

FROM THE GENERATION MEMORY TO THE GROUP IDENTITY: THE FILM “A THROAT FULL OF STRAWBERRIES”

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Abstract: In the work entitled “From the generation memory to the group identity: the film “A Throat Full of Strawberries”, the influence of personal and collective memory on generation identity is analyzed. The work is based on Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann’s theory of memory, with a special review of the books “Cultural Memory” (Jan Assmann), and “Work on the National Memory” and “The Long Shadow of the Past” (Aleida Assmann). Firstly, the analysis includes the mapping, then the explanation of the memory figures which appear in the movie. Also, the thesis which I covered in the work refers to the difference between Halbwachs’s term “the images of memory”, and “the figure of memory” introduced by Assmann: the figures of memory are complementary to the first term “because they include not only pictorial, but narrative forms as well.” (Assmann). In this paper, the relation between personal and collective memory is examined, as well as how individual memory influences the establishment of one’s group memory, and how memory and remembrance affect what we call generation identity. The Film “A Throat Full of Strawberries” (by Srdjan Karanovic, 1985) was chosen as my case study.

This movie is a sequel to the series “The Unpicked Strawberries” (Srdjan Karanovic, 1976). It tells about a reunion of the group of people of the particular generation, who evoke the memories about the events during the 60’s (the time of their youth), so the topic this film is focused on represents the starting point for the study of the generation memory and its function. The aim of this paper is to prove that generation memory has the crucial role when it comes to the creation of one’s group identity.

Keywords: “A Throat full of Strawberries”, personal memory, collective remembrance, generation memory, group identity, memory figures, nostalgia...

I GENERATIONAL MEMORY AND GENERATIONAL IDENTITY

The paper attempts to explain the cause-and-effect relationship between the following terms: memory – generational memory – nostalgia – group identity, and show the relationship between the generation of memory and generational identity.

Before going further into the topic of the relationship of these related phenomena, it is necessary to define a reference point for each of them, and that, in this case, is the term "generation". The dictionary states that the term generation refers to *all members of a genus or species; generation, generations, birth, creation, production* (Klein, Sipka, 2006 : 284). However, it is not enough to explain this concept by means of the identity of a particular group or its existence. When we say 'generation' we mean that it is a "daughter of democracy and the acceleration of history" (Pierre Nora), and it also implements the social (culture) and the natural (time). In fact, it is a multitude of personal and individual ambivalence, which ultimately integrated into unity. Being part of a generation means complicity in a common ideology, and sharing similar or identical ideas and wishes. The product of ideas and actions of one generation is a generation memory. It includes a number of personal and individual associations united in the collective memory, based on the reconstruction and conscious selection of relevant models, from both the experienced, as well as the constructed past.

The encounter between a certain term (a person, space, feeling, object) and the experience, is a prerequisite for the emergence of what Asmann called "figures of memory", that is, for a truth (at least pseudo truth) to become integrated into the memory of a group or an individual, it is necessary to be determined by time, place and a concrete form (Asmann, 2007 : 36). Figure memories are determined by time, space, actuality, and reconstruction. A related term to Asmann's "figures" is Halbwachs's term "memory image". However, unlike Halbwachs's highlighting the

image, in Asmann's idea there are other forms of remembrance with a special emphasis on narrative forms (Asmann, 2007 : 37).

"Memories do not exist as closed systems, but in the social reality they are always touching, amplifying, crossing, modifying, polarizing with other memories and impulses of forgetfulness." (Asmann, 2011 : 404). Everyone's memory has a feature of reconstruction, it can change and be transformed under the influence of its own experience and aspirations, so that there is not a thing like universal or unique memories, but we can only speak of collective or group memory that involves blending, overlapping and collision of a multitude of personal and individual memories whose reference point is - a common point in the past. "Images of the past reduce the vastness of past events by separating the important from the unimportant events, establish the criteria of tradition for generations, but they easily become an emotional basis of comparison of the past and the present and thus an incentive to awaken feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the existing." (Kuljić, 2006:).

