

NATION-BUILDING AND THE DYNAMICS OF SILENCES, MEMORY AND FORGETTINGS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

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CONTENTS

SPECIAL ISSUE

NATION-BUILDING AND THE DYNAMICS OF SILENCES, MEMORY AND FORGETTINGS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Elena Soler – Guest Editor Introduction to the Special Issue: Nation-Building and the Dynamics of Silences, Memory and Forgettings in Central Europe	5
Karolína Pauknerová, Petr Gibas The Fall of Marshal Konev: Silencing Beyond Post-Socialist Monument Removal(s)	13
Aimée Joyce Silent Traces and Deserted Places: Materiality and Silence on Poland's Eastern Border	33
Anna Malewska-Szałygin Self-Silencing Strategies in Casual Conversations about Politics in Rural Poland	49
Zdeněk Uherek Undercommunicated Stories in Boundary Building Processes: Successful Romanies in the Czech Republic	65
László Kürti Strictly Confidential Anthropology: Post-Truth, Secrecy and Silence in Society and Academia in Hungary	79
Frances Pine, Haldis Haukanes Silences and Secrets of Family, Community and the State	99
Elena Soler Long-Term "Ethnicized Silences", Family Secrets and Nation-Building	113
INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS	131

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE: NATION-BUILDING AND THE DYNAMICS OF SILENCES, MEMORY AND FORGETTINGS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

ELENA SOLER – GUEST EDITOR

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This special issue on nation-building and the dynamics of silences, memory and forgettings stemmed from an (online) international workshop that I organized, under the auspices of the Visegrád Anthropologists' Network (V4 Net)¹ at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology and with the support of Charles University in Prague on October 15-16, 2020.

This workshop brought together leading academics from different branches of anthropology and adjacent fields from the V4 region (the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland), and also from the UK, Germany and Norway. The focus was on long-term silence (or deep silence) in correlation with other processes of memory and forgetting. This provided the theoretical framework for a comparative anthropological exploration and an intense debate on the extent to which silence can serve as a useful analytical category in the study of nation-building in the Vysegrád region (but not only here). The result, as demonstrated in this issue, was an attribution of a central role to silences, of a range of types, within nation-building that can only be analyzed and understood within wider contexts of Europeanization and globalization.

Today, thanks to the "Ethnologia Polona" editorial team who, in response to our proposal, expressed their interest in turning extended versions of some of the papers presented in the workshop into a collection of peer-reviewed articles, I have the honour, but also the significant responsibility as the guest editor of this collective publication, to write its introduction. The current volume is a thematic issue which, due to the valuable work put into it by many parties, has reached far beyond its initial expectations. This is why, we believe that the current publication can be of interest not just to

¹ https://www.eth.mpg.de/4638135/Visegrad_Network (accessed: 01.11.2021).

anthropologists and specialists in nationalist and memory studies, but also to a wider public beyond academia.

The introduction is structured in three parts. The first part contextualizes the period covered, while trying to define what we mean by the main concept of the issue: silences. The aim here is to provide a preliminary exposition of the ideas, questions and themes I expected to be covered in the subsequent articles. In the second part, the seven articles that comprise this volume, offering a rich variety of ethnographic material, innovative concepts and theoretical questions, will be briefly introduced. Thereafter, I propose some concluding and reflective remarks.

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL LOOK AT SILENCES AND NATION-BUILDING

Silence has long been a significant theme in anthropological studies. In his book, Du *silence* (1997), David Le Breton demonstrated (as have other authors, such as Keith Basso (1970; 1990)) that the meanings and uses attributed to silence (both individual or collective) are neither self-evident nor stable across, or even within, different cultural and historical locations and contexts. Although it may seem to be its opposite, silence – as is the case for other corporal gestures – can be considered in the same terms as verbal language: as another mode of human communication.

It can be conscious and unconscious; forced, as a result of social, political, economic and even religious contexts or circumstances, or voluntary. It is one thing to discuss silences under a totalitarian regime, like those experienced in Europe in the twentieth century, when millions of people were forced into silence. Or, as historian Orlando Figes (2007) put it, when describing private lives in Stalin's Russia, what people said had to be self-controlled and not too loud. Silences under these regimes were a consequence of structural political oppression: the state, and the whole apparatus of various actors that it deployed, created a social atmosphere of fear, distrust, risk and uncertainty, which made people vulnerable and forced them into silence.

It is quite a different thing to study silences in post-war situations and/or following periods of ethnic cleansing, when terrible memories can leave people mute, without words. This muteness does not, however, mean that people forget, as John Borneman has argued in his book *Political Crime and the Memory of Loss* (2011, 63): "During an ethnic cleansing, some central aspects of the loss remain unregistered and escape recognition at the actual time of the happening: language and the ordering mechanism of the symbolic order fail to register what is often called 'the unspeakable'." In other words, narratives of death and loss are shrouded in silence.

A further distinct context, as will be argued in this volume, is that of the study of silences in contemporary democratic post-1989 Central and Eastern European nationstates, also members of the EU. For this is a region which was deeply marked by World War I (and the subsequent consequences of the Treaty of Versailles) and World War II (with all its memories, silences and forgettings mainly related to the Holocaust, or *Porajmos* for the Roma), as well as by the subsequent post-war atrocities, ethnic cleansing and displacement of people all around Europe (Judt 2005). These traumas of war were followed by more than four decades of communist totalitarian systems until their fall in 1989, and the subsequent unexpected, fast and sometimes harsh transitions to democracy and a global market economy that came thereafter.

Within this context, the call for contributions included the following list of suggested themes.

- Silences and the imagined community (Anderson 1983). Here, my suggestion was that long-term shared silences, as a strategic tool of communication, might bring a community together, especially when silences are perceived as a continuation of the past. Such silences can therefore be considered an essential aspect of the functioning of society. However, what happens when these shared silences, or communities of silences, at familial, local, regional and even national levels, are broken and contested: can such ruptures tear a community apart?
- What is the relationship between nation-making (in its attempt to give an image of a unified community), minorities and silencing? The discussion in this instance focuses on teasing out the identities (ethnic, religious, etc.) of the carriers of both old silences and new ones, as well as the respective substantive foundations of these silences. Can we talk about keeping the nation protected from any sense of internal contradiction through silencing "others"?
- To what extent are memory and silence frameworks (Halbwachs 1992) related to such issues as: inclusion and exclusion; truth and lies; purity and impurity; continuity and change; stability and threat; acknowledgement and indifference, etc.?
- What role do emotions play in silence and memory practices? What do people experience: fear, happiness, sadness, shame, sorrow, relief, nostalgia, etc.?
- How are silences politically instrumentalized in connection with official heritage, commemorations, memorials, national myths and ritual? What particularly striking examples of this phenomenon can be observed in this region?
- The materiality of silences. How do such "silencedscapes" (Soler 2019) as ruins, or mass graves as "landscapes of terror" (Ferrándiz 2015), speak for themselves, relate to or even define the contexts around them?
- Finally, following the work of Kendall R. Phillips and G. Mitchell Reyes (2011) talking about "global memoryscapes": what happens when shared silences, or public silences, are no longer grounded within the confines of traditional nation-states, but reach different European or globalized frameworks and temporalities?

Underlying each of these suggested themes is the question: what can we learn from these silences, and how can they help us to understand some of the challenges that Europe and the world are facing today?

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE ISSUE

In response to these initial questions, themes and ideas emerged the seven articles that comprise this issue. These texts both offer a rich set of vivid ethnographic examples and propose novel theoretical frameworks and questions.

