

RADMILA ŠVAŘÍČKOVÁ SLABÁKOVÁ (Ed.)  
Family Memory: Practices, Transmissions and Uses  
in a Global Perspective  
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Thinking about memories, particularly family memories, gives one a sense of time passing. It reminds us of continuity and the importance of sharing our past experiences with those close to us. As the editor of the volume *Family Memory: Practices, Transmissions and Uses in a Global Perspective* Radmila Švaříčková Slabáková puts it, family is the essential memory community. For this reason, she considers family memory to be a research concept with “primordial importance” (Švaříčková Slabáková, *Ed.*, 2021: 2).

Families shape our individual and collective identities as our lives are embedded in them. We learn to feel that we belong (Ibid: 1) and (re)construct our sense of belonging by engaging with family stories, whether narrating or listening to them. These stories teach us how to perceive the world around us and significantly impact our historical consciousness. Ultimately, every individual memory or the process of remembering is socially determined (Halbwachs, 2009). Families, in particular, play a significant role as a primary setting where this process takes place. Moreover, family memory is a fluid process, creating and transforming the intertwined individual and collective memories (Švaříčková Slabáková, *Ed.*, 2021: 10).

Researchers in memory studies often take a different road and focus on the macro-perspective, painting the “bigger picture” (Vrzgulová, G. Lutherová, 2021). According to Švaříčková Slabáková, their reluctance to focus on families originates in “the intermediary position of family memory between the individual remembering and collective remembering, between private and public, between local/transnational” (Švaříčková Slabáková, *Ed.*, 2021: 2). The ambivalence of family memories and remembering makes the research more complicated from the methodological point of view but also more exciting and bids for interdisciplinary analyses.<sup>1</sup>

In the monograph *Family Memory: Practices, Transmissions and Uses in a Global Perspective*, authors from various scientific fields, including history (particularly oral history), literature science, sociology, ethnology, or folklore, explore the micro-perspective of the intimate space of the family. What is the meaning of family memories and remembering? How do we see ourselves in them, and how do we relate to them? How do we construct our relationships with our predecessors and descendants through our memories and narrations of the past? The authors suggest multiple approaches to the plurality of voices in the families and the stories individuals create and pass on to one another.

At the core of this research is family identity, intrinsically connected to families’ cohesion and intergenerational and intragenerational relationships (Švaříčková Slabáková, Sobotková, *Eds.*, 2018). The fact that several authors in this volume use an autoethnographic approach

1 In the context of Slovak oral history, there are authors focusing on family memory. First of all, regarding the memories and identities in Jewish families after the trauma of Holocaust (e.g., G. Lutherová, 2020; Bumová, Gažovičová, Salner, Soukupová, 2011; Salner, 2022), or more generally on intergenerational relationships (e.g., Vrzgulová, Volanská, Salner, 2017).

also speaks much about the subject matter. This kind of research is never straightforward and plays well with the “fluidity” of family memories.

The first part of the volume uncovers the private and social practices in building family memory. The chapter by Barbara Ronchetti immediately takes the reader for a deep dive into her family history. Throughout the analysis, she examined their rich family archives, consisting of letters, photographs, and objects from their family heirloom. For Ronchetti, this was an opportunity for hours of sharing stories and reconstructing family memories with her mother, mainly focusing on five generations of women. Her paper is also a beautiful homage to her late mother, who passed away after their joint research venture, underlining the intergenerational character of the family memories – passed from one generation to the other.

The following text by Giselle Martins Venancio, albeit about family memory, goes in a different direction. It uncovers the history of the family Buarque de Holanda, which built part of its family memory in public spaces. The author examines “ego-documents” with broader circulation, such as published interviews, books, and other memory documents of publicly known members of this family of intellectuals and artists, to relate their trajectory to the periods of Brazilian political history.

Yet again, Radikobo Ntsiname turns attention to her own family, but through the traditions and rituals that participated in maintaining and preserving the bonds between the family members on intergenerational as well as intragenerational levels during the pressing socio-political times of the Apartheid system in South African society. Looking at one family’s history and observing particular practices and rituals, such as naming the newborn, Ntsiname sheds light on a family’s resilience when influenced by social processes such as social segregation or urbanisation.