Although nostalgia is often interpreted as "a regret for past times or for what was lost" (Klein, Sipka, 2006 : 830), Spasic said that it also points to the "attitude toward the present" and "possible visions of the future," and points out that nostalgia is the means by which it provides an insight *res facti* through the relationship between utopian images of the past and real experience (Spasic, 2012 : 578), and Boym distinguishes two types of nostalgia: reconstructive and reflective (Boym, 2005 : 86). The key point of this research will be the reflective nostalgia, which is characterized by "the relentless process of transience and forgetting" (Boym, 2005 :

49-55). Some of the main trends that influenced the expansion of the nostalgic feelings are abandoning tradition, neglecting cultural heritage, social transformation which occurred under the influence of the development of modern means of information, oblivion, the formation of pseudo-history, etc. However, reflective nostalgia often cannot be distinguished from the reconstructive one, because in many cases it transfers a utopian image of the past as opposed to an anti-utopian figure of the present (Ilic, 2010 : 71), which will prove to be the case with the subject of this paper.

Individual and personal identity is made up of a multitude of characteristics acquired through belonging to collective and group identity, depending on the choice and combination of these qualities, what we call personal identity shall be established. Sharing the same ideals, values, beliefs, ethical principles, thinking and behavior is a precondition for the creation of a group identity, and if we add a single temporal sameness - age, we reach the so called generational identity. However, for a group / collective identity to be marked as a generation, it is necessary to take into account any specific cultural experience (education, riots, wars, political convulsions, revolutions, etc.), "(...) primarily because the crucial generational experiences had to be lived in order to create the shared memory." (Kuljić, 2008 : 70).

II "A THROAT FULL OF STRAWBERRIES": MEMORY AND IDENTITY OF A GENERATION

The television series "The Unpicked Strawberries", recorded in the 1975, was directed by Srdjan Karanovic, written by Srdjan Karanovic and Rajko Grlic. It represents an ode to the youth

of a generation that grew up in socialist Yugoslavia. Opposite to the utopian image of growing up (represented in the series) is a film called "A Throat Full of Strawberries" from 1985 whose main thematic platform indicates the recapitulation of experience from the perspective of the now adult members of the former generation growing up in the 1960s. Images presented in the two Karanovic's works are set in the opposing relationship where youth is the antithesis of the current "mature" age.

In the film "A Throat Full of Strawberries" a series of memory and remembrance by some people of a generation are registered. It is a generation that is growing up in the 1960s Belgrade, and in the 80s, in adulthood, it shows clear signs that once promising young people become an integral element of a mediocre society.

After the introductory part of the film, which introduces viewers to the story of "Branislav Zivkovic called Bane or Bumbar (*Branko Cvejić*), who was born after the World War II, at the beginning of a new epoch." (Karanovic, 1985), the narrator's voice follows the corresponding series of four paintings which indicates that it is the past: 1) close-up of Bane Bumbar, 2) photo of Bane and his former girlfriend Goca (*Gordana Maric*), 3) Goca between two best friends, Uške (*Aleksandar Berček*) and Bane, 4) Bane, Goca, Boca (*Bogdan Diklić*), Uske and Miki (*Miki Manojlovic*) embraced. By gradually increasing the number of people in the picture we can assume what the relationship between the individual and generational is. The first picture shows Bumbar's character and encourages thinking that a significant proportion of memory registered in the film was created primarily from the perspective of the main character. The second image shows the memory

of a carefree calf love and suggests a possible thematic contrasting sequence of events in the present (the marriage of Goca and Uske). The third picture shows the former unity of the main characters that will later be disrupted during the film (a woman between two men). The last in a series of images shows the generation that grew up in a (seemingly) utopian environment and assumes its role in expressing the contrast compared to the situation in the present.

Bane Bumbar at the same time has the function of the main character and the one who focalizes. At the beginning of the film he presents an ideal picture of the conditions under which this generation grew up: "With my classmates, I spent a carefree and joyful youth in 1960s Belgrade, feeling that we were slowly becoming adults, we tried in every possible way (even funny from today's perspective) to be good, smart, successful, happy." (Karanovic, 1985). It is clear that this beginning is an allusion to the frustration of youthful ambitions and aspirations for the future, and shows how the ideology postulated by this generation is going to be destroyed due to the difficulties the new era is bringing.