The opening two papers move us into the arena of the materiality of silences. The first article, "The Fall of Marshal Konev: Silencing Beyond Post-Socialist Monument Removal(s)" by Petr Gibas and Karolina Pauknerová explores the ways in which the controversial Marshal Ivan Stepanovich Konev statue in Prague has been de- and re-contextualised by means of various material interventions and performances that finally led to its definitive removal on April 3, 2020. Drawing upon this act of political and social iconoclasm of a Soviet figure (that played an essential military role in the liberation of the Czechs from Nazi occupation), the authors, inspired by an archaeological sensitivity, suggest a need to critically rethink the concept of post-socialism. Their novel theoretical proposal aims to reinvigorate this concept in CEE in relation to the dynamic processes of the geopolitics of memory, remembering, forgetting and silencing.

The second article, "Silent Traces and Deserted Places: Materiality and Silence on Poland's Eastern Border" by Aimee Joyce, touches upon the issue of the materiality of silences from a different angle. Through two specific barely noticeable and yet powerful sites related to historical conflict – in this case to the Holocaust – in a town on Poland's Eastern border, Joyce ethnographically demonstrates the relationship between silences and traces. The author analyses how silenced acts of historical violence are not locally forgotten, but rather suspended in the landscape. The author emphasizes how silencing creates gaps in the official historical narrative of the nation, as Rolph-Trouillot (1995) noted in the book *Silencing the Past*, and can also be generative in its capacity to construct cohesive local communities. Therefore, alongside the importance of neighbourliness in community building, local practices of silences can also be strategically used in order to guarantee conviviality (at all levels, not just the local).

In the third article, "Self-silencing Strategies in Casual Conversations about Politics in Rural Poland", Anna Malewska-Szałygin considers a constructive dimension to self-silencing. Through different examples based on interviews conducted among villagers in the mountainous Nowy Targ county in Southern Poland at the beginning of the 21st century, the author excellently demonstrates how, in a hostile socio-political environment, self-silencing or muting one's voice when talking about politics and the use of rhetorical techniques (such as indirect speech, irony, allusions, etc.) can be strategically used to make an adversary's voice more audible, to avoid definitive judgement and to create a safer space for exchanging opinions. The author tackles this issue of a constructive and positive aspect of self-silencing in order to safeguard dialogue and avoid the polarization of society, not just in casual conversation, but also in wider public debate. This text, therefore, pursues the concept of the issue by examining how silences and self-silencing can be an essential element in the successful functioning of a community (at both micro and macro levels).

The fourth article, "Undercommunicated Stories in Boundary Building Processes: Successful Romanies in the Czech Republic" by Zdeněk Uherek, deals with the issue of de-ideologization and de-ethnicization in everyday interactions and conversations. The text documents narratives of social and cultural experiences that do not have a strong potential for creating national or ethnic borders, because their stories are regionally universal. The narratives are told by Romani, but this is not apparent in the stories themselves. In the text, the author demonstrates that the stress on group boundaries in both literature and society with regard to the Roma issue is exaggerated. There are numerous topics where the boundaries between many Romanies and other inhabitants of the Czech Republic are not visible. The author suggests that the non-communication of these shared experiences and the over-ethnicization of a divide between the discourses of the Romani and the rest of the population does not realistically mirror the everyday lives in the common state.

The fifth article, "Strictly Confidential Anthropology: Post-truth, Secrecy and Silence in Society and Academia in Hungary" by Lászlo Kurti, tackles the issue of how academic life is not immune to secrecy, silence and covert practices. Drawing upon a long-term personal and professional anthropological experience that dates back to the times of state socialist ideology in both Romania and Hungary, the author comparatively demonstrates how Hungarian academic life strategically continues to rely on covert programs, hidden or silenced information and institutionalized hegemony in order to promote, reproduce and maintain its structures and interests. The article thus demonstrates how in different contexts silence, secrecy and power have been, and continue to be, intrinsically interrelated.

The sixth article, "Silences and Secrets of Family, Community and the State" by Haldis Haukanes and Frances Pine, suggests that silence is more about remembering than forgetting. Drawing on ethnographic work and particular examples that date back to the late 1970s in Poland (in the case of Frances Pine) and the beginning of the 1990s in the Czech Republic (in the case of Haldis Haukanes) up to the present, the authors introduce the term *the walls of silence* in order to explore the roles silences play in the relational and dynamic processes of drawing boundaries between people and the state, between generations (grandparents, parents and children) and within communities (between insiders and outsiders). By looking at different registers and domains of silence, and the ways in which they are strategically used at different levels (micro and macro levels), the authors suggest that silence can be complicated when crossing social spaces and relations of both intimacy and power, but that despite of this is essential in anthropological studies. In the seventh and the final article, "Long-Term Ethnicized Silences, Family Secrets and Nation-building", through a particular ethnographic case study I address the dynamic relationship between long-term ethnicized silences, family secrets and nationbuilding in Central and Eastern Europe. How have modern nation-states been imagined and formed on the basis of these long-term silences? In order to illustrate what I believe could be the contribution to anthropology (principally to nationalism studies) enabled by introducing the analytical category of *ethnicized silences*, the paper focuses on an analysis of the life story and identity journey of a self-identified "Slovak woman with Hungarian-Roma roots" who settled in the Czech Republic in 2009. The term *ethnicized silences* proposed in this article draws attention to the relationship between silence, ethnicity, power and agency. For nation-states that are based on the principle of ethno-cultural homogeneity it is suggested that this term can be used to identify ethnic power dynamics within a hierarchical social structure. In this sense, it is suggested that silences of this kind can be considered an integral element in the complex processes of nation-building (from the bottom up).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can say that even though we could agree that some silences are necessary, especially those that are related to meditation, intimacy and reflection – these being highly needed in today's society – and that there are some moments when silence is demanded during social interaction, there are also other kind of silences, disturbing silences, in Central and Eastern Europe that are far removed from such connotations.

Perhaps, there might be another way of putting this – not as a distinction between positive and negative silences – but as different implications of the way in which people use silences to deal with disturbing memories of the past. Several of the articles in this volume suggest that silences enable the community to live together in the face of divisive and horrifying memories, but also suggest that, in the very process of avoiding these tensions, the resulting strategic silence implicitly preserves the memories themselves and their dangerously destructive potential.

The result is the existence of multiple long-term silences found at both micro and macro levels, and in some cases persisting over generations. Therefore, we believe that if recognized, collected and analyzed (which is the main goal of this thematic issue), apart from stimulating debate and generating new theoretical frameworks, these silences can enable not only a better understanding of how nations have been (and are still being) built in the V4 region, but also illuminate some of the most significant challenges today facing Europe and the world.

In this regard, and in order to conclude the introduction to this thematic issue, it could be suggested, at least as a warning, that the extent and types of silences might be

used as a marker of the state (or quality) of our contemporary EU democracies. This could be done not just by the analysis of the short term inflections of existing measures of long-term silences (with their different dynamics, temporalities, domains, meanings, uses and abuses, whether contested or broken), but also through a multisited research programme which could gauge the social increase and decrease of them.

But this is just a hypothesis, so I leave this open question here to reflect while reading the following texts.

