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Vojvodinian Ethnic Minority Hungarian Millennials Caught in the Woes of the 1990s Yugoslav Wars

During the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, armed conflicts were avoided in Vojvodina, the multi-ethnic northern province of Serbia, but the war still left its traces. State-funded (Serbian) nationalist propaganda of the 1990s did have detrimental effects on Vojvodinian ethnic minorities, many of whom emigrated since the 1990s. Although a considerable amount of research was conducted on the topic of the 1990s Yugoslav wars, the affect the war had on Vojvodinian minorities (in this case the Hungarian ethnic minority) received scant attention in the international academic arena. Millennials, born in the 1980s might be the group most adversely affected by the Yugoslav wars. They did not experience anything from the “old Yugoslavia” which was idolized by many and which did serve as a welfare state for the generations who were born in the middle of the century. Millennials had to face the diminishment of the big country on the micro level, i.e. in their families as their fathers were receiving military conscription and anxiety was brought in and on the macro level, i.e. in the society being faced with open nationalism, alienation, and the prospect of being side-lined. The goal of this paper is to investigate the effect of the Yugoslav wars on the ethnic minority millennials childhood and adult life through their narratives about the traumatic experiences caused by the war. The analysis is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with millennials born in homogenous Hungarian marriage or in a Serbian-Hungarian intermarriage of their parents. The findings show that all of the respondents, on a micro level endured fear and anxiety because of their fathers either went to war or went to live abroad, leaving their familiar for many years, to avoid military conscription. On a macro level the respondents

encountered nationalism-fuelled incidents during their schooling or in the street, that inevitably became embedded into their identities.

Keywords: 1990s Yugoslav wars, ethnicity, millennials, family, discrimination, Vojvodina, Serbia

Introduction

As borders and political systems change, members of some nations become minorities, which results in multifaceted changes for those communities. In the 20th and 21st centuries, the situation of ethnic minority communities in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is widely discussed in the relevant literature (Brubaker 1996, Kymlicka 2007, Papp 2017, Székely–Horváth 2014, Várady 1997). One of the most prominent ethnically diverse regions is the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (hereinafter, Vojvodina), the northern province of Serbia, which is not a territorial autonomy on ethnic grounds, but a multi-ethnic region (Székely and Horváth, 2014) with 25 different ethnicities, among which the Hungarian ethnic minority is the largest and constitutes 13% of the Vojvodinian population (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2012). Following Kymlicka's (2007) classification of three general types of minorities in Western democracies (indigenous, sub-state, and immigrant), the above-mentioned Hungarian ethnic minority maybe defined as a sub-state 'national group'. It is important to note that „nation” is often imagined in ways that cut across the boundaries of state and citizenship (Brubaker et al, 2006:14), thus a Hungarian living in Serbia is understand oneself as belonging to a Hungarian ethnocultural nation (defined by speaking Hungarian as one's native language) that encompasses persons living not only in Hungary but in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine (ibid.). Hobsbawm argues that nationhood and nationalism, are “dual phenomena”: they are “constructed essentially from above,” yet they “cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people” (Hobsbawm, 2012:10-11).

During the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, armed conflict was avoided in Vojvodina, but the war still left its consequences (Nađ, 2006). With the outbreak of the 1990s wars, the living conditions of the Hungarians in Vojvodina significantly changed (Göncz, 2004). Their number

decreased due to emigration (Gábrity-Molnár, 1997; Vékás, 2008), and they were forced to cope with difficult economic and ever-changing social and political circumstances that were exacerbated by and associated with their minority fate and vulnerability (Göncz, 2004). Although a considerable amount of research was conducted on the topic of the 1990s Yugoslav wars, and how were they “constructed from above” (Hobsbawm, 2012) were conducted, the affect the war had on Vojvodinian minorities (in this case the Hungarian ethnic minority) received scant attention in the international academic arena, i.e. it was not tackled “from below” (Hobsbawm, 2012).

Millennials,¹ born in the 1980s might be the group most adversely affected by the Yugoslav wars, who had to face it on the micro level, i.e. in their families as their fathers were receiving military conscription and anxiety was brought in and on the macro level, i.e. in the society being faced with open nationalism, alienation, and the prospect of being side-lined. The goal of this paper is to investigate the effect of the Yugoslav wars on the Hungarian ethnic minority millennials’ childhood and consequently adult life through their narratives. The structure of the paper is as it follows: after the introductory part, literature review follows on the topics of nationalism, Yugoslav wars and the role of ethnic minority Hungarians in the rise of Serb ethno-nationalism during the collapse of Yugoslavia. The next part is the methodology, then the presentation of the main findings, ending with a conclusion.