Crucial to the identity of this generation is the area where its members grew up – the space of SFR Yugoslavia and time – 1960s. However, as indicated above, what is important for each, even this generation, is a combination of common thinking and acts. With his memories of the times past, Bane shows certain characteristics of his generation, which also adds to the picture of generational identity. Members of this generation listened to Radio Luxembourg, *supraphon* gramophone, Paul Anka, Elvis, Harry Belafonte, Celentano, Rita Pavone, Arsen Dedic, Cliff Richard and *The Shadows*, Yves Montand, Brassens, Bob Dylan, The Beatles. They

read Prevert, Yesenin, Rakic, "The Little Prince", Camus, Dostoyevsky, Marquez. They admired Marlon Brando, Belmondo, Marilyn, Brigitte Bardot, Pele, the Kennedy brothers, Rudi Dutschke, Radivoje Korac. They visited Serbian monasteries, Dubrovnik, dreamed of Paris and London went to voluntary youth work projects (Karanovic, 1985).

Parallel to the story of this generation's traits, pictures taken from the series "The Unpicked Strawberries" are lined, celebrating the former youth and emphasizing the idealized memories of the past. Regardless of whether these memories of the specific moment in the past were triggers of positive or negative feelings with their carriers, they are from the perspective of adults and within many years of time distance, read completely idealistically.

Memories of the import of scooters and some of the older guys who were able to use them and opposed to that three members of their generation – Uske, Boca and Bumbar, who still rode bicycles, then the memories of skipping bucks, which was a real obstacle for the obese Bumbar, being weighed at school, the flabby body, tucking the stomach in, or the memory of Goca and Uske's relationship, although it may be interpreted as negative¹, they are not drivers of negative feelings, on the contrary, these events have become an integral part of an idealized memory of the past, and are no different from the memory's images which in the past were the initiators of positive emotions, such as memories of the film at the landfill, playing football, family dinners, bleaching jeans, reunion of the band, first fight, first dance, first kiss, playing hockey, twist, Tale (*Josif Tatic*), Branko's bridge, Tale's engine with a trailer, making love, youthful ties, joining the military, marriage, Rubiroza's going abroad and others. Certain events in the past lose the former

qualifications and become interpreted positively, due to the nostalgic attitude towards the past.

The reunion of members of a generation is a breaking point for launching individual memory first, and then the generational one. One of the potential problems in the analysis of memory is the issue of whether the person or the feeling has a role of memory figure. We assume that one does not exclude the other, so by connecting certain people and emotions that a person arouses in the subject, the memory is formed, that is, the old comrades function as a figure of memory, because they cause memories in each other of the past and the moments they shared. Asmann also speaks about it, considering how individual memory is a feeling in the first place (Asmann, 2007 : 36).

The film clearly indicates that one whole generation falls into mediocrity and each of its members fails to realize his youthful dreams. Miki Rubiroza became a *gastarbeiter* rather than a successful architect. His return to the homeland is characterized by a constant search for what was left. Therefore, the crucial motive of Rubiroza's return is the motive of failure to recognize. Miki doesn't know that "people now kiss three times here", "pubs are being opened on the river", "the sugar factory is more downstream" (Karanovic, 1985). Uske defines him as: "the lover who terrorizes our high school" (Ibid), and Rubiroza, since his arrival in the pub, is trying to keep the old reputation, seducing young Vesna (*Gala Videnović*). Rubiroza, who went off into the world in the late 60s, largely manifests sentimentality and nostalgia, he even tells Uske: "We haven't got together like this since ages ago ..." (Karanovic, 1985). Life in a world where there's "no kidding", "in which he works like a horse", "where there is the money, big money" (Ibid) affects that, with a particular emotion, he recalls an earlier time when

he lived freely, with dreams and desires for the future.

Nostalgia is one of the main motifs of the film, and can be registered at several levels: external –Yugo-nostalgia from the perspective of viewers, the internal – the nostalgia of youth and 60s, from the perspective of the characters and individual-internal level – Rubiroza feels nostalgia for a place that he left. An example of external nostalgia is a scene where the restaurant owner (*Cune Gojkovic*), explicitly states dishes typical of Yugoslavia: fishermen's salad, baked beans, urnebes salad, kebabs, trout, carp, sausages, cabbage with smoked ribs, which causes the viewers a sense of Yugo-nostalgia, and nostalgia from the perspective of one of the characters is best reflected when Ruža (*Mira Banjac*) pours them homemade apricot brandy, of which Miki Rubiroza says: "Like my granny's." (Karanovic, 1985).

Another important place of remembrance is of the games in youth. The desire to return at least for a moment to that happy time is reflected in an attempt to revive the old habit of playing leapfrog, hide and seek, red gloves, long spit.