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SHORT BIO ABOUT THE GUEST EDITOR

Elena Soler holds a Ph.D in Social Anthropology from the University of Barcelona (2005). Since 2009, she has been a senior lecturer at different Central European Programmes at Charles University and The University of New York in Prague. In recent years she has been working on an independent project entitled: "Long-term silences and nation-building in Central Europe" (expected to be published in book format in 2022–23). Other publications related to the concerns of this thematic issue are: Soler, Elena and Calvo, Luís (eds) (2016) *Transiciones culturales. Perspectivas desde Europa Central y del Este.* Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), and, in relation to the Spanish Civil War, the Republican Spanish exile and the Holocaust, the 2020 article "Silencio, secretos encubiertos y memoria en la vida y obra de Jorge Semprún". *NASLEDJE*, 335–349.

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THE FALL OF MARSHAL KONEV: SILENCING BEYOND POST-SOCIALIST MONUMENT REMOVAL(S)

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This article¹ traces the developments that led to the 2020 removal of a memorial to Marshal Ivan Stepanovich Konev from a square in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic. In the article, inspired by an archaeological sensitivity to context, we explore the ways in which the monument has become de-contextualised and re-contextualised by means of various material interventions and performances. This investigation allows us to detail the transformations of the monument within a changing context, and show how selective de-contextualization and re-contextualization allow for the amplification and silencing of different voices. In so doing, we interrogate what role(s) socialism, or rather its image – the spectre of socialism – plays in these dynamics of de- and re-contextualization. Through the case of the monument, we assert that, while the spectre of socialism and its invocation are locally specific, they also go beyond the local context because the socialist spectre is present and contingent both locally *and* globally. Consequently, we suggest that by a careful linking of local and global mechanisms of how the notion of socialism is employed in order to legitimize and delegitimize competing views, it is possible to open up a novel and productive re-conceptualisation of "post-socialism" in relation to the (geo)politics of memory, remembering, forgetting and silencing, which goes beyond the confines of post-socialism as a descriptive marker and an already worn out concept.

KEYWORDS: De-commemoration, spectre of socialism, re-conceptualising post-socialism, public monuments

Immediately after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, public spaces in Prague, the capital of the then Czechoslovakia, as well as in other settlements all across the country witnessed

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numerous acts of what Light (2004) calls de-commemoration and new commemoration. Streets and other public spaces were stripped of ideologically charged names, and the most conspicuous monuments of and to the socialist past were removed one by one. Naiman (2003, xiv) argues that "Totalitarianism is distinguished by a kind of epistemological imperialism, the battle for the 'symbolic occupation' of space and time." In the case of socialist Czechoslovakia, symbolic occupation was achieved mainly through imbuing toponymy and public art (including monuments) with particular ideological resonance. In such a light, the iconoclasm and acts of renaming right after the socialist regime's fall can be understood as attempts by the emerging post-socialist state and society to break a perceived symbolic spell cast by the socialist state and ideology over public space. The need to force socialism out symbolically and to fill in spaces with new symbols, meanings and imaginaries was – at least in some instances – acutely felt. Gibas (2013), for example, notes that metro stations in Prague were renamed, on the basis of public consultations and expert deliberations, even before socialist Czechoslovakia was itself renamed and ceased to formally exist in 1990.

The iconoclasm and renaming that occurred after the fall of state socialism can be seen as a post-socialist phenomenon: a reaction to the fall of the previous socialist regime and a strategy to symbolically reclaim (public) space. In this article, we focus on a seemingly similar act of iconoclasm: the 2020 removal of a statue of the Soviet Marshal Ivan Konev from its pedestal. Ivan Stepanovic Konev was a Soviet general and a Marshal of the Soviet Union, who commanded the Red Army forces that liberated much of Eastern and Central Europe during World War II. As such, he was the first Allied commander to enter Prague in May 1945 and was hailed throughout socialism as a liberator of Prague. The monument to Konev discussed in this article was built on May 9, 1980, on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia from Nazi occupation by the Red Army.

As it took place in Prague, the capital of what has since 1989 become the Czech Republic, and was embellished with proclamations and arguments that might sound reminiscent of those of the 1990s, the 2020 removal of the monument to Konev could easily be dismissed as yet another post-socialist de-commemoration. However, we argue that the removal of Marshal Konev is not only different from that of the many Lenins who were toppled in the 1990s, but that it can for that very reason allow us to critically rethink post-socialism as a concept through its relation to silencing.

Our considerations of what happened to Marshal Konev in Prague are based on an analysis of material interventions and discursive performances concerning the monument. In developing this approach, we have been particularly inspired by archaeological theory: especially its approach to, understanding of and heightened sensitivity for context. By closely inspecting the material interventions made to the monument – and to a lesser extent also the corresponding discursive performances – with a particular attention paid to the role and transformation of the immediate context of the monument, we illuminate the reasons for and ways in which the past has been invoked as part of a dynamics of silencing. In other words, we interrogate the role of context – both general, socio-political, and immediate, socio-material – and link the processes of re-contextualization and de-contextualization in their material and discursive forms to contemporary issues of de- and re-commemoration. In doing so, we suggest that socialism is but one of many impetuses at play in these events, alongside other factors such as current (post-transformation) economic and local political, as well as geopolitical, issues, and numerous imaginaries inspired by these. This investigation allows us to think through silencing from the perspective of a spatial location associated with post-socialism – that of a CEE capital – but also to move beyond its confines. As a result, a potential for re-conceptualising "post-socialism" in relation not only to memory, remembering, forgetting and silencing opens up.

Before we get to such considerations, we first briefly discuss the theoretical underpinnings of our article, namely the notion of post-socialism and that of context. Then, we tell the story of the memorial to Marshal Konev in Prague and the events which led to its removal, and zoom in on the immediate context of the monument and its transformation. Finally, we return to the question of silencing beyond post-socialism.

ON CONTEXT AND POST-SOCIALISM

In an immense array of scholarly literature from the last 30 or so years, Prague, alongside other cities from around the region of Central and Eastern Europe, has frequently been labelled with the attribute of "post-socialist".² Often, however, this would function simply as a spatial or temporal marker, a shortcut for "a city in the post-1989/1991 CEE region" (Tuvikene 2016, 143). At the same time, post-socialism often connotes geographical, epistemological and political stances and imaginaries and in turn obscures rather than illuminates. This leads Müller (2019, 534) to argue for abandoning the concept of post-socialism altogether because it "has both lost its object and comes with problematic conceptual and problematic implications".

Moreover, with the passing time, both socialism as a lived experience and postsocialism as a (political and scholarly) idea have ceased to be – if they ever were – a unifying and "prime reference point for people in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, but rather one among many" (Müller 2019, 539). In other words, socialism as a horizon of experience and political practice has become less and less of primary importance, with other more immediate experiences coming to the fore: these include

² The full list of articles using or referring to this term from across anthropology, geography, sociology and other disciplines, including writings by the two authors of the present article, would be practically infinite.

socio-economic inequalities formed not only by the economic transformation after the fall of state socialism, but also stemming from contemporary global capitalism with its internal tensions and predicaments, such as the 2008 economic as well as the ongoing and intensifying ecological crises.

We are no longer post-socialist in the sense of a historical, territorial or political predetermination. At the same time, however, socialism keeps hovering above our heads as a spectre invoked whenever needed for political or economic reasons. This "zombie socialism" as Chelcea and Druta (2016, 522) characterise it, has become an inherent "ingredient of neoliberalism" not only in CEE, but also elsewhere. It haunts political competition, economic policy making and political parties' infighting in countries as diverse as not just the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, but also the USA and UK.³ As Szadkowski, Moll and Kuligowski (2019, 9) observe, while "Central European countries are today spearheading the anti-communist paranoia ... the role played by anti-communism in contemporary capitalism is not peripheral or accidental, but rather overwhelming and systemic." Emboldened by the fall of socialist regimes, the spectre of socialism gains political and emotional, even affective, power; in its post-socialist life, socialism has become both undead and de-territorialised.