The Nature of Nationalism

As nationalism is a very complex notion in social science that cannot be defined easily, and it cannot be even stated with certainty whether it emerged long ago or is rather a quite recent phenomenon (Cerulo, 2001). It is considered that as an ideology and a social and political movement, has been very much in evidence since at least the end of the eighteenth century, although academic debate on this topic started in the twentieth century (Özkirimli, 2000). It first started in Europe, but by the end of the twentieth century spread to other continents, such as South and North America, Africa and Asia (Cerulo, 2001).

¹Millennials in post-socialist countries in Europe, as they are in a particularly vulnerable, even precarious position, as the transition from socialism to neo-liberalism has revived class, gender, and ethnic social differences (Ule, 2012: 40).

The idea of a nation stands in the heart of nationalism. It is an imagined community, which fastened by common beliefs, territory, as well as the aspirations about the future. Its members are also connected by a set of values and principles, together with the terms upon which they agreed to live, which represents their political identity as a nation (Cerulo, 2001). Therefore, nationalism is based upon the notion of unity – people gathering around their national identity, claiming that it should be the basis for a political state, as well as around their territory (Cerulo, 2001; Kaplan, 2020). What these people also have in common is their public culture and political goals. According to Cerulo (2001: 10328), “nationalism evokes a strong collective sentiment”, meaning that, despite the fact that ruling elites were those who initiated it, all citizens eventually experienced collective identity. As stated by the same author, nationalism finds different means of expressing itself such as, for instance, symbols, bonding and honouring citizens, motivating patriotic actions, providing citizens with a means of protest etc (Cerulo, 2001).

Mamadouh, Herb and Kaplan (1999) argue that nationalism is rather a cultural form of boundary construction. It cannot be equated with patriotism, but neither with xenophobia or in-group solidarity, although it is related to the sense of identification with a group (like patriotism), as well as hostility towards outsiders (like xenophobia) (Mamadouh, Herb & Kaplan, 1999). On account of its complex nature, nationalism “has inspired intense loyalties as well as deep hatreds” (Djeudo, 2013: 291). More specifically, certain issues arise due to the fact that very often more than one nation lives inside the same boundaries. The collapse of Yugoslavia was a result of the raising nationalism, which could not be calmed down, nor stopped; it has been a product of political leaders, mainly Slobodan Milošević’s politics by the end of 1980’s which went to look for ethnicity (Eriksen, 2012).

Minority communities find themselves in these contexts in a disadvantageous position. The problem of accommodating to their political needs, legal rights, as well as enabling for them to decide for their own future remains (Djeudo, 2013). Thus, the paper will address the effect the burst of nationalism in Yugoslavia had on the ethnic minority communities, more specifically through a case study of ethnic the Hungairan ethnic minority.

The Yugoslav Wars

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was established in 1946, after World War II. It was divided into six Republics: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro, and two autonomous provinces on the north and south of Serbia: Vojvodina and Kosovo. The territory of Yugoslavia encompassed the area which differed in economic, social, cultural, and religious aspects. It was difficult to imagine a region richer in any of the abovementioned sense (Perović et al. 2017). In the former Yugoslavia, a generous and inclusive welfare system was developed based on the principles of solidarity and equality. The welfare state was based on a universal public education system and Bismarkian social health insurance and pension provision, combined with in-kind benefits provided by enterprises in which employment rights were protected (Žarković-Rakić et al, 2019). Social assistance was provided through a range of family benefits, while the universal health and education systems provided comprehensive services that were mainly free at the point of delivery (Bartlett, 2013). However, due to that fact, as well as the fact that it was not led by a liberal thought but driven by unsustainable democracy, combined with numerous conflicts, Yugoslavia came to an end in 1992 (Marković, 1994). After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the welfare regimes of the successor states evolved in different directions, largely influenced by the varied experience of war and conflict, the different privatisation strategies implemented by their ruling elites, and the pace of their EU accession. Although Serbia was involved in the wars of Yugoslav succession in the early 1990s, it initially avoided armed conflict in its territory (Žarković-Rakić et al, 2019). However, UN sanctions in the 1990s and intense NATO bombing during the Kosovo war in 1999 severely damaged its economy (ibid.). Since the early 1990s, different international actors have promoted the reform and creation of states as a solution to the conflicts that erupted on the territory of the former Yugoslavia (Bieber, 2011:1783). It should be pointed out that the breakup of Yugoslavia was determined by various internal and external factors, the most prominent one being separatism of a number of constitutive nations (Marković, 1994). The frozen conflicts were built upon the ruins of territorial problems, resulted from unsuccessful annexations and secessions, based on which Yugoslavia was born but also destroyed (Perović et al. 2017). It started in 1991 with a divisive civil war which disrupted