One of the memory mapped in the film is the memory of the "squeeze" which was a dance that the male members of this generation performed at parties, trying to win the girls of the same age. It used to be performed in local communities and at dances, and in the film we see how this phenomenon of youth transfers to a new era and place – a cafe. Rubiroza's lesson of "squeeze" dancing which he gives to Vesna with the song "Love Me Tender" by Elvis Presley, fully reflects the past and influence the creation of memories of former Rubiroza's position in society. But it also affects the task of the members of this generation, taken from their youth, and which was reflected in their first dance with girls.

Uske, who pretended to be a “big activist” suffered a complete breakdown. Miki greets him saying: “You totally changed your image. You sank a bit.” (Karanovic, 1985). Bane asks: “Do you remember that in school they called you Stupid Uske?” (Karanovic, 1985), and he answers: “I do. I remember everything.” (Karanovic, 1985). Even while Bane says to Goca that he loves her, Uske shall be observed through the fogged window and with his hand gestures, will show that he remembers the constant competition between him and Bane. From the former Stupid Uske whom they mocked (and also loved), he becomes a divorced alcoholic father of a child who is not his, badly-paid municipal worker who pays for the company of young girls to show off to people. The position he had in his youth is replaced by lazy habits, and he himself says that he “rises at dawn, puts on a suit, serves the sentence to the municipality and then goes on his own, messing around with young girls, no flat, no car, no nothing, and his pay is quite miserable.” (Karanovic, 1985) and atters the key statement of such social order: “The thing is, they can’t pay me so little, as little work I can do” (Ibid).

Although the meeting of Bane and Goca is followed by short compliments, it is clear that this is a encounter of nostalgia. In the background you can hear tamburitza playing the title track from the series (music by Zoran Simjanović), which makes their emotional encounter even more intense. Goca will tell her son Igor: “You remember Uncle Bane. That’s my and dad’s friend from school.” (Karanovic, 1985) Goca is here the carrier of memory of her first love. The memories of the innocent, young love are even evident from the reply given by Bane to Goca: “I’m not kidding, anything of any worth in my life had to do with you and our time together (...) It seems I

have never loved anyone else but you (...) that is the only thing that has been pure and right.” (Ibid). In this statement intertwine the two memories: Bane’s personal memory of his first love and childlike feelings, and the collective memory of youth and the time when their generation was free and carefree.

Although Goca at the beginning of the meeting claims that they have all fulfilled their ambitions and succeed in life, because Boca is a successful journalist, Miki a wealthy merchant, Bane is happy with his family and successful in the tourism industry, and Goca teaches in a high school, at the end of the film, following her drunken ex-husband she will ask rhetorically, “Where did we all go wrong? There must have been a point, a time, a place. We really could have done something, and we have not done anything.” (Karanovic, 1985). Thus giving the final comment on the situation that has befallen them, characterized by memories of the former potentials of the generation and their decline in the present.

In contrast to Bane’s pseudo-story about a happy marriage and a successful life, there is Biljka (*Dobrila Stojnić*) and her unannounced arrival at the party. Like most members of this generation, Bane is trying to present his life better than it is. Aspirations which they had in youth: they used to want children, Biljka wanted the ideal image of a woman, a mother, a homemaker, a female scientist, a wife, “and having a bit of everything – she is nothing” (Karanovic, 1985), while Bane was having affairs, withdrawing money from their savings account, and lying. Bane thus says, “Remember when we said, others first love each other, then they don’t, we may not love each other, but eventually we will?, Well, we tried, and nothing.” (Karanovic, 1985). Even when Vesna asks Uske: “Has she ever been hot?” (Karanovic, 1985), he answers pityingly: “No, she was always Biljka.”

(Karanovic, 1985). Here, we see that memories of the role that each of the heroes of his generation had, had not faded, but unlike other members of their company who have suffered a complete fiasco, Biljka's position remains unchanged². Bane will say "no more joy, no more games. It seems to me, there is no more sense." (Karanovic, 1985), and although he speaks to Biljka, leaving the family home in New Belgrade, this sentence could be symbolically understood as a comment on the present, where a gathering of a former promising generation loses all meaning, because its members are unable to cope with the challenges that maturity and the current situation in the society carry.