Thus, although we might not be post-socialist in the sense imagined right after the fall of the regimes in 1989/1991 (by scholars like Verdery 1996), we might have become post-socialist in a different vein: for we keep being haunted by post-socialist socialism. This condition, however, is not uniform. De-commemoration in relation to the state socialism of the 20th century, as well as the more general invocation of the spectre of socialism, happen in different contexts shaped by particular local and localised conditions. For example, the recent removals of monuments in Poland or Hungary, as well as the one explored in this article, are fuelled by imaginaries and respond to, as well as act as catalysts for, political developments that share certain similarities, but also differ in many respects, including those of the historical and urban contexts in which they take place (deTar 2015; Szcześniak and Zaremba 2019). Context then becomes crucial for understanding the ways in which the de-territorialized post-socialist spectre of socialism is intertwined with and underscores a dynamics of silencing.

A situated analysis of the processes of de-commemoration is needed to understand the ways in which silencing is and has been deployed in a particular (geo)political context. Such analyses are part of contemporary explorations of the ambiguous lives of monuments, both in former socialist countries and beyond. For example, Lehti, Jutila, and Jokisipilä (2008) have explored the removal and subsequent relocation of the "Bronze Soldier of Tallinn", a World War II memorial, in relation to contemporary

³ As showcases the recent usage of the label of being a "socialist" as derogatory and scaremongering in the cases of, for example, democratic senator Bernie Sanders and former UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Estonian nationalism. In a similar vein, Pušnik (2017) links contemporary experience and the politics of memory by examining the ways in which the remembering and forgetting of both World War II and socialist Yugoslavia enable Slovenian nationalism to appropriate anti-totalitarian and anti-communist discourses. Klymenko (2020) uses the case study of the removal and replacement of a Lenin statue to discuss continuity and change in the political order of post-Maidan Ukraine. The fate of this statue, Klymenko argues, is illustrative of an emergent political ethnonationalism and the ways in which this is connected to religious, gender and other imaginaries in Ukraine today. Likewise, James (1999) shows how the removal of socialist statues in Hungary and their placement in a dedicated museum allows for an ethnonationalist distancing of contemporary Hungary from both its communist past and from Russia. Such explorations, albeit implicitly, acknowledge the post-socialist invocation of the spectre of socialism, situate and contextualize its workings and showcase the materials through which it finds expression, as well as the political impacts that it generates.

While context within such a situated analysis can mean more general socio-political circumstances and historical settings, in our approach we have been inspired by an archaeological understanding of and sensitivity to context. In archaeology, context refers both to the provenance of the artefact - where it came from: which exact place, location, strata or area – and what the artefact is geologically, environmentally and culturally associated with. This earlier archaeological approach to context as primarily referring to an artefact's provenance and associations, has become enriched by increased attention to the "cultural and/or behavioural setting in which an artefact had a role, and expanding the concept to distinguish primary and secondary contexts" (Lyman 2012, 210). Primary context refers to undisturbed (Pompeii-like) settings, while secondary context denotes usually disturbed, mixed, or redeposited settings (for discussions of context in archaeology, see for example Binford 1962, Shiffer 1972, Butzer 1980).⁴ In the case of the Konev monument, its original position in the urban setting might be seen as the primary context, while the museum to which the monument was transferred for preservation represents a very different context. Such a move from being a monument to becoming heritage entails a series of de-contextualizations and re-contextualizations, and encompasses a "conflict between continuity and discontinuity, between the contextualized and the decontextualized" (Hodder 1990, 15). While the dynamics of this are specific to the Konev case, heritage-making more broadly, as Laura-Jane Smith points out, "is always fraught and contested. Indeed it is always political, not simply because its interpretation

⁴ Within archaeology, depending on the given paradigm, context can indeed have various meanings. Context is "simply [the] material context of discovery - site and stratigraphy - or the notions of systems context of the new archaeology, or the meaning-giving social contexts of post-processual archaeology." (Shanks, Tilley 1992, xix). For clarity of argument in this article, we do not want to delve into these conceptual differences; suffice it to say, a sensitivity to context on both material and other levels is crucial for archaeology, as well as for us here.

or history may be disputed, but because any assertion of inclusive heritage must also include an implicit assertion of exclusion – 'this is who I am, and you are different from me''' (Smith 2017, 15; for more on heritage as a process of negotiation see, for example, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004). It follows that the concept of cultural heritage is understood "as a presentist process": not a passive preserving, but an active assembling. It draws together "various social and cultural entities, such as material objects, places, values, ideas, emotions, memory and identity" (Lähdesmäki, Thomas, and Zhu 2019, 2).

In the following series of snapshots covering the developments around the monument to Marshal Konev in Prague leading to its removal, we focus on the context along the lines sketched above. We look at both the broader socio-political context, and at context in terms of material settings and the material and cultural associations prevalent within a given setting. We trace the transformations of the monument within its changing contexts and show how selective de-contextualization and re-contextualization serve purposes of amplifying and silencing, and analyse what role(s) the post-socialist spectre of socialism plays in such a dynamics.

THE SOVIET MARSHAL IN PRAGUE AND HIS FALL

In the early spring of 2021, we visited the Square of the International Brigades (Náměstí Interbrigády) in Prague, where the monument to Marshal Konev used to stand facing the Street of the Yugoslavian Partisans. Here, at the spot labelled in the popular Czech online map application "mapy.cz" the "Former Marshal Konev Memorial", only a few traces of the monument's former presence were still visible: some rectangular, flat sided bushes which grew right behind the memorial, an area with bare soil instead of grass and an elevation marking the raised position from where the statue overlooked the busy street (fig. 1). This, together with the bushes that originally flanked the memorial, an information board about the square, including a couple of sentences on the monument as well as about an adjacent children's playground, is all that has been left *in situ* as fading traces of the recently disappeared memorial.

The monument to Marshal Ivan Stepanovic Konev was erected more than forty years ago, on May 9, 1980, on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia from Nazi occupation by the Red Army. The unveiling of the monument – consisting of a statue of Ivan Konev on a pedestal towering above a stone paved area, with a commemorative bronze plaque bearing an inscription of the Marshal's name and the years of his birth and death – was attended by the communist party elite, amongst them the then prime minister and members of the party's Central Committee, and by members of the Czech as well as Soviet military, including both WWII veterans and commanding officers of the Soviet troops currently stationed in Czechoslovakia. The presence of these dignitaries emphasised the symbolic importance

of the monument. It also expressed and fit with the overall socio-political atmosphere of the 1970s and 1980s: the era of state socialism labelled "normalization", which commenced with the invasion of Warsaw Pact armies in 1968 to stifle the liberalization of Czechoslovakian socialism of the 1960s.⁵



Fig. 1. The former location of the monument as photographed in Spring 2021 (source: authors)

On the level of the symbolic occupation of space and time, to return to Naiman's notion mentioned at the beginning of the article, normalization was characterised by proclaiming, emphasising and offering evidence of the "never-ending friendship of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union".⁶ Projects as diverse as co-operation in space exploration, culminating with a first Czechoslovakian astronaut shot into space, or the construction of the Prague metro were all embellished with the symbolic veil of the good and beneficial Czechoslovakian-Soviet relationship. As the commanding officer of the Red Army which liberated Prague in 1945, Marshal Konev, discursively framed as Prague's

^{5 &}quot;Normalization" was a period of far-reaching political purges and repressions after the failed attempt to humanise Czechoslovak state socialism during the Prague Spring. It concerned not just top Communist Party leadership but society as such, through a pervasive political vetting aimed at thwarting any attempts at continuing the previous reforms and at resisting the occupation by Warsaw Pact armies in 1968 (for more detailed discussion, see Šimečka 1984).

