In this paper, we will present a study into the dynamics of the transmission of emotional traumatic in three families of victims of World War II and post-war communist oppression. This study is taken from a broader research project in which we investigated the experiences of nonclinical families that managed to survive through three generation, and in which post-traumatic growth is present, i.e. the ability to integrate traumatic experiences and provide greater security for future generations.

Keywords:

The main focus will be on how emotional content is transmitted and transformed through generations and how to recognise it in various forms of behaviour, thinking and emotions, that appear in each of the generations. As we follow the transformation of traumatic content, we will also follow the signs that show how traumatic content has integrated and begun to bring new, deeper emotional and mental insights.

The emotional depth of the traumatic experience is what burdens the victim the most and slows down the dynamics of trauma processing. It appears in the form of symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome, insecurity and mistrust. This is found even in victims who have articulated the trauma sufficiently to rise above intimidation, managed to develop emotionally strong and connecting interpersonal relationships, maintain faith in the future, and form a coherent narrative of their traumatic past.
The most interesting result of the research was that all three families, regardless of their diversity, are similar in term of processing the trauma. They were all able to speak openly about their traumatic experiences. In all three families there was a great deal of discussion and searching for the social framework and personal truth of historical events, and the desire to present and describe the events that left such deep wounds in such a way that they would be clear, reworked and accessible to future generations as a document of the reality of some tragic and difficult times.

Another source of trauma processing was religious faith, which allowed all the participants in this study to look at trauma and life more deeply, through relationships and connections between people and through a deeper understanding of human history embedded in a broader and deeper spiritual flow. Faith helped these families to find the courage to make decisions, to face life's challenges, and to endure even the most severe of life's trials.

A third source that facilitates the processing and integration of a traumatic experience is secure interpersonal relationships and compassionate parenting. Despite the fact that the whole question of parenting was demanding and full of challenges for our interviewees, the quality of parenting has been improved from generation to generation, and sincere affection for children and gratitude for children were present everywhere. The ability to follow the new generation and its initiatives while maintaining a connection to its roots is a dynamic that characterises all three families. There is also a lot of thinking and conscious effort in establishing and maintaining good marital relationships in these families.

For the recovery from trauma this study shows the importance of talking about it and also talking about it in a safe relationship until it takes a form that is genuine and at the same time clear, coherent and thus suitable for the general public. That’s when the traumatic story ceases to be traumatizing and becomes a story of courage, perseverance, and truth.

We visited Anna (We changed the name due to ethical reasons (footnote)) at her home in Austria on a warm June day to interview her for research. She was one of the many survivors of the traumatic experience of war and post-war events in Slovenia, who lost her home and civil rights, and continued her life in one of the refugee's camp set up in neighbouring countries after the war. Over the years, people have migrated from camps around the world or made their homes elsewhere. Barracks have been replaced by new blocks-of-flats and houses. Interestingly, together with her husband and her son, she built a new home for themselves: the same barrack in the same place!
During our visit, we were shocked by the image of a modest house, with the house number and the name of the street – Lagerstrasse. The only remaining proof that this is a place that connects the traumatic past with the present in such a striking way. The weather on this particular day was remarkably sunny, and the green mountains were silhouetted in the background above the settlement. Yet, the family, which has found its home in this town over the years, shares the fate of many families, who were deeply wounded by the communist regime during and after World War II, and who chose to remain the living proof of that horrific past.

This major drive for self-preservation in us occurs for social reasons, given that our reputation contributes to our social acceptance and determines whether we might belong somewhere. If we succeed to display qualities, such as intelligence, charm, braveness, etc., we hope to have control over our group-membership and social appreciation (Rochat, 2014). Therefore, starting from a very young age we learn to size our value through the gaze of our environment. An appreciative look will lead us to believe that we have the right to be part of our community, and will further contribute to both our self-confidence and social well-being. A disapproving look, especially if it results from the public display of such qualities, which we tend to keep private, can be a humiliating social experience. When writing this article our aim was to explore such experiences to understand their impact on the families of survivors in by implementing a longitudinal perspective.