many local economic, social, cultural, and scientific activities among several newly formed states (Igić, 2002). This was the first greater conflict in Europe after the World War II. Around 200,000 people lost their lives in the Yugoslav civil war (Igić, 2002). Moreover, more than 2 million people moved due to the war. Additionally, cultural segregation that had already been present in this region, “where a permanent struggle for the tripartite Muslim-Catholic-Orthodox dominance for the Mediterranean lasted for centuries”, became even worse (Igić, 2002).

As a result, five independent countries were created, together with two territories that are under NATO led foreign control (Igić, 2002). Namely, Slovenia and Croatia seceded from Yugoslavia on 25 June 1991; BiH on 3 March 1992. The length and the extent of violence depended on the extent and complexity of ethnic mixing. The war in Slovenia was 10 days long and cost 63 lives, whereas the war in BiH was the bloodiest. It lasted 3 years and 8 months and more than 100 000 lost their lives. By 1999 Yugoslavia had broken into five states: Slovenia, Croatia, BiH, Serbia and Montenegro, and Macedonia. Later, in 2006 and 2008, respectively, Montenegro and Kosovo proclaimed independence from Serbia (Tatalović and Dauenhauer, 2019).² Vojvodina was largely deprived of its autonomy under the rule of Slobodan Milošević and it has not been restored ever since (Várady, 1997).

Hungarians in the rise of Serb ethno-nationalism during the collapse of Yugoslavia

Contrary to the constantly built “brotherhood and unity”, in Yugoslavia where ethnic minorities were to be represented in every governmental body, the 1990s were a turbulent period, permeated by ethnic conflicts and the outbreak of hatred and hostility towards national minorities, or towards all those who differed from the majority nation (Savić 2006). The community involvement of the Hungarians of Vojvodina in the Yugoslav and then the Serbian state changed strongly depending on the role of the state itself in the minority/national communities (Rácz, 2018).

With the outbreak of the 1990s Yugoslav wars the living conditions of ethnic minority Hungarians significantly changed in Vojvodina (Göncz, 2004). The overall atmosphere was a chauvinistic, uncompromising, genocidal, as the populist leader, after Milošević, the second most influential politician Vojislav Šešelj spoke out with hateful voice, his thoughts on

² Under pressure from Greece, Macedonia renamed itself North Macedonia.

deporting all the ethnic minorities are commonly known: „When we deport Vojvodina minorities, we show how humanly we treat them. We nicely escort them to the station, and they get sandwiches for the trip. Hungarians get one sandwich per person because their homeland is close.” (Dobó, 2014).

When the wars began, mobilization has taken increasingly violent forms in the beginning of the 1990s Yugoslav wars (Vékás, 2008). In October 1991, a huge number of reservists were called from the Hungarian-inhabited settlements of Vojvodina, and when word spread that they would be taken to the front immediately, a series of mass peace demonstrations in mostly Hungarian-inhabited municipalities swept through the province, with people chanting that this is not their war to fight (Rácz, 2018). These rumours were only backed up by the facts that some of the ethnic minority Hungarian soldiers died in the beginning of the war (Szerbhóváth, 2018). The presidency of the political party called Hungarian Democratic Community of Vojvodina (VMDK), established in 1990, called on the Yugoslav presidency and the general staff to disarm the Hungarian conscripts until the constitutional role of the army, the now disintegrated Yugoslavia, is clarified (Vékás, 2008: 356). The obligation of a minority ethnic group in a war fought by a country of which it is a citizen and in whose territory it is a very complex issue (Rácz, 2018), however the number of Hungarians in Vojvodina rapidly decreased due to the military conscriptions (Göncz, 2004; Vékás, 2008) which was brought by the high emigration rate of the Hungarian ethnic minority (Márton, 2014). By May 1992, 25,000 Hungarians had fled to Hungary, who were later deprived of their inheritance rights in Serbia, and those who refused to serve at home were dismissed from their jobs (Vékás, 2008:356). Márton Attila (2014) in the Introduction part of the book by Angéla Szabó titled *Holtszezon* [Title in English: The Off-Season] elaborates on who were the victims among the Vojvodinian Hungarians when it comes to the Yugoslav wars. In his opinion there were different kinds of victims, first those who were fooled by the propaganda which implemented the idea of Serbian ethnic "purity" and went to the war on voluntarily basis, but of course the victims were who were forcibly mobilized and died in the Slavonian cornfield fighting under the flag of a country that no longer existed (Márton, 2014). Moreover, victims were also those who managed to escape across borders and those who managed to avoid being mobilized, but their health deteriorated due to the banging on the door at dawn and by the ambush of the military police (Márton, 2014). Szabó in her book writes about the 63 Vojvodinian Hungarian men who died during the 1990s wars and NATO bombing (Szerbhóváth according to Szabó, 2018). What is missing from the book is the death of 5 ethnic minority Hungarian policemen,