⁶ An omnipresent phrase of the times.

liberator, served such a political-symbolic purpose well. The figure of Konev should, according to *Rudé Právo*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, "forever commemorate the historic days of May 1945".⁷ As the inscription on the monument's plaque suggests, it thus allowed for an effective symbolic rebranding of the Red Army, tarnished by the Soviet military presence after the occupation of 1968: "Ivan Stepanovich Konev, an important Military Marshal of the Soviet Union, double Hero of the Soviet Union and Hero of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front which on May 9, 1945, saved Prague from destruction".

The monument thus served a particular role – as also did many other monuments, edifices, events and activities – within the local variant of the symbolic occupation of space and time conditioned by the predominant political as well as geopolitical context. One aspect of the geopolitics to which monuments such as the one in question responded was that of Soviet imperialism and its consequences. This is important to note because, as we shall see, imperialism is also a key element underpinning the developments leading to the monument's removal in 2020.



Fig. 2. Konev memorial in 2011 (source: author: ŠJů, Wikimedia Commons, accessed 26 August 2021)

⁷ Rudé Právo (Red Justice), 12 May, 1980, p. 2; all translations from Czech by the authors.

Although there were some attempts to remove the memorial after the fall of communism, it mostly simply stood unnoticed (see fig. 2), shrouded in a ghostly invisibility, as is often the fate of monuments as Musil once famously observed (2012, 64). This situation changed suddenly around 2014 when the statue was splashed with pink colour. From that moment on, the monument drew a growing attention, becoming a target for more and more frequent interventions, with a particular escalation in 2019/2020. The graph (fig. 3) illustrates the rise in media coverage of the monument, and clearly shows how the monument quickly shifted from being invisible to becoming a haunting presence.

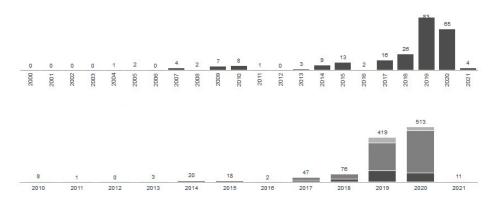


Fig. 3. The upper graph shows the number of articles about Konev memorial in printed media since 2000, the lower one number of articles in (from bottom up) printed media, internet, TV and radio. (source: Anopress news database, export authors, 2021)

Post 2014, a number of material interventions to the monument took place, as well as other performative actions in which the monument functioned as either a background or a central theme. Most prominently, the monument was repeatedly splashed or sprayed over with various inscriptions, often in pink or red colour. The colour red connotes both the colour of the communist party and blood, and as such it is readily semiotically recognisable. The role of the colour pink is more contextual: it references another, earlier, artistic cum political intervention to another socialist monument – a tank which used to stand on Kinsky Square (formerly the Square of Soviet Tank Drivers). The tank, as well as the name of the square, represented another memorial to the liberation of Prague by the Red Army; however, in this case the tank was unveiled as a monument right after the end of the war in 1945.⁸ In 1991, it was painted pink by the

⁸ The celebration took place on July 29, 1945, and Marshall Ivan S. Konev was among the honorary guests.

artist David Černý and, due to the ensuing controversies stretching well into the late 2000s, became known as the pink tank. Although the tank served in WWII, as a result of Černý's intervention and the political discussions that followed, it became associated with the invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies in 1968 and the presence of Soviet troops in normalization Czechoslovakia. In turn, the pink colour sprayed on the Konev memorial references the pink tank and connotes the 1968 invasion and normalization, as well as the 1990s/2000s controversies around attempts to come to terms with both.

Pink paint appeared a number of times after 2014: for instance, in 2017, as a part of demonstrations against the local authorities' plan to place a new explanatory plaque on the monument. Apart from pink, the monument was also repeatedly stained with red: for instance in drips reminiscent of blood that accompanied inscriptions such as ?Heil Putin? and 44 SR9 in 2015 and the dates 1956, 1961 and 1968 in 2017, 2018 and 2019, in the latter case also accompanied with the inscription "No to the bloody Marshal! We will not forget."10 The dates that kept reappearing on the monument reference historical events in which Konev played a more or less important part. In the autumn of 1956, it was Konev who led the brutal suppression of the Hungarian Uprising by the Soviet army: hence also his nickname, "the bloody Marshal". In the years 1961-62, it was he who was the commander of the Group of Soviet troops in Berlin: this was at the height of the Second Berlin Crisis (1958–1961), which culminated in the construction of the Berlin Wall. In May 1968, Konev came to visit the newly elected President of Czechoslovakia and a fellow WWII veteran from the Eastern Front, Ludvík Svoboda. According to some sources, during this visit members of his delegation began to map the terrain for a possible invasion of Warsaw Pact troops. His role in the invasion of that year, however, has been questioned and was probably minor if any.

Interestingly, these inscriptions serve primarily to re-contextualize Konev as a person and political figure, and use the memorial as a vehicle to do so. As was the case for his role in socialist discourse, Konev here too serves a specific function: through associating him with hot and cold conflicts, such re-contextualizations attempt to spotlight the geopolitical role of the Soviet Union and the outcomes and consequences of its imperialism. Moreover, through inscriptions like ?*Heil Putin*? and *44 SR*, Konev, and the Soviet Union for which he is made to stand, are directly made synonymous with both fascism and contemporary Russia. The differences between the USSR, Russia,

^{9 44} SR stands for a stylised SSSR, which is the Czech abbreviation for the Soviet Union, or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

¹⁰ For paint interventions to the memorial in 2014 and 2015, see Gallery iDNES.cz: https://www.idnes.cz/ praha/zpravy/znovu-pocmarana-socha-marsala-koneva-v-dejvicich.A150624_095504_praha-zpravy_bur/ foto (accessed 10.03.2021); and for paint interventions and protests around the memorial in 2017, 2018 and 2019, consult: https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/foto-tak-sel-cas-se-sochou-koneva-od-vztycenipres-protesty/r~5679a2a8847911eab115ac1f6b220ee8/ and https://www.idnes.cz/praha/zpravy/sochamarsala-koneva-mestska-policie-zakryti.A190831_085737_praha-zpravy_brzy/foto (accessed 10.03.2021).

communism and Nazism fade away, while Russia becomes primarily connoted with its imperial ambitions.

These types of interventions were accompanied or followed by performative actions such as protest meetings and public gatherings, either in support of or against the ideological and political meanings supposedly etched into the monument. Thus, for example, in 2017 people protesting against the plan of the local municipal authority to place an explanatory plaque on the memorial gathered under the Marshal with placards and flags. The flags waved on this occasion were those of the Czech Republic, as well as the flag of today's Russia, but there were also flags of the Soviet Union, as well as those associated with contemporary Russian separatism (in Ukraine). The grand-daughters of Ivan Konev took part, alongside some Czech politicians from the contemporary Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, as well as representatives of other parties. Two days later, the red years of 1956, 1961 and 1968 re-appeared, again sprayed on the pedestal.