Fig. 1: Photo of the house (barracks), part of the former refugee camp (source: personal archive of the researcher)
1. How it all started – Historical Overview

The pain of war and post-war trauma, marked by feelings of fear, shame, grief, loss, and many others, has long been found only in the hidden suffering of victims and their resistance to the principles of the regime (Cukjati, 2018). Nevertheless, until this day, this internal conflict took place not only in the individual but, in the entire Slovenian society. It is reflected in the division, the main or strongest source of which can be found in the mass trauma from the time of the Second World War, and the period after it, when, in addition to the fight against the occupier, a civil war took place on this territory.

Immediately after the beginning of the Second World War, in April 1941, the territory of Slovenia – then still part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia – was divided between the three occupiers: German, Italian and Hungarian, whose purpose was to destroy everything connected to Slovene consciousness as quickly as possible, to erase the Slovenian nation as an ethnic unit.

Slovenes sought different ways of organizing themselves to defend their national identity. The Communist Party, which had been operating illegally until then, declared an armed uprising against the occupier in June 1941 at the request of the International Union of Communist Parties based in the Soviet Union (Griesser-Pečar, 2007), which later seemed to be more intended for the takeover the authority (Borak et al., 2005). With the help of the Security Intelligence Service, they began to systematically deal with individuals and groups of Slovenes, deemed as political competitors, first by violent acts (murders, confiscation of property, etc.) and later by labelling them as “national traitors” (Cukjati, 2018). All those affected were those who seemed to pose a threat to the communist party at the time. The range was far and wide, and no one could feel safe (Hančič, 2015). By the autumn of 1943, many casualties among the population were the result of the struggle against the occupier, and partisan violence, intimidation, robbery, and murder, and consequently the occupier’s revenge measures (Možina, 2019). The highest number of casualties was among the civilian population, who tried to protect themselves and asked the occupier for help, as they did not want to risk finding themselves between two enemies. Consequently, with the permission of the Italians, the first anti-communist units, called village guards were established in central Slovenia (Možina, 2019).

After the capitulation of Italy in 1943, when partisan units defeated most of the village guards, the inhabitants reorganised with the help of the German
occupier. They established their police units, called ‘Home guards’. These were an effective defence against partisan violence, but the inter-Slovenian conflict took on new dimensions (Borak et al., 2005).

In May 1945, after the end of WW2, the Communist Party took power in Yugoslavia. The Home Guards, together with thousands of civilians in fear of partisan revenge withdrew to areas of Austria, which belonged to the English occupation zone (Mlakar, 2003). The British returned most of the Home Guard prisoners, including many civilians, to the partisans as a price for their withdrawal from part of Austria. After being interned in the camps of the secret communist police, most of them (between fifteen and eighteen thousand) were killed in May and June 1945 without a legal trial. Their bodies were thrown into mass graves, mostly abandoned mine shafts, anti-tank trenches, excavated caves, and karst abysses. To the current day, there are more than 600 of these types of graves recorded throughout Slovenia (Možina, 2019; Ferenc, Alič and Jamnik, 2011).

The number of Slovene victims of the Second World War on the territory of Slovenia (based on the data of the Institute of Recent History) can give us a picture of the true scope of the war: between 1941 and 1946 most victims were caused by the German occupiers (32,140), followed by communist partisans (24,443). To the latter (partisan side), researchers of the circumstances of the interwar and post-war killings attributed more than 20,000 additional victims to unknown perpetrators. These numbers are an indicator of the tragedy of the war and post-war violence in Slovenia and among Slovenes (Možina, 2019).