who died in Kosovo during 1998, their deaths were written down in a book titled *Spomen-knjiga, Junaci otadžbine 2000*, the book was issued by the federal government back then, the members of the editorial board were later had to face the International Court of Justice in The Hague, two of them committed suicide (Szerbhorváth, 2018:131).

During and after the war, it became onerous to be a member of an ethnic minority community (Göncz, 2004). The Hungarian community in Vojvodina was forced to cope with difficult economic and ever-changing social and political circumstances that were exacerbated by and associated with their minority fate and vulnerability (Göncz, 2004). When Ilić and Cvejić (1997) researched the political agglomeration and overall satisfaction of ethnic minorities in Vojvodina, salient was that Hungarians in Vojvodina did not focus their dissatisfaction on confrontation with the Serbian majority, but their dissatisfaction rather involved worsening economic and social conditions, which were the result of the Yugoslav wars (Ilić and Cvejić, 1997). There is a considerable amount of research done on the Yugoslav war's effect in Bosnia and Croatia. When it comes to Vojvodina, lately there has been done a comprehensive study on the ethnic minority Hungarian population which was published as an edited volume in 2018 in Hungarian language (Márk Losoncz and Krisztina Rácz editors) entitled: *A vajdasági magyarok politikai eszmetörténete és önszerveződése 1989-1999*³ [The history of the political ideas and self-organization of the Vojvodinian Hungarians between 1989-1999], which attempted to add to some of the personal narratives of the events of the 1990s, as well as the historical elaboration of this period, a minority perspective (Rácz, 2018). However, the effect of the Yugoslav wars on the ethnic minority Hungarian millennials, who were the first generation to be raised in a falling apart Yugoslavia, childhood and adult life has not been tackled yet, thus the paper's intention is to fill in the gap in the literature on the above-mentioned topic of ethnic minority millennials in Vojvodina,

Methodology

The study is based on a comprehensive corpus of twenty-five interviews conducted with ethnic-minority millennials. Seventeen respondents were born into homogenous, ethnic

³ The curiosity of this book is that the renowned Hungarian publisher from Novi Sad (Vojvodina) refused to publish the book as it shows in a bad light the current political actors who were very much involved in the ethnic cleansing during the Yugoslav wars.

minority Hungarian marriages of their parents, while eight of them were born into intermarriages (Serb-Hungarian) of their parents, thus some of the interviewees spoke in Serbian, while others in Hungarian during the interview, it depended on how their identities evolved during their childhood and which language became a stronger one for them. Nonetheless all of the interviewees speak both languages.

The snowball method (Esterberg, 2011) was used when choosing the respondents. Interviews were conducted from September to December 2019 in Hungarian and Serbian. Parts of the interviews that are discussed in the paper were translated by the author from Hungarian and Serbian into English. The respondents were born between 1980 and 1989, and raised in different parts of Vojvodina. The municipalities in which interviewees from minority communities were born and raised make a difference in terms of experiencing the war induced societal changes. The most prominent changes were in the cities i.e. in Novi Sad and Subotica. In smaller municipalities, which were mostly inhabited by ethnic minority Hungarians (like however The interview grid consisted of twenty questions that built on each other and were divided into five main topics, namely: (1) childhood; (2) schooling; (3) the 1990s in Vojvodina; (4) ethnic identification; and, (5) cultural differences in partnership and family. In this paper I will describe topic number (3) which involves exploring the turbulent times of 1990s, and part of topic number (4), which some respondents attached to either schooling or to their narrative about the 1990s. Inductive analysis was performed, which means that the process of coding the data was undertaken without trying to fit it into a preexisting coding frame, avoiding analytical preconceptions (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 83). Initial coding (Saldana, 2013) was applied for the primary analysis of the qualitative data, which involved developing a list of codes after the first cycle of analysis of the interviews. Since a long list of codes was identified across the data set, the different codes were sorted and examined for an overarching theme(s) (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 89), and then refined – first by reviewing at the level of the coded data extracts, and second in relation to the entire data set (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 91).

