembering, are seldom asked about their own personal experiences. In such situations social workers might encourage people to re-member. Fear as a consequence of violence prevents people to talk, "to bear witness to oneself" (Laub 1992). Being incapable to bear witness to one's own events and therefore not talking about experiences of political violence, is closely connected with the socially constructed silence. If a story does not get a collective recognition to be told, might be that the person cannot tell the story at all.

An old woman in one of post-Communist countries in central Europe could not re-collect the political violence her family experienced during the Nazi times. After being asked to talk about Jewish life in the city before and during the Nazi period, she said: "I will not tell anything, we were a normal family." (personal communication, 1998). For her even almost fifty years after the war life did not seem safe enough to re-call her experiences in a society which never reflected on its own anti-Semitism. Since the stories of Jewish people under the Communist regime were kept silent, she too never got a public recognition for telling her personal experiences. This made her story impossible to be told. This example shows that there is a narrow line between the stories which the person "knows have happened" and what she or he does not know or are not able to know.

Silence might speak about the limitations of the talking and traumatic re-collection.

During “memory work” it is important that social workers reflect on the boundary of the silence and the talking. Some people are willing to testify and some are not. Not only asking “the right questions”, also not asking questions at all, is an important skill of social work. Listening during the process of memory work means that the story becomes shared among the social worker and the client, social work user or citizen. The personal story becomes historicised and part of historical and public memory. Listening to the story as well as to the silence, which is an integral part of the story, is the process of empowerment and thus the advocacy.

Conclusion

Remembering is for many people who are victims as well as survivors of political conflicts, one of the ways through which to survive. Public remembering is one of the methods to give the events which do not have any sense a meaning. The desire that other people can witness the events is another means of giving sense to events which otherwise would remain senseless. Langer (1994) speaks about people who remembered concentration camps, and who described these events as the time in which they did not live, but as the time in which they “died through”. They spoke about what has died through them and in them. Laub (1992) has emphasised that many people survived extraordinary difficult situations not only to tell the others and to testify afterwards what they went through, but they had to testify in order to survive. They had to share their personal story with the others and had to make their stories a part of the public story. They were emotionally forced to transform the personal story into a historicised story in order to survive. Some of them were discriminated through not being allowed, or not having the space, to share the story of what they went through. Some people even spoke about being horrified of the imagination, that they will die before the story will become known and shared with others.

In the eyes of Greek philosophers people with hearing impairments had also speaking impairments, and were therefore seen as people without a memory. Story-telling was only possible, according to the Greek philosophers, if someone could remember and was able to verbalise his memories. Memory was seen as a precondition of speech also much later, in the 17th and 18th century. The power of verbalisation was prioritised over that of the written text. The impairment of speech was seen therefore as disability which causes also other

impairments, and therefore people with impairment were perceived as being similar to those described as “primitive”, black people, some white women and children.

For social work practice it is important that the civic disability of not having the right for a personal story is overcome with memory work at the personal, collective and the societal level.

References:

Caruth, C. (1996), Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative, and History, John Hopkins University, Baltimore.

Erikson, K. (1995), Notes on Trauma and Community. In: Caruth, C. (ed.), *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, pp. 183-200.

Horowitz, S. R. (1997), *Voicing the Void. Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction,* State University of New York Press, New York.

Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, T. W. (1973), Dialectic of Enlightenment. Cultural Memory in the Present. Continuum, New York.

Levis Herman, J. (1992), *Trauma and Recovery. The aftermath of violence - from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books, A Division of Harper Collins Publishers, United States of America.

Linton, S. (1998), *Claiming Disability, Knowledge and Identity.* New York University Press, New York.

Langer, L. (1991), *Holocaust memory. The ruins of memory.* Yale University Press, New Haven & London.

Laub, D. (1992), An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival, in: Felman, S., Laub, D, (ed) *Testimony,* Routledge, New York.

Fentress, J., Wickham, C. (1992), Social Memory, Blackvvell, Oxford UK, Cambridge USA.

Langer, L. (1994), »Remembering Survival«, in: Hartman, G. (ed.), *Holocaust Remembrance*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Freud, S. (1899) Screen Memories , SE, 8. (1893-1899), Hogarth Press, London, 1986, p. 301-322.

Halbwachs, M. (1992), *On Collective Memory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, (orig. 1950).

Zerubavel, Y. 1995.*Recovered Roots. Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition,* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago,

Ballinger, P. (1998), The Culture of Survivors, *History and Memory* , vol. 10, nr. 1, p. 99-132.

Niethammer, L. (1995), Diesseits des »Floating Gap«. Das kollektive Gedachtnis und die Konstruktion von Identitat im wissenschaftlichen Diskurs«. In: Platt, K. (ed) Mihran Dabag, *Generation und Gedachtnis. Erinnerungen und Kollektive Identitat,* Leske + Budrich, Opladen.

Feldman, A. (996), On Cultural Anesthesia: From Desert Storm to Rodney King. In: Seremetakis, N. (ed.), *The Senses Still: Memory and Perception as Material Culture,* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Hartman, G. (ed.) (1994), *Holocaust Remembrance. The Shapes of Memory,* Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Frederico, M. Picton, M., Clifford J., Muncy, S,, Ongsiapco, L.M., Santos, C., Hernandez, V. (2007), Building community following displacement due to armed conflict: a case study. *International Social Work,* Vol 50, number 2, pp. 171-184.

Zaviršek, D., Zorn, J., Rihter, L., Žnidarec Demšar S. (eds.) (2007), *Ethnicity in Eastern Europe. A Challenge for Social Work Education,* Faculty of Social Work, Ljubljana.

Zorn, J. (2005), Ethnic Citizenship in the Slovenian State. *Citizenship Studies*. vol. 9, no. 2, pp.135-152.

---

[i] The article is based on the research work conducted during my stay at the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Managment in Berlin in 2002. I would like to thank the colleagues from the Center for intellectual support during my stay.

[ii] The term "shadow work" was developed by Ivan Illich, who meant by it the invisible work of women in the private sphere.

[iii] The visit was part of the Human Rights Tour which was organised as part of the IASSW post-congress events in Santiago de Chile in Sept. 2006.

[iv] The visit was part of the Human Rights Tour which was organised as part of the IASSW post-congress events in Santiago de Chile in Sept. 2006.