The power maintained by the Communist Party in Slovenia through the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of power has for decades grossly violated human fundamental rights and freedoms, collectively intimidated people, including with the help of trials that did not comply with any principles of law, the establishment of criminal institutions, the nationalization of private property and so on (Kolarič, 2016). Above all, they directed their anger against all those who took part in the anti-communist uprising and their families: the murdered family members were deprived of their right to a grave and were to be erased from public memory. The families of the murdered were punished with silence, and they had to mourn secretly (Dežman, 2004). The communist authorities wanted to completely dehumanize those, who were identified by the authorities

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1 The Slovene Home Guards had a controversial role as they collaborated with the Germans for protection against the Communists. In doing so, they lost the support of the Anglo-Americans, who were supposed to help them achieve a free and democratic Yugoslavia. The communist leadership of the partisan movement, on the other hand, aspired for a Soviet Stalinist republic and rejected Western-type democracy. Immediately after the end of the war, the Home Guards withdrew to Austria, where they surrendered to the British, who handed them over to the Slovene partisans. (Mlakar, 2003)
as “enemies of the people” (mostly due to political or religious beliefs) (Cukjati, 2018). Without conviction, they were sent to prisons or labour camps without even knowing when (if at all) they will be released. They were in fear and felt helplessness due to suffering from psychological violence (Pečjak, 1990). The Communist authorities also limited their rights to schooling or employment, for example they were restricted or denied access to a scholarship, a place in a student dormitory, to further themselves. Their right to social benefits was also violated.

Out of fear of government repression and shame over the stigma of “national traitors” for harassing them, people remained silent about their experiences. Many people, even to this day, remain silent. Nevertheless, at first, mainly by post-war political migrants, testimonies and records kept coming to the public light, showing that the horrors of the communist regime could not be silenced (Cukjati, 2018). As part of their recovery from trauma, they have strengthened some parts of their lives and developed resilience to possible additional traumatic experiences. For example, they deepened relationships with others, made their experience meaningful and developed gratitude for what they have, strengthened their sense of power and the alike. With such responses to trauma, which they had to consciously and consistently develop, they embarked on an important path of post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004), which also helped them to forgive – that is to the process and decision (to accept their pain, mourn the lost and making sense of suffering and injustice) needed for a full and creative life (Erzar, 2017).

2. Intergenerational Transmission of Shameful Traumatic Experience

Human traumatic experiences, as well as beliefs, emotions, values, and various patterns of behaviour can be consciously or unconsciously passed on to one’s offsprings through several generations, as many studies in intergenerational transmission have found (e.g. Danieli, 1998; Kellerman, 2009; Yehuda et al., 2007). Descendants adopt feelings similar to those developed or transmitted by their parents and grandparents, and in the case of unprocessed traumatic experiences, they may express symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder or somatic symptoms (Danieli, 1998). According to Wollyn (2017), unprocessed pain is expressed in victims of trauma through a variety of symptoms and thus, seeks relief in subsequent generations, where due to the difficulty of living with the traumatized generation, they manifest themselves as problems with self-esteem and identity, certain types of cognitive problems (such as anticipation of a ca-
tastrophe, preoccupation with death), affective problems (for example anxiety, nightmares, anger, guilt, feelings of loss) or problems in interpersonal relationships (Rowland-Klein and Dunlop, 1998; Kellerman, 2009).

Trauma transmission factors are diverse, usually, transmission occurs as a combination on several levels. Psychodynamic theories of transmission see the transfer factor in the unconscious and unprocessed parental emotions (Volkan, 1997; Dekel and Goldblatt, 2008). Sociocultural theories emphasise the importance of inappropriate parenting and socialisation models (Rowland-Klein and Dunlop, 1998; Wollyn, 2017). Family system theories see the transfer in unbalanced communication and enmeshment of family members (McGoldrick, 2004b; Gruenberg, 2007); while biological theories believe that trauma is transmitted epigenetically, through hormones, genes, and DNA (Lipton, 1995; Yehuda et al. 2007).

When we talk about social trauma, such as war trauma or life under a totalitarian regime, the important role of trauma transmission is silence or denial. Many painful feelings such as anxiety, guilt, shame, sadness, and others occur when the conspiracy of silence is interrupted after many years or decades (Kestenbeig J.S and M., 1982; Weingarten, 2004; Kellerman, 2009).

The main strategies of totalitarian regimes are intimidation and shame, the former silences the victims, and the latter blocks their initiative, as each of their initiatives are discredited in advance and presented as wrong or shameful. This opens the way to further devaluing the victims, denying their sovereignty, and allowing all possible intentions and labels to be attributed to them.