An idiosyncratic crowd gathered at the monument two years later on the occasion of the placing of the explanatory plaque on the memorial. It was claimed that this trilingual plaque, in Czech, English and Russian, would ensure that the memorial was put in a proper historical context. It read:

Marshal Ivan Stepanovich Konev commanded the 1st Ukrainian Front, whose troops were deployed in the final attack on Berlin and liberated northern, central and eastern Bohemia, and were the first to enter Prague on May 9, 1945. In the autumn of 1956, he directed the suppression of the Hungarian Uprising by the Soviet army, and as commander of the Soviet Army Group in Berlin in 1961, he participated in solving the so-called second Berlin crisis by building the Berlin Wall. In 1968, he personally sponsored an intelligence survey before the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Clearly, this inscription responds to the vernacular re-contextualisation of Konev embodied in the years repeatedly sprayed on the monument and their implied attempts at commenting on Marshal Konev as a historical figure. It was hoped – at least this hope was publicly proclaimed – that this historical contextualization would put the controversies around the memorial to rest. However, the unveiling of the plaque took place on August 21, 2019, which was the 50th anniversary of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. The occasion – the date was indeed chosen purposefully, as the municipality of the Prague 6 Borough is overtly anti-communist and anti-Russia – drew both sides into more and more heated conflict. It is worth noting here that during state socialism, the borough became a prominent spot for housing communist cadres, such as police officers and party members. At the same time, dissident circles were also prominent there. This means that today it is a space of the repeated discursive struggles of hardline communists and anti-communists, for whom the Konev monument became one of the key battlegrounds.

Back to the demonstration: on the one hand, Marta Semelová, a communist party member and long-time municipal politician, came with a placard saying "I refuse the overwriting of history." On the other, people waved posters saying, for example, "Konev = a communist lie / We don't want lies here" and "He has blood on his hands / Take him down." The opportunity to calm the situation, rather than to amplify and/ or silence particular voices was wasted. Six days later, the monument was sprayed over again; as a response, the municipality decided to cover the statue with a canvas hoisted on a construction purportedly to "protect the statue" against vandalism. This resulted in repeated attempts to pull the canvas down and to put it back up, protest meetings (involving both politicians associated with communist party and nationalist circles) and some people bringing (red) flowers.

The definitive decision of the authorities to solve the situation with the memorial came in 2020, and on April 3, 2020, the memorial was dismantled. The statue and the explanatory plaques were taken away and are now stored for their future use in the newly established Museum of the Memory of the 20th Century. Around the time of the statue's removal, the situation got even tenser: the mayor of the borough and the mayor of the city of Prague were both put under police protection, because of death threats in relation to the monument; the Russian Federation protested against a "crime" on the eve of the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII; and the Czech Embassy in Moscow was attacked by unknown protesters.¹¹

For some time, the remnants of the monument were left on the spot and the protests continued. People kept bringing flowers and candles; someone covered the remains of the pedestal with an oriented strand board and put a toilet on top with a sign, "Please do not excrete", and toilet paper with the inscription "The Constitution of the Czech Republic". During summer 2020, the board covering became a "discussion panel" with inscriptions like "Konev is a liberator" and "Konev is a murderer and occupier"; the place became more and more derelict and was taken over by skateboarders.¹² In November 2020, the paved area and the remnants of the pedestal were dismantled, and the terrain was flattened. A new memorial to the WWII Liberators of Prague is envisioned, the competition for which should take place by mid-2021.¹³ At the beginning of 2021, the situation calmed down and all voices grew silent. The statue was placed in a depository and should become part of the Museum of the Memory of the 2021, a museum and memory institution founded by the city of Prague. As of 2021, the situation calmed memory institution founded by the city of Prague.

II For photographs of the dismantling of the monument, see for example: https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/ regiony/hlavni-mesto-praha/3073948-odstraneni-sochy-koneva-neporusuje-smlouvy-s-ruskem-petricek-si (accessed 10.03.2021).

¹² For discussions on the board and the skateboarders' signs, see: http://www.evropsky-rozhled.eu/okolipiedestalu-sochy-marsala-koneva-se-stalo-mistem-setkavani-mladych-sportovcu-kreativcu-i-neznamychvandalu/ (accessed 10.03.2021).

¹³ The source for this information and also a for a photogallery of the dismantling ot the monument is: https://prazsky.denik.cz/zpravy_region/pomnik-konev-demolice-soutez-hluk-park.html (accessed 10.03.2021).

the museum is preparing an exhibition to "present this artefact in a wide historical context". The plan for 2022 is to open a temporary seat of the museum in which the monument would be presented. However, in a long term time perspective, the statue is intended to become part of a permanent exhibition with the aim "to show different views of Marshal Konev, his role in various historical events, as well as the creation of his propagandistic cult in post-war Czechoslovakia" as a part of setting "a content framework for a public debate about these questions".¹⁴ For now, in the spring of 2021, only the bushes and barren soil serve as *in situ* remainders of a monument gone.

RE-CONTEXTUALIZATION, DE-CONTEXTUALIZATION AND THE SPECTRE OF SOCIALISM

If we, invoking an above-mentioned archaeological sensitivity to context, look closer at what happened around and to the Konev monument, what we see is an intricate web of re-contextualizations and de-contextualizations. Moreover, these have been happening within a wider socio-political, historical and geopolitical context which has been changing as well. In this perspective, the transfer of the statue to the museum constitutes a particularly profound change, involving the severance of the monument from its primary context. Socialism – or the images, values and emotions embodied in and associated with socialism – played an important role in the processes of both the de- and re-contextualizations of the monument, and in its move from its primary to a museum context.

After around 2014, as described above, a number of material interventions and discursive performances brought to the foreground polarized opinions on the meaning and future fate of the monument. Physical interventions directly altered the materiality of the monument, either temporarily or permanently. Sprayed dates or splashed red or pink colours only turned out to be temporary, because they always got cleaned up. They were loud and visible, spurred media attention, and then were materially silenced by the authorities through the use of detergents. Similarly, flowers put on the pedestal and demonstrations with posters and flags (and speeches) temporarily caught media attention and brought to the fore and amplified certain voices whose opinions thus became more or less successfully and permanently ascribed to the monument. These contrasting interventions made manifest the highly polarised and at the same time highly particular opinions revolving around Konev as an exemplary "socialist" figure through which a web of connections to and within "socialism" could be spun, and thus produced a particular dynamic of re-contextualising the monument over time.

¹⁴ Quoted on: https://www.muzeum20stoleti.cz/muzeum-pameti-xx-stoleti-a-socha-marsala-koneva/ (accessed 10.03.2021).

The response of the municipality to the vernacular as well as (semi)official re-contextualizations of the monument via material interventions, gatherings and demonstrations was its own attempt to re-contextualize the monument once and for all, in the form of an explanatory plaque. A reaction to the dynamics of de-and re-contextualization already taking place, it too became interwoven in these dynamics. As such, it did not succeed in calming the situation, but quite the opposite. As a result, the monument became literally invisible: hidden behind a protective canvas. The visibility and invisibility of the statue resulting from the repeated attempts to pull the canvas down and its subsequent replacement became a symbolic expression of the changing dominance of one interpretation of the monument over the other.