The following fourteen themes were identified in relation to the 1990s Yugoslav wars and ethnic minority millennials' childhood: (1) Father got a military conscription; (2) Did not serve the conscription; (3) Family member got a military conscription; (4) Neighbor's military conscription; (5) Went to the front; (6) Reservist; (7) Family issues due to war/Divorce; (8) Father's alcoholism due to war; (9) Broken family/Father lived abroad; (10) Unemployed parent; (11) Anxiety; (12) Poverty due to high inflation; (13) Dread; (14) Physical/Verbal

Assault. Those themes were grouped into three overarching themes, namely: (1) Military conscriptions and war experiences of family members and neighbours; (2) The war's effect on families; (3) The war's effect on social wellbeing. Finally, content analysis was conducted to record the frequency of occurrence of specific themes and thus verify their persistency, thereby injecting a quantitative dimension into the analysis.

Findings

The findings are described in Table 2, while in Table 1, the demographics are shown for the respondent. Pseudonyms were used. Along with the discussion of results from the table, some of the most illustrative and informative interview excerpts will be presented and discussed as well. The qualitative data from Table 2 will be presented in three major topics: (1) Military conscriptions and war experiences of family members and neighbours; (2) The war's effect on families; (3) The war's effect on social wellbeing.

Military conscriptions and war experiences of family members and neighbours

The war was most prominent for those whose father's or other family members got a military conscription. 11/25 respondents narrated how their father got a military conscription, but 5 of those conscriptions were not served to them, as they were avoiding being at home at the time when the postman came, or just went to hide in the garden, this was of course very stressful for them. As Márton (2014) stated those men, who were to hide in the gardens or in the basements were already victims of the war. For example, Angéla narrated about how she had to tell the postman that her father was not at home:

As I recall he did get a military conscription, but he did not go. I remember we were also taught that if someone rings our gate and an unknown person asks about him, we should say that he is not at home, he moved away. I do not remember how he finally got the conscription. Probably the military came, and he went out to hide into the garden because we lived in a

*house. When we got the Hungarian citizenship, he said he finished with Serbia, he cannot live here anymore, and left. He never came back.*⁴⁵ (Angéla)

It is interesting to mention that in the end 2/25 respondents narrated that their father really had to go to the front, where armed conflicts were happening. 5/25 were however called as reservists and were away from home for shorter or longer periods of time, came home in military outfits and went again by nights. This made the interviewee's very anxious as they feared for their father's life. Zsuzsanna's father was mobilized in the end after a few attempts of serving him the military conscription. Her interview excerpt follows:

My dad got military conscription, I did not know that was how could I know, I was very small, ignorant. A man came, I think he was a postman, handed me something, asked if my dad was home, I said no, handed it to me, asked me to sign. I started writing that "L" the first letter of my name, then he looked at me, he said you know what, let's pretend I didn't come. I image is still in front of me when my dad came home and I told him what had happened, he froze, he was angry about it and blamed me - how I would have dared to take it over, my mother was also on my side, I could not know it, we were lucky then, I saw the positive thing in all that. Then, of course, the conscription caught him up, and he went to defend his homeland. He was away for a year. (Zsuzsanna)

Some of the respondents (2/25) narrated how their close family member, brother or some of their in-laws got a military conscription and had to serve the country. For Gábor this meant that his older brother was called in and came back after a few months with a very severe pneumonia and mental problems. His brother never recovered from his time in military service.

3/25 respondents narrated how almost all of their neighbourhood was called in to serve the country, which made their father's very anxious, and they were either hiding or went to live abroad. This was reported by the local news, as a huge number of reservists (disproportionate to the total population) was called in in the municipalities where the majority of the population was Hungarian (Rácz, 2018). One of the respondents narrated how even two of her relatives (from her mother's side) died in the war in Croatia and that she recalled going to the funeral.

⁴ Under pressure from Greece, Macedonia renamed itself North Macedonia.

⁵ Her father went to live abroad in Sweden after 2010, however he was justifying his decision with the frustration of the war left on him. Her mother followed her husband, and they left their three adult daughters behind in Serbia, they live in Sweden ever since. Learned the language and not once came for a visit in Serbia.

They were of Croatian nationality, as of her grandparents mixed nationalities (Croatian – Hungarian). This made a huge impact on the family, which was not the same after that.