According to many experts, shame is the swampland of the soul. It is territory that is rarely discussed, therefore, it is rarely revealed openly in interviews, when we are asked details about our family or members of our families past, we try to avoid it by all means, and if we are being revealed, in our shame we try to cover ourselves right away (Tomkins, 1987). This strong effort for self-presentation happens for a particular reason: with an attempt to control how our environment sees and perceives us (Rochat, 2009). Primarily we tend to have others in mind, and see ourselves from their perspective, trying to estimate what they would like us to be and to act. In our imagination, if we assess their expectations correctly, we have the power to regulate our own social reputation.

If shame is abused by authorities, if the victim cannot be silenced by killing or intimidation, then by malicious attributions and interpretations and prejudices, his or her legitimacy can be taken away, and consequently his or her actions and will is automatically understood as senseless, shameful. The subject will feel unworthy as a human being. „A man is shamed either by being openly ridiculed and rejected or fantasizing to himself that he has been made ridicu-
lous. In either case, it is a potent sanction. But it requires an audience or at least a man’s fantasy of an audience.” (Benedict, 1946/2005, p. 223).

The recovery from shame to freedom of being and belonging is slow, and requires more than one generation. In our research, we will illustrate three paths from traumatic shame to freedom of mind and dignity.

3. Methodology and Analysis

Since we believe that there exists an essential, perceived reality of shame in the studied society with common features, which has long-term consequences, our objective is to describe the meaning of the lived experience of post-traumatic shame by the thematic description of the ‘essences’ and structures of recalled, narrated and ‘passed-on’ shame experiences.

The central questions of our research are: What is the lived experience of the survivors of trauma, and how do they articulate aspects of shame concerning themselves, their environment – family, state, etc. In addition, we also want to explore how shame manifests itself in a transgenerational perspective.

We interviewed representatives of three generations of three families. The representatives of the first generation were survivors of the traumatic experience of communist violence during and after World War II. These interviewees then decided for themselves which of their second-and third-generation descendants would participate in the research. The main inclusion criteria required that all interviewees be of Slovene nationality and speak Slovene, that members of the first generation of females were born no later than 1941, and have their own, original memory of traumatic events, and that members of all three generations be willing to talk about their experience.

Below, we briefly describe the families, which participated in the research.

Family A

The primary family of the first-generation representative, who had a very strong consciousness of its nationality, withdrew to Austria after the end of the war for fear of communist violence. The representative of the first-generation interviewee and her sister, who were on the train with the wounded home guards they cared for, were seized from partisans. Communist authorities sentenced them to long prison terms by forced labour and deprivation of their civil rights. After several years, they were amnestied. Then the representative of the first generation managed to join her parents in a refugee camp in Austria. Although many
from this camp migrated to places around the world, most often to Argentina, Australia, Canada, and the United States, her parents did not move, because they wanted the family to stay together (both daughters were still in Slovenia at the time). She started a family there, married a refugee as well, and remained at the campsite until her death two years ago. The time spent in prison left consequences on her physical health, so she struggled with various illnesses all her life, which also prevented her from having more than one child. Her main struggle was to preserve the Slovene language and culture in her family and also in the wider community. Her son stayed with his family (he has three children and one grandson) in Austria, where they still live today. Unfortunately, the marriage of her son was dissolved. His sons are currently students in Austria.

His eldest son’s (the third generation representative’s) partnership also sadly fell apart soon after the birth of his son. Both of them still feel a lot of guilt because of their failed marriages.

**Family B**

The representative of the first generation of this Family B has lived all her life, as have some of her children with their families, in a village marked by the beginnings of resistance to the violence of the communist regime (establishment of village guards). As a result, most families in the village were victims of revenge by the authorities and many, especially men, of these families were either killed in post-war mass killings or (at least) imprisoned in labour camps. This was also the case in family B, whose traumatic experience strengthened their desire to survive and so, to this day, they have made sure that life continues not only in their family (she and her husband have 5 children and 17 grandchildren), but they also tried to revive the village life. The village and its inhabitants have long been humiliated and intimidated by anti-communist authorities, and many have also struggled with poverty, as they have been deprived of the rights to social security benefits that would otherwise belong to them. Thus, all these years they were active in many societies and events, first locally, later on also at the state level (political parties and meetings). Many of their efforts have been aimed at making society know and understand the truth about what the totalitarian regime in Slovenia has caused, and what the consequences of its actions are. The member of the first generation, together with her daughter (her second child) and her family (three children), lives in her hometown, in a house she and her husband built.