As a result of these processes, the monument as a historically and politically contingent complex became invisible long before the statue was removed and its pedestal dismantled. It became engulfed in the dichotomous sets of meanings and emotions invoked by the spectre of socialism: it is the opposition between the sets of connotations provoked by the spectre of socialism which simultaneously delimits the space of political imaginaries and haunts it. While the attempts to re-contextualise the monument were seemingly about the past and coming to terms with it in the present, they in fact sought to establish a complete symbolic control over the monument, with the spectre of socialism looming large. Both defenders and opponents of the monument took part in a battle of epistemological imperialism, to refer back to Naiman (2003), which was conditioned by the contemporary complex of ideas and emotions associated with "socialism", but reaching far beyond to the realms of geopolitics and ethics. In the process, stripped of its primary associations and meanings by means of ignoring its provenance, both spatial and temporal, the monument was effectively de-contextualised: it was no longer primarily a normalization era monument, with a distinct and complex historical, political and symbolic legacy. In such a way, the monument became an empty canvas to be re-contextualized within a battle for the symbolic occupation of both space and time.

The hauntings of the spectre of socialism provided the grounding for the dichotomous positions between which the battle for symbolic occupation took place. In other words, it was the spectre of socialism that made the points of view, and the debates and negotiations through which they were expressed, highly polarized. It also made them ethically and emotionally supercharged. What happened to and around the monument was an example of a historically contextualised statue on a pedestal becoming a vehicle for resolving a contemporary tension between anti-communists and their opponents in an attempt to assert epistemological (and symbolic) domination. The temporal provenance of the monument – from the normalization era – and its location in a politically tense borough helped turn it into a node around which particular associations were made and from where a net of politically as well as emotionally charged meanings were produced that sought to catch us all and force us to choose a position for or against. To be in favour of the monument was thus linked to being for Konev and in turn for Soviet imperialism: the heinous, criminal and violent regime that the ("bloody") Marshal stood and fought for. The web of associations around the monument re-contextualised the monument only by means of de-contextualizing Koney, by ignoring the historical and (geo)political context in which he as a military leader operated and in which his statue became a part of the monument to the liberation of Prague. At the same time, the re-contextualization activated new geopolitical associations, and the monument became inseparably linked to Putin's Russia and its present day imperialism. This was made possible not only by the opponents of the monument, but by its defenders as well: for the statue was linked to contemporary Russia in the media, and in symbolic and political statements by representatives of the Russian Federation, both at home and in the Czech Republic – like the presence of Konev's grand-daughters at the memorial in 2017. Likewise, the involvement of the contemporary Communist Party, which consorts with both Czech and Russian nationalists, helped create, maintain and exploit such associations. For its opponents, these associations made it possible to re-contextualise the monument as a morally corrupt attempt to rewrite history: to obscure and support heinous anti-democratic regime(s) of the past and present. The monument needed to be removed in order to allow for the proper interpretation of history to materialize. For the monument's defenders, pushing for re-interpretations of Konev and in the end for his removal signalled precisely a rewriting of history by silencing the past; it thus constituted an embodiment of the hypocrisy of contemporary democracy, which accuses others of suppressing freedom while doing exactly the same.

The amplifying and silencing of voices and perspectives provided a particular dynamics to the developments in and of the context in which the monument was embedded, which finally led to its removal: starting from indifference and rising up to politically polarised and toxic. With the removal of the statue from its primary context, two changes happened: one spatial and the other temporal (for a discussion of continuity and discontinuity, see Hodder 1990, 15; for the issue of an asynchrony of temporalities, see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, 75). Moving the statue from a public space in a wider urban setting to a museum will necessarily lead to a process through which the statue becomes a part of a curated past, a part of heritage. The museum and the exhibition within it will open up a new space for debate; but this debate will now be framed by the views of specialists: it will be a rational debate under the curation of experts. Hand-in-hand with this comes also a temporal shift: removing the statue from a public urban setting effectively moved it from the registry of the present to that of the recent past. By becoming heritage, the statue will be placed in a context in which it is to be evaluated and interpreted as part of history. The new context to which the statue was transposed as a part of a future exhibition about the memory of the 20th century predisposes the temporal plane on which the statue will continue to exist: a plane very

different from the temporality of first indifference and later material interventions, protest events and heated performances in its primary context. In essence, the new context, with its temporal and spatial specificities – the museum in which the statue finds itself – will allow for a novel process of re-contextualization. Interestingly, this was enabled in the first place by de-contextualizing the monument: by wrestling it out of its primary context through the above-described battle for its symbolic occupation which overlooked the complexities in fact inherent to the monument.

CONCLUSION

Taking place in Prague, a CEE capital, the removal of the Konev monument might be seen as yet another, albeit somewhat belated, post-socialist act of de-commemoration. In this article, we have looked closely at what preceded this removal. Inspired by an archaeological sensitivity to context, we have exposed the specific dynamics of the de-contextualization and re-contextualization of the monument which took place in the particular primary context in which the monument was located until its removal. We argued that what had been happening to and around the monument was a battle over its symbolic occupation in which the spectre of socialism played a formative role. It allowed for the de-contextualizing of the monument, for brushing over its complex historical, political and geopolitical spatial and temporal provenance. Likewise, the spectre of socialism was also invoked throughout the re-contextualization of the monument, not because of socialism (or communism) as a historical reality or political imaginary, but rather as a reaction to imperialism, both historical and contemporary. The spectre of socialism thus always served a particular purpose, even if these could be wildly different or even starkly opposed.

Drawing on the case of the Konev monument, we would like to suggest some conclusions. The removal of the monument does not represent a post-socialist decommemoration simply because it takes place in a city which in the second half of the 20th century used to be a capital of a socialist state. The only justification for even considering post-socialism as a prism through which to perceive the case of the Konev monument is because the spectre of socialism was indeed invoked and played its part in this process. And while that spectre and its invocation are locally specific, they also go way beyond the local context, and local municipal and state politics, because the socialist spectre is present and contingent both locally and globally. It features in, fuels, legitimises and discredits geopolitics and their locally specific impacts. It is invoked among others by present day Russia, even in the case of the removal of a monument in one Prague borough, as a way to consolidate support for and legitimise the nation's contemporary geopolitical involvements: in this case, as in many others, the spectre is invoked just as energetically by proponents and defenders as by opponents and rivals.

The spectre of socialism can be used as a tool to both legitimise and delegitimise locally as well globally. This apparently paradoxical situation was made possible by the fall of state socialism in a part of Europe in 1989/91, which allowed for socialism to become both undead and deterritorialized.

To explore the locally situated impacts of such invocations, it is necessary to look closely at the context(s) in which they happen and explore the contextual changes they bring about. Only then is it possible to link local and global workings – hauntings – of the spectre of socialism and, in so doing, maybe even reclaim post-socialism as a concept. But similarly to the spectre of socialism, in order to make post-socialism and its effects and power, post-socialism needs to become deterritorialized. It needs to cease be a spatial and/or temporal marker, but instead become a critical tool to highlight contemporary practices of the invocation of the socialist spectre, and their geopolitical underpinnings and local effects. In such a way, we believe, it is possible to productively re-conceptualise "post-socialism" in relation to the (geo)politics of memory, remembering, forgetting and silencing. In this sense, interventions and performances like those which kept happening around and to the Konev memorial in Prague can be seen as post-socialist: just not in the sense unreflectively associated with the term.