In the second part of the volume, the focus shifts to the intergenerational transmission of social and political values. The editor of the volume, Radmila Švaříčková Slabáková, writes about Czech family stories of the communist era before the fall of the regime in 1989. Through the stories, members of the family transmit values over the generations. This process has to be studied within the context of current hegemonic discourse in society. Family memories do not have to be in consonance with the official narrative, but this can complicate the transmission process and, ultimately, the relationships in the family. As opposed to this: “Through the ‘right’ stories about the communist period, family resources are mobilised, and family functioning is supported” (Švaříčková Slabáková, *Ed.*, 2021: 91).

Ilia Illiev also elaborates on family memories of communism, in this case, in Bulgaria. Following up on research by Daniela Koleva and her colleagues, who collected biographical interviews on the communist era in 1999, ten years later he conducted research at the exact same location. He analysed how memories are approached in intergenerational relationships and communication and how they construct identities.



In memory studies, trauma is an essential concept, along with the post-memory as defined by Marianne Hirsch (Hirsch, 2012). Pilar Domínguez Prats uses this concept in her study about oral accounts of women living in Mexico since their childhood and being born in exile. Their perspectives are deeply influenced by the experiences but also by political and social values transmitted by their parents.

The papers in the volume's third part are focused on family memory of violent events and genocide, uncovering the way traumatic experiences are transmitted over generations. As Öndercan Muti explains, the intergenerational transmission becomes layered and fractured since the stories are often recounted fragmentarily and on various different occasions or become taboo. In his paper, he uncovers how the Armenian Genocide is narrated and interpreted by young generations in Armenia, Lebanon and Turkey.

Philippe Denis focuses on the way cultural frameworks and patterns of master narratives influence family stories. The combination of both conveys positive or negative emotions and contributes to the transgenerational transmission of trauma. Denis uncovers this by focusing on the transgenerational legacies that played a critical role in the development of the ideology that led to genocide against the Tutsi population in Rwanda.

Zbyněk Vydra focuses his research on modern Russian history, particularly on the history of Russian nobility and the reconstruction of aristocratic memory in families. Through analysing memoirs, he investigates their connections to the country residences and the reflections on the trauma caused by 1917. Many residences were destroyed after the Russian aristocracy was forced to emigrate after the revolution, but, as Vydra describes, they were not erased from memory, being passed across generations.

In the last part of the volume, the authors study family memory and identity in relation to digital media. The first text draws the readers' attention to oral genealogies and how it shapes diasporic identity among European settlers' descendants in New Zealand. For Anna Green, a "genealogical imaginary" is the key analytical concept revolving around kinship and relatedness. According to her, it lies in selectivity as people claim specific affinities with their forebears and frame the family narrative in a particular way, reflecting aspects of the genealogical imaginary.

Indira Chowdhury focuses on family archives and their roles in constructing memories of displaced families in post-colonial societies, particularly India. The informal repositories and collections shed light on how ordinary people make sense of their past and larger socio-political contexts. Undoubtedly, these personal accounts also speak to the link between family memory and nostalgia, as shown in the author's analysis of her autoethnographic data.

Anne Heimo assumes the responsibility of concluding this volume by delving into genealogy, family history, and how people engage with the past through their interest in ancestry and familial recollections. Exploring ancestral roots became more realisable than ever with the rise of the internet and digitalisation. Sharing their findings from family archives on the internet and social media enhances the transnational connections between people. It becomes a vital tool for migrant families to reconstruct their family memories and transform their family memory practices.

As Alessandro Portelli postulates in the introduction to this volume, it generates more questions than answers, as all good books do. I cannot object to this statement. However, it also brings many explanations for the readers and the vital necessity of the interdisciplinary study of family memory and the ways the narratives of the past are being transmitted from generation to generation, being just one of them. Lastly, besides being profoundly informative

and scientifically inspiring, this book also reads well, which is always a tiny but significant plus.

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