The representative of the first generation lives in the same house with her husband and family of her second daughter (representative of the second gen-
eration). This daughter, a historian by profession, is married and has three children, all still in school. Her eldest daughter (a representative of the third generation) is a history student.

**Family C**

Unlike the first two families, the representative of the first generation of this family grew up in Italy, where a large part of the autochthonous Slovene population lived. They are a family that suffered from fascists, who killed two of their relatives, and two more were killed probably by the communists. In this family, in which the parents (and many of their relatives) were active in the Communist Party, some were also rewarded for their ‘merits’. Today, this fact causes the members of the first generation (who later met the other side of Slovenian inter- and post-war history) feelings of shame and guilt – something that transpires from the parents experiences that she bears. However, the activity of the first generations representative’s parents also left a psychological burden on them, which led them to a world of constant renewal of war stories and excessive drinking after the war. Their daughter, the first generation representative, thus, grew up with estranged parents, with the feeling that she was left to take care for herself, which also had consequences on her – problems in the relationship that ended in divorce. Although she formed a safe relationship with her other husband, she remained trapped in traumatic feelings with one part of herself. She partially resolved them with the help of her daughter (a second-generation representative in the research), who, as a psychologist, set out on a path of understanding the dynamics of trauma and resolving it. She wanted to stop the transmission to the next generations, and she and her husband (also a psychologist) developed this as part of their mission. They have two children, that are both currently in school education.

The representative of the first generation, in addition to this daughter, who is from her second marriage, has another child from the same marriage, and one from the first marriage. She moved to Slovenia during her studies and all of her children remain there to this day.

4. Results

The topic of shame, associated with feelings of guilt, fear, insecurity, and others, in families A, B, and C is manifested mainly through three central themes: (own) parenting and conformity to family values, especially those related to el-
ements of nationality (language, culture, religion, political belief) and the topic of identity-related to belonging and social security.

We found that the first-generation (G1) survivors of trauma were ashamed because of their identity, relationships, and social position. The second-generation (G2) trying to differentiate found the same topics as the emotional struggle points. By working through shame, they developed an emotionally richer and more secure position for the third generation (G3). The third generation could use what was previously the source of shame as a source of security and knowledge.

Table 1: Transformation of shame through generations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>G1 (survival)</th>
<th>G2 (differentiation)</th>
<th>G3 (growth, future)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source of shame</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Society</td>
<td></td>
<td>Struggle points</td>
<td>Sources of security</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Society</td>
<td>1. Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td></td>
<td>social activity</td>
<td>freedom to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td></td>
<td>entering the main culture</td>
<td>freedom to create</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>divorce/marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Relationships</td>
<td>2. Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td></td>
<td>secure marriage</td>
<td>freedom to connect</td>
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<tr>
<td>family (relatives)</td>
<td></td>
<td>compassionate parenting</td>
<td>freedom to speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
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<td>3. Identity</td>
<td>3. Identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
<td>emotional survival</td>
<td>freedom to feel</td>
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<td>wealth</td>
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<td>education</td>
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The level or source of shame/pride is different in each generation. What remains equal are emotions, while the activity and surface problems are changing, enabling a person to either restore and strengthen their social connectedness, or to find more secure social bonds and a more creative life. That means more sources of pride, more discharged shame, and consequently, higher self-esteem.