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SILENT TRACES AND DESERTED PLACES: MATERIALITY AND SILENCE ON POLAND'S EASTERN BORDER

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This article explores how silence is held and transmitted through the materiality of deserted and abandoned places along the Polish frontier; and the generative role that silencing plays in local practices of tolerance. The article discusses two specific sites of silence in a town on Poland's eastern border. Both sites were abandoned or destroyed at the same time, and are part of a larger landscape of religious and ethnic conflict in the area. This history of conflict is managed through small everyday acts of forgetting, minimising and silencing. Yet, the two sites at the centre of this article demonstrate that silencing is an incomplete process. The fragmented materiality of the two places undercuts local silences, actively invoking experiences and memories of the Holocaust. The objects missing and present in these haunted places are too inconsequential to be considered ruins - one site is notable only because it is an empty field. Yet these sites and objects act as powerful silent traces. Traces, as Napolitano (2015) has observed, are knots of history with an ambiguous auratic presence, located between memory and forgetting, repression and amplification. Traces conjure that which we can and that which we cannot say. The deserted places of the town draw attention to the silences that conviviality is built upon. This article considers how paying close attention to the specific silences concerning 'unthinkable' histories can reveal the power relations embedded in the process of history making and community building not just nationally, but also at the local level (Trouillot 1995).

KEYWORDS: Poland, silence, neighbourliness, trace, the Holocaust, absences

It is tempting to discuss silence only in terms of the discourse of nation building: what stories get told about the nation, who gets to tell those stories, what histories and memories are excluded from the official historical record and what kind of nations do these exclusions and inclusions create? Yet silencing does not just create gaps in the authorised historical narrative of a nation. Silencing is also generative: it shapes the physical and material world just as it shapes the discursive one, and is an element of the practices that construct cohesive local communities. In this article, I will address silencing at the local scale, demonstrating how the materiality of deserted and abandoned landscapes is generated by, maintains and transmits silence. In particular, this article will pay attention to the way in which locally silenced historical events are not

forgotten, but rather suspended in the landscape. I will discuss two specific sites of discomfort in Biała¹, a town on the north-eastern border of Poland. They are both sites in which material presence and absence engage silenced historical moments of religious and ethnic conflict. The importance of exploring the concept of silenced histories at a local level is that it reveals the complicated way in which silencing works. Biała is historically religiously, ethnically and linguistically pluralistic. Locally, this pluralism is managed through small everyday acts of silencing. In this article, I demonstrate that the silencing of stories and memories of conflict and ethnic cleansing does not equate to their forgetting, nor has it led to the destruction of the material residues of these histories. Rather, it has created a landscape of fragments and traces. Through an analysis of what silence is actually doing on the local scale, this article highlights some of the reasons why silencing cannot act effectively as a framework for nation building.

This article looks at two interrelated examples of the materiality of silence. I focus on two empty places in Biała, examining how local people interact with, talk about and avoid these sites. These two sites are part of a larger landscape of silence within the town. The events that shaped these empty sites have neither been forgotten, nor are they in the process of being forgotten; rather the memory of these events is suspended in the sites' fragmented materiality. As Napolitano (2015, 58; 60) has observed, traces are knots of history with an ambiguous auratic presence, located between memory and forgetting, repression and amplification. Traces conjure that which we can and that which we cannot say in the same moment. The traces in these deserted places are too inconsequential to be considered ruins: one site is notable only because it is an empty field, the other because it is a gravel filled garden with a large out of place gate. Yet, these sites and objects act as powerful traces, which keep silences in the collective memory of the town from becoming total: they suspend the local memory and representation of the Holocaust in these particular locations. The Holocaust, and the subsequent policies of silence created by the memory politics of the socialist government, have shaped the lives of Biała's residents in drastic ways. The central argument of this article is that the silent places in Biała are not the result of an attempting to deny, ignore or forget history. Instead, they are places where the politics of ambiguity is embraced.

In many ways, a politics of ambiguity seems like a safe approach when dealing with divisive periods of intense loss and conflict: a way to seal these periods off from contemporary life without completely disregarding them. Yet the problem with a politics of ambiguity is that it is also a politics of spectres (del Pilar Blanco & Peeren 2013). So long as memories of ethnic conflict and genocide remain suspended in the material landscape of the town, they haunt. Failing to address these critical moments in local history, leaving them suspended in the town's landscape, means that they can always

I At the request of the people I interviewed, consulted and stayed with, I have anonymised the name of the town.

return unbidden. The ghost or the spectre is frightening because it waits, and can return unexpectedly, forcing us to confront and answer questions from the long-buried past without warning (Derrida 1994). The deserted places in Biała draw attention to the silences that local practices of conviviality are built upon and function as markers of those who are left out of history. Trouillot has shown that paying close attention to specific silences concerning "unthinkable" histories can reveal the power relations embedded in the process of history-making both locally and nationally (1995). To this I would add that, in the case of north-eastern Poland, exploring the materiality of silences reveals the inadequacy of silencing as a framework for developing local identity.

This article will start by providing some context for the argument, and then move on to discuss the two deserted places indicated in the title. This second section will also introduce an analysis of material traces in the landscape of the town. The third section will engage with ongoing discussions about memory and the Holocaust in eastern Poland. The article will conclude by returning to the idea that connects this article to the rest of this special issue: it performs an analysis of the inadequacy of silencing as a framework for nation building, developed by reflecting on what silence is actually doing in the local area.

CONTEXT

Biała is a small town at the centre of a rambling municipality. During the period of my fieldwork, 2011-2012, it had approximately 3800 residents, many of whom were scattered around the countryside. Only around 1800 people lived in the town, and over half were older than sixty-five or younger than eighteen years of age. The centre of Biała was contained within three main roads and surrounded by cornfields to the west, forests to the south and north, and the River Bug and the border with Belarus to the east. In 2011, the local official unemployment rate was almost 3% above the provincial average, but Biała remained one of the more economically well-off towns in the province (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2015). The municipality was renowned throughout the east of the country as a site of Mariological significance. While the majority of the town's population were Roman Catholic, during my fieldwork Biała was also home to a sizable Eastern Orthodox Christian minority. Alongside the large Roman Catholic church in the centre of town, there was also a good sized Eastern Orthodox Christian church. Within the municipality and at its edges were a number of Ukrainian Catholic sites, as well as the only remaining Neo-Unite parish in Poland. There were also several sites that evoked the Jewish and Tatar heritage of this area of Poland. The area had many sites that officially and unofficially attested to its long and complex history of ethnic, religious, national and linguistic diversity. There is not enough space to go deeply into the history of the area within this article, and so I focus

on one key historical conflict.² However, it is important to note that the demographics of the town are a direct result of the area's history. While it is now located in Poland's eastern borderlands, Biała has not always been under the control of the Polish state. Over centuries, different political and national polities have ruled, controlled and shaped the area surrounding the town. This in turn has led to different ethnic and religious groups ascending and declining in power at different points in history. The diversity of the local population speaks directly to the town's complex history.

During the year I lived in the town, the population was predominately Roman Catholic and Polish speaking; there was also a small and vocal Eastern Orthodox Christian minority, and a handful of Protestant and Ukrainian Catholic families. Many in the town had Belarusian family and heritage, and in private people occasionally spoke Ukrainian, although very few people claimed to have any connection to Ukraine. The majority of land, shops and businesses in the area were owned by the majority Roman Catholic population, and most local politicians were Roman Catholic. The Roman Catholic church was one of the largest landowners and provided a number of jobs, which increased seasonally.

Despite the diversity of the local population and the long histories of conflict over this diversity, people in Biała constantly pointed out the conviviality between residents to me and other visitors. During my time in the town, I was fortunate to work with both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christian locals. In my interviews with