Like the other members of this generation, Boca failed to accomplish. He will try to present the story of "his zenith", "female fans", "freedom of speech", but slowly we will see the zenith is, in fact, mediocrity, his fan – an elderly waitress Ruža, and freedom of speech – the illusion that is accompanied by uncertainty and fear of failure. Even when Boca says that it is a different time now, that he feels free to speak, unlike when his dad was taken away for three years, it is clear that substantially that time has not passed, because Boca is still afraid of the editor's call, and he will show his fear, saying repeatedly, "I'm not a dissident!" (Karanovic, 1985).

The cult sentence of Miki Rubiroza "We take over the bar!" (Karanovic, 1985) is a trigger for what Bakhtin calls carnivalization, and among its features are *a public place, the time, the rules and laws, universality, ambiguity, disguise, kicks and beatings, polyphony*. The term *public place* used to involve a square, and in this case it is a pub where the collective dominates over the individual. The tavern's space is characterized by an atmosphere of freedom, openness, familiarity (Bakhtin), which is also characteristic of

the carnival area. Carnival is determined by *time* and it is accurately known how long it lasts, in the case of the film, it begins at dusk and ends at dawn. *Rules and laws* are displaced and invalid. Only the carnival's rules are being respected, which are based on ambiguity, the inversion of roles, the excess, the multitude. The characteristic of *universality* is reflected in the idea that everyone takes part in, besides the guests (members of the generation), the manager, the waitress, the musicians, and the cook also participate. *Ambivalence* means switching the roles, which is evident, because after Miki's announcement of the bar's takeover – guests become service and vice versa. By this, hierarchy is abolished and they insist on familiarity, equality, collectivity. Carnival laws are based on the "characteristic and different forms of parody and travesty, degrading, profaning, the incorporation of buffoons and overthrow" (Bakhtin, 1989 : 18). This can be seen in the scenes of debauchery, drunkenness, quarreling, fighting, uncontrolled laughter, crawling on the floor, breaking the inventory, games, songs, etc. *The disguise* has to do with switching the roles, but also with the change in appearance caused by excessive alcohol consumption, which makes the face grotesque, disfigured beyond recognition, which is most obvious in the final scene as the raft floats freely in the river. *Kicks and beatings* symbolically give a new life. In the movie, Bane and Uske fight, then Uske and Rubiroza, Rubiroza and a driver (*Zarko Laušević*), Vesna and Uske, Vesna and Rubiroza, Boca and Tale. *Polyphony* is embodied in the loud laughter, screams, barking of dogs, music, songs, noise, crashing etc. Of the new situation, in which vice and lechery prevail, Rubiroza will say: "The good old days." where we see a generational memory of the time of youth without rules and restrictions, which is distinguished by freedom and belief in their own omnipotence.

III GENERATIONAL IDENTITY – NOSTALGIA FOR YOUTH

When talking about the generation that grew up in 60's, we can assume that they are determined by two main characteristics: nostalgia and lack of ability. Their memories are modified resulting in a seemingly utopian image of the past. A promising generation with full potential, desire and ambition, was degraded and suffered a fiasco. The burden of what they could have done and what they wanted on the one hand and what they accomplished on the other hand, makes their dissatisfaction with the present grow, and the feeling that the past was better and safer intensifies.

The last scene in which the raft as a symbol of all the mistakes, sins, regrets and failures, sails down the river could be construed as a sense of transience, for all that was of any worth, that was innocent, carefree and primarily related with youth, now is gone and has come to an end. It is no coincidence that only Goca, Bumar, the children, the driver and Vesna have "survived". Representatives of the new generation, although one of them, "is studying nothing" (Karanovic, 1985), "he doesn't want to be anything, indeed" (Karanovic, 1985), and the other one has been brought as an escort, are being freed, because they possess what others have lost – the youth, which they long for so much. On the other hand, unrealized Goca and Bane have a chance for another youth, because unlike the other members of their generation, they are given the opportunity to be meaningful, living again through the offspring that they have created.

The song "The Youth" (by Arsen Dedic) is performed by tamburitsa musicians, while the completely distorted, grotesque characters are sitting in a demolished bar, sailing into the unknown, points to the generation that did not manage to cope and did not realize its full potential, and therefore imposed on themselves a constant feeling, or the main determinant of identity: a nostalgia for youth and memories of the past, so badly missed.

ENDNOTES

- [1] Those were troublesome situations in the character's youth
- [2] She has always been an "unimportant" part of their company

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