**Parenting**

Parenting has been a source of painful feelings for most of the interviewees, who have their children (except for the third generation of families B and C, who doesn’t have children yet), especially shame at the feeling that they cannot be good enough parents.
In Family A, the ability to be a good parent to a member of the second and third generation was put to the test due to the breakdown of the partnership/marriage, which triggered feelings of guilt and shame. The representative of the first generation in this family speaks little about her parenthood. Explicit references of shame or guilt in these narratives are not traceable. From the narratives of the second and third generations, we can see how the unprocessed trauma of the second generation (its representative talks about this topic with visible discomfort and very modestly, with long pauses) left consequences on the third generation, which shows hidden vulnerability in strong stressful circumstances to the post-traumatic response (Kellerman, 2009).

2A

(Longer silence)... Well, it certainly wasn’t easy. Now...when a man stays with three children from today to tomorrow...

It went so far that we all realized it wasn’t going to work anymore. That it doesn’t make sense that this is already self-destructive, on both sides. Then you better make a line. Otherwise, I didn’t understand it at the time, maybe I didn’t want to understand that it was like that... At that time it was something new for me and I couldn’t believe that it was happening to me, simply. Of course, every divorce also leaves certain trauma, even my children were traumatized then, and are still today. I don’t know a single child from a separate family who wouldn’t be traumatized...

3A

When I knew we were expecting a baby, the matter was clear to me. I thought we were going to be family or whatever...normal... Well, in the end, I have the same thing now – what I never wanted, I got now. It’s my fault... Mom and Dad aren’t together...kids, there, kids here, some tearing all the time. What I had.

In family B, the inability to be a suitable parent is manifested by the symptoms of postpartum depression, which are expressed in both the first and second generation, and from their stories, it is clear that the mother of the first generation also struggled with them. Thus, we can observe the effects of trauma on offspring growing up with traumatized and weakened parents (Danieli,

\(^2\) The number in codes 1A, 2, 3A, 1B,..., means the generation number (1 for the first, 2 for the second and 3 for the third generation), and the letter indicates the family (A, B or C).
1998), which was experienced by a member of the second generation (her mother became ill after the birth of her younger sister). What the intergenerational aspect can show us is the decrease in the intensity of symptoms (from a severe depressive episode requiring hospitalization in the first generation to individual depressive moods in the second generation), and both felt ashamed that they expressed physical and mental weakness.

1B

And my mother-in-law once said to me: ‘Go there in front of the house... go to do something,’ Ooo... I couldn’t. I couldn’t work. My daughter was guarded at home. Then my sister looked after the baby. I mean, you usually happily swaddle a baby. I cried because I couldn’t even swaddle the baby. It was so hard for me to live like that... sometimes that it was desperate.

2B

For example, when I gave birth, I had a lot of trouble regulating hormones. I was able to cry and... I used to be convinced of myself that I was strong. And then all of a sudden... I said to myself: ‘Well, is it possible that one thing can make me cringe so much that I just start crying, for nothing, because there was nothing?’

The shame associated with the feeling of being unable to be a suitable parent was also felt by the representatives of family C. In the first generation, it is connected to the experience of abortion, which causes the representative of the first generation to bear the shame and guilt that she still feels today. In the second generation, our respondent shows shame at the uncertainty of being the mother she thinks their children deserve. In both cases, we can observe the questioning of sufficiency. Because they both had the experience of growing up with their mothers searching for a source of emotional support with their children (Field, Om, Kim, and Vorn, 2011), a task that cannot be accomplished, they were left with the feeling that ‘they are not enough’, and they also questioned the correctness of their own decisions.

1C

And the fact that I had an abortion also hurt me a lot and I carried guilt for a long time. And my friends at work said to me: ‘Come on, come on, there’s no woman who wouldn’t have an abortion.’ But it bothered me a lot.
... After they were bigger and there were a bunch of these situations... I often said to myself that it’s not good for them to have me for a mother who really isn’t made for it.... I felt bad for them because they are so nice. Really one such feeling that they deserve the best mom. A little bit of a wish that I wouldn’t be like my mother, that I wouldn’t ‘fail’ them.

**Nationality, language, culture, faith, political stance**

In family A, which lives in a bicultural environment, attachment to language, culture, faith and political stance there was an important source of survival, and at the same time a source of pain, especially shame, as they were often humiliated and discriminated against as strangers. All three generations were strongly affected by having been negatively classified, however, in their narratives, there are signs of recovery from trauma, as the amount and intensity of these feelings decrease over time. In the second generation today, there are occasional flashes of these feelings, while in the third, there are none. Instead, they are replaced by awareness of new opportunities offered in Austria.