The war's effect on families

When it comes to the 1990s wars effect on the Hungarian ethnic minority families, 8/25 narrated about family issues in their families after their father came back from the front or from serving as a reservist somewhere on the border, some of these marriages ended in divorce later. The respondents could not relate their parents' divorce directly to the war, but indeed their relationship declined, or the problems bulged, and their parents could not move on. When it comes to broken families during the war time, 7/25 narrated about their families being separated in the 1990s, which meant that their father lived either in Hungary, or even went to live and work in other European countries, like Germany. Some of them could not even be in contact with him regularly. Zsófia's interview excerpt follows:

Most of all, Zenta⁶ “did not receive” any of the events of direct war. We were indirectly involved, taking everyone into the war who was deemed to fit, the men. What has happened to us, is that my father escaped from here and went to Germany. When he saw that all the neighbours had been called in for military duty, he said he would not go to war. It was the last wave when the men were let out of the country, then he escaped too. He was out in Germany for two and a half years. When he returned, he first returned to Hungary, to Budapest. He was there until '96. He went to live in Germany in '91, came to Hungary after 2 years, was there until '96 and then he came back here. In the meantime, he was able to return home from Budapest almost every weekend. He said that his bag already knew the way by heart, on the train and on the bus, on the border bus, on the train between Szeged and Budapest, and that's how we lived until '96. (Zsófia)

Some of the respondents reported on living with their father abroad for some time, but that they came to Serbia as for their mother's work. Zsolt's interview excerpt follows:

He got a military conscription, he managed to save himself for quite a while, they were looking for him at home, they were looking for him at Topolya⁷, because my parents were from Topolya,

⁶ A middle size municipality in Vojvodina, where the Hungarian population is still in majority.

⁷ A middle size municipality in Vojvodina, where half of the population is still Hungarian.

but my father went to live in Hungary, we were there with him for a while, but then we came back just when the worst years hit. When he finally decided to turn in himself, it turned out that the conscript was not a soldier on duty, but they saw that he was an architect, they told him to go home and when it comes to rebuilding the country he will be called . I don't know what would have happened if he had gone to the military right away. (Zsolt)

4/25 interviewees reported how their father became an alcoholic due to the traumatic experience caused by the war, also some of them reported how their parents divorced during the 1990s period. Judit's interview excerpt follows:

The mental state of my father after the war? During that time his drinking started, but he never showed how he felt! (Judit)

The interviewee's recall of the period of the 1990s Yugoslav wars as very frustrating for their parents who were focusing mostly on surviving the adverse conditions. Parents were tried to hold their families together as much as they could and not reflect their anxiety on the children.

The war's effect on social wellbeing

The war has affected the respondents' social wellbeing, they had to face poverty and anxiety in their early childhood. From a very generous and inclusive welfare system, a universal public education system and Bismarkian social health insurance and pension provision, combined with in-kind benefits provided by enterprises in which employment rights were protected (Žarković-Rakić et al, 2019) suddenly poverty, inflation and unemployment took place in Serbia. 22/25 respondents narrated how they felt dreadful during the 1990s wars, also 17/25 narrated on how they felt extreme anxiety as well. Tina's interview excerpt shows depict the environment during those times.

I still remember one scene... we watched a cartoon. Dad and mom were preparing dinner and when we switched to from the cartoon at half past seven we switched to the news and I remember those horrible scenes from the war and stuff and then we started crying... will the war come to us?! And then my sister started crying even though she was little she didn't even know, she was crying because I was crying and we didn't feel

the war that much because we grew up in Čenej⁸ with children, with puppies, kittens and we didn't just felt. There was talk at school, it was felt at school, but I was not aware of that at the time. (Tina)

9/25 narrated on experiencing physical or/and verbal assaults as well during the turbulent times of the 1990s. These assaults were on ethnic basis. Physical assault was more common between the male respondents, whereas female respondents were experiencing verbal harassment on the bus or in their school environment. Gábor's interview excerpt follows on this topic.