**1A**

... For the locals, you’re always an Ausländer, that’s a foreigner. Oh, we felt strongly that we were foreigners. That wasn’t easy, you know. And when my son started going to school, there was a teacher, who wrote a note for me in a notebook that if my son would still sign himself with a Slovenian name that he will be punished.

**2A**

In fact, as a child, you don’t even realize it. You realize it when society classifies you... Then I realized that for some I was just a camp child, a ‘lagerkind’. On the one hand, I was just a camp child, socially something less valuable, and on the other hand, nationally speaking, not the so-called Austrian child, but we were some foreigners, some Ausländer, who were looked down upon.
But when I had to speak Slovenian in front of my friend, I was ashamed. ... And I remember how my father called me on the phone and sometimes it was difficult for me to pick up and speak Slovene with him on the bus because some people looked at me ugly. ... I have often heard ‘cus’ and ‘Yugo’, this is how they insult us.

Family B felt ashamed mainly because of the humiliation due to their religion and worldview. The village community played a protective role, as the vast majority of families shared past traumatic experiences, as well as values/beliefs. This is shown above all by the representative of the first generation, who mentions less painful feelings (probably also because her life focus was on her life and work within this community), and it is also evident from the narrative of the third generation.

And of course this teacher couldn’t do anything with us since we children were already so well informed from our parents that even if we didn’t know everything, we felt how it was... I don’t know if we were afraid of consequences...

It was known exactly if you were a Christian. Even now, for example, a man will not always proudly say he is a Christian. Well, I’m not hiding my opinion. But I knew that if I showed it, I would probably be inferior in a certain social circle or I wouldn’t rank so high.

In fact, every house in the village has such experience. And you can talk about all this here without worries because you also know other family destinies. Outside, for example, when it comes to communism, it’s a little different. For example, it is difficult to oppose someone who speaks well of communism or attacks religion. For example, when I’m looking for a new company, I always have to sniff a little bit about what people are like, I don’t dare say it in front of everyone, for fear that it won’t be accepted.
Family C, in which the representative of the first generation grew up in a bi-
cultural environment (where Slovenes were an autochthonous minority), also
felt shame associated with humiliation due to nationality or language. The un-
processed pain of her family, which displaces feelings of shame due to a sense
of external threat, is shown when they are passed on to the second generation – its representative tells how her relatives ridiculed her for pronouncing words the Italian language.

1C

Italians have always been doing that way. That you had then the feeling that you
were not worthy. Yeah, I felt that. For example, when we went to the store with
aunts that spoke the Slovene language, the shopkeepers served us differently. You
knew you weren’t worth it.

2C

I felt what it was like to be a Slovene there more from my relatives... But I was
always ashamed to say something in Italian in Trieste because I had a harder pro-
nunciation, and then all my relatives laughed at me. So I think there was a huge
amount of anxiety around that. It was felt how they, as Slovenes, felt threatened.
Yeah, so they made fun of me.

Shame in this family is also connected to worldview beliefs. A representative
of the first generation, whose parents were active communists, feels shame for
their actions and “blindness”, as well as guilt and shame that she did not realize
the cruelty of the regime the parents were devoted to. The member of the sec-
ond generation felt ashamed that she belonged to the nation that brought and
supported this communist regime, while Slovenia (which was otherwise part
of the said nation) was excluded or represented for her as a kind of island of the
solution, as they also had such a belief in the family of her mother.

1C

One aunt once said to my mother: ‘She was a member of UDBA anyway.’ It affected
me so much, but it was probably something like that. (cries) It bothered me that
she didn’t see what she was doing. I thought it was nice, my parents were won-
derful... when we came to Ljubljana, all these important ladies visited my mother
and I thought it was nice. Now I am horrified when I know their role. (cries) At the
time, I thought my mom was ‘cool’.
What I feel, and probably a little carried over to this day, is that all my life I have been infinitely ashamed to be from Yugoslavia; until Slovenia became independent, I was ashamed to say where I came from.

Now I have always said that I am from Slovenia that is next to Italy. Because if I said I was from Yugoslavia, it was like saying my second name is shit. It was terribly humiliating for me to say that... to our relatives and also to Italians and also to any foreigner I met as a child, for example on holidays. If I would be from Burkina Faso, it would be better. It’s was a shame.

Additional topics: poverty

When I went to high school, I might have been a little embarrassed when there was no money for lunch...
And I remember from times I went to elementary school: in school, we paid for the lunch with potato we grew at home – and we were never farmers, but we had that field of potatoes... back then it was possible to agree that if you brought a few crates to school, then you were provided with the payment of lunch for certain months. I know that this is how our poverty manifested itself.

As Tomas Scheff (1990) explains the cycle of shame (the same process could be seen in the personal recovery and multigenerational narrative), starts from the broken social bond or lack of deference (trauma, first-generation), which results in a negative evaluation of self, and triggers shame. If shame is acknowledged (mainly by the second generation) it leads to discharge (in the third generation).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

According to Scheff (1990), the maintenance of social bonds is the most crucial human motive. To interact, we must be able to communicate and to attune to each other. As an interactional device »shame and pride«, according to Scheff (1990), »are the most basic and powerful of all social emotions«. Shame is triggered when the social bond is threatened, and pride is felt when the social bond
is intact or restored. The loops of shame take place within three levels: between people, within a person, or as a combination of both. Unacknowledged shame thus results in low self-esteem and anger.

In our study, we elaborate on three sources/levels of shame: individual (identity), relational (between individual people), and social (between the individual and the society at large).

For Family A – shame is connected to nationality and to being ‘the traitor’. Moreover, it is maintained through living in the same ‘lager house’ at Lagerstrasse (the source of shame for the second generation). The strong connection of grandparents did not manage to free the second and third generation of relational shame. They gain initiative only after the divorce and differentiation in relationships and by developing sensitivity to children and putting their initiative in culture and nourishing the Slovene language and identity. The third generation of this family is now able to talk about deeper levels of emotional experience, and finally belong to community.

You need to think positively. You see, there are not only good times, but there are more good than bad, and that’s okay. In the end, we are all fine, it just depends on how you accept it.

In Family B shame manifested itself in two different ways. First, by being degraded as traitors and second by being Christians (understood as ideology). In the
second generation shame is transformed into the public initiative. The third generation then managed to develop the sensitivity to know how to connect with others, without only being the bearer of the truths and memory. In this family context the difference between the various generations can be observed in how they are addressing shame and repeat stories. Their initiative developed into a public discourse. It has always been driven by the wish to connect with people that are not from the same village and the same religious background.

And now that I look at it from a distance, I think that's fine, because when I meet new people, I know I don't always have to adapt my attitude, but that I can be who I am.

When observing Family C, we can see that shame is twofold. Like in family A, it stems from the notion of being of the wrong nationality and being degraded. It has been passed to the second generation by shaming the Yugoslav pronunciation of Italian language and by having parents who believe in the wrong ideology. We can observe that in this context also the first-generation gains control and initiative by divorcing and by catholic faith. It results in dif-
ferentiating from the rest of the family, and enabling the second generation to start from a different basis, secure relationship and emotional freedom. Consequently, it leads to enabling the third generation to enter the world that is already free-spirited.

It's good to forget as soon as possible and live on, otherwise it just hinders you ...

Today there are other times. Different thinking: the past is past, the present is alive and the future is something you look forward to.

Our article discusses the transgenerational transmission of trauma studying the example of three Slovene families. Nevertheless, the occurrence of shame, guilt and post-traumatic responses across generations is a topic that reaches beyond the boundaries of Slovenia. Undiscussed past, hidden wounds and family secrets can be found all over the world, with real consequences, which affects all areas of our life and might have an impact on the subsequent generations. Our research was limited to three generations of three families. Future research could rely on a much broader dataset, and could delve into undiscussed secrets in nations’ part, hidden shame and guilt.

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References