They have beaten me on the street, they attacked me a few times. In one case, it really made an impact on me. I was in elementary school back then, we went up the hill to sledge, three of us from elementary school, we were talking very freely in Hungarian, on the way home a company who was also sledding there rushed us down, attacked us, they started slapping us. They said because we were Hungarians. (Gábor)

Moreover, 17/25 interviewee narrated how they faced extreme poverty during the 1990s wars, which made their mother's bake bread at home. They also reported on having no clothes to wear, their parents had no money to buy them new ones, so they had to wear some old clothes from the attic. Ljiljana's narrative excerpt follows:

In the 80s, until I was 8, I got a lot of sweets, the store was full of everything, after that I had nothing to eat, just scone (lángos), margarine and bread every day. I remember there was nothing in the shops, just a piece of yellow sugar, we lined up with meal-tickets. I lived in a very deep poverty. In '93 I felt it could not get any worse than that, we hit rock bottom, then 1 dinar became equal to 1 Deutsche Mark, then it started to get a little better. For the first 8 years we got all kinds of clothes we just wanted, the shops were full. Afterwards, we took our mother's clothes from the 70's from the attic, we wore them, there were no clothes, until the rummages appeared. We did not go to Hungary for shopping, but we went the "nylon market" in Subotica, twice a year. We bought a feather jacket and some other typical things (Ljiljana)

3/25 respondents reported how their fathers lost his job during the turbulent period of the 1990s and had to start working something else, so that the family could economically endure the adversities. Some of the respondents narrated on how their parents started to do "business" besides their jobs, so that they could earn more. This was mainly connected to Hungary, as they started buying their groceries or other things (like car parts) and reselling them in Serbia.

⁸ Countryside near the city of Novi Sad.

Nonetheless all the respondents narrated on how their social wellbeing seriously deteriorated, which was strengthened with overwhelming insecurity and anxiety.

Conclusion

The raise of nationalism in Yugoslavia by the end of 1980s brought its collapse and resulted a serious bloodshed, the nationalistic outbreaks made a deep abyss between the ethnic minorities and the majority population; as with those who were born and raised in Vojvodina, along with those who came as refugees from the neighboring countries, overall alienation was to be experienced. The Yugoslav wars had many consequences, tragedies, and victims as well. It is a cliché, but the first victim of the war is the truth (Márton, 2014). There is a great deal of "truths" about the massacres of the 1990s to this day: everyone is stating their own, where we "are" the victims and "those" are the evildoers (ibid), however the main thought was when it comes to the Hungarian ethnic minority is that this war was not theirs to fight (Rácz, 2018). Even though, this might be interpreted as lack of loyalty towards their country, it was evoked by the nationalistic and chauvinistic political propaganda led by lead politicians, in the first place by Vojislav Šešelj.

In this paper I gave voice to the ethnic minority Hungarian millennials, who were, indirectly the victims of the Yugoslav wars, and through their narratives I analysed the traumatic experience of the Yugoslav wars which abducted their childhood. Their right for a care-free childhood was taken from them, as they were the generation who had to grow up in extreme poverty and anxiety during war-time, in a once prosperous Yugoslavia.

Three main themes emerged when analysing the ethnic minority Hungarian millennials' narratives on their memory of the 1990s, namely the (1) Military conscriptions their father or some other family, or neighbours got; (2) The effect of the war on their families; (3) The war's effect on their social wellbeing.

When it comes to the military conscriptions, this was the most prominent memory of the ethnic minority Hungarian millennials, as it affected them. Many of them were taught not to open the door if the postman came, however the conscriptions were inevitable and came in a large number, especially in the municipalities where ethnic minority Hungarians lived in Vojvodina

(Rácz, 2018). Even though, from 25 interviewees' only two stated that their father went to the front, a lot more were called in as reservists.

The war had severely affected the ethnic minority Hungarians on the micro level, in their families. Interviewees narrate on how their fathers decided to leave the country, escaping the military conscriptions in this way. Some of them did not come back for years and could only talk to their families on a weekly basis. The war brought an immense tension, which some of the families could not overcome, thus the interviewees' reported on divorce and their father's alcoholism which started when they came back from the front or during serving as reservists. These problems were never treated by the post-war society, their fathers had to face the consequences and stress by themselves.

When it comes to the Yugoslav wars' effect on the macro level, on the social wellbeing, this was the most salient and severe consequence for the ethnic minority millennials, who had to live in poverty and anxiety. Their parents were struck by the new economic circumstances which were characterized by high inflation and overall poverty in Vojvodina. Moreover, as the rise of nationalism brought Millennials in post-socialist countries in Europe, are still in a particularly vulnerable, even precarious position, as the transition from socialism to neo-liberalism has revived class, gender, and ethnic social differences (Ule, 2012: 40), but for ethnic minority Hungarian millennials who had to endure the Yugoslav wars during their childhood, by living in extreme poverty, anxiety and in a lot of cases their fathers having been called in for military service or left the country. The paper added to the historiography of the Yugoslav wars, as nationhood and nationalism, are "constructed essentially from above," yet they "cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people" (Hobsbawm, 2012:10-11). In this sense the paper revealed how the period of the 1990s Yugoslav wars influenced the ethnic minority Hungarian millennials, being the first generation to be raised in a falling apart Yugoslavia, whose childhood traumas caused by the war were not revealed so far, nor have been analysed yet.

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Table 1 The demographics of the sample

| No. | Code | Gender | Date of birth | Brought up |
|-----|-----------|--------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. | Judit | F | 1980 | Újvidék |
| 2. | Gábor | M | 1980 | Újvidék |
| 3. | Ljiljana | F | 1981 | Kishegyes |
| 4. | Natália | F | 1982 | Zenta |
| 5. | Ernő | M | 1982 | Magyarcsernye |
| 6. | László | M | 1982 | Újvidék |
| 7. | Evelin | F | 1982 | Újvidék |
| 8. | Tina | F | 1983 | Čenej |
| 9. | Klára | F | 1984 | Péterréve |
| 10. | Tijana | F | 1984 | Újvidék |
| 11. | Éva | F | 1984 | Topolya |
| 12. | Angéla | F | 1984 | Újvidék |
| 13. | Boris | M | 1984 | Mohol |
| 14. | Zsuzsanna | F | 1985 | Kanizsa |
| 15. | Kinga | F | 1985 | Szabadka |
| 16. | Zsófia | F | 1985 | Zenta |
| 17. | H. Tímea | F | 1986 | Temerin |
| 18. | Zsolt | M | 1986 | Újvidék |
| 19. | Ildikó | F | 1986 | Újvidék |
| 20. | K. Tamara | F | 1986 | Újvidék |
| 21. | Č. Tamara | F | 1986 | Ada |
| 22. | B. Tímea | F | 1987 | Zenta |
| 23. | Edvina | F | 1988 | Topolya |
| 24. | Karolina | F | 1988 | Újvidék |
| 25. | Emília | F | 1989 | Újvidék |

| No. | Code | Military conscription and war experiences of family and neighbour's | | | | | | The war's effect on families | | | The war's effect on social wellbeing | | | | |
|-----|-----------|---|-------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------|-------------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| | | Father got a military conscription | Did not serve him | Family member's military conscription | Neighbour's military conscription | Went to the front | Reservist | Family issues due to the war/Divorce | Broken family/Father lived abroad | Father's Alchollism due to the war | Unemployed parent | Anxiety | Poverty due to high inflation | Dread | Physical /Verbal Assault |
| 1. | Judit | x | | | | | x | x | | x | | x | x | | |
| 2. | Gábor | | | x | | | x | x | | | | x | x | x | x |
| 3. | Ljiljana | | | | | | | x | | | | x | x | x | x |
| 4. | Natália | | | | | | | | | | x | | x | | |
| 5. | Ernő | x | | | | | x | | | | x | x | x | x | x |
| 6. | László | | | x | | | | | | | | x | x | x | x |
| 7. | Evelin | | | | | | | | | | | | | x | |
| 8. | Tina | | | | | | | x | | | | x | x | x | |
| 9. | Klára | | | | x | | | | | | | | | x | |
| 10. | Tijana | x | | | | x | | x | x | x | | x | | x | |
| 11. | Éva | x | | | | | x | x | x | | | x | x | x | |
| 12. | Angéla | x | x | | | | | | x | | | x | x | x | |
| 13. | Boris | | | | | | | x | | | | x | x | x | x |
| 14. | Zsuzsanna | x | | | | x | | | x | x | | x | x | x | |
| 15. | Kinga | x | | | | | x | | | | | x | x | x | |
| 16. | Zsófia | | | | x | | | | x | | | x | | x | x |
| 17. | H. Tímea | | | | | | | | | | | x | x | x | x |
| 18. | Zsolt | x | x | | | | | x | x | x | | x | x | x | x |
| 19. | Ildikó | x | x | | | | | | x | | | x | | x | |
| 20. | K. Tamara | | | | | | | | | | x | x | x | x | x |
| 21. | Č. Tamara | | | | | | | | | | | | x | | |
| 22. | B. Tímea | x | x | | | | | | | | | | | x | |
| 23. | Edvina | | | | | | | | | | | x | | x | |
| 24. | Karolina | x | x | | x | | | | | | | | | x | |
| 25. | Emília | | | | | | | | | | | x | | x | |

Table 2
Themes
emerged
from the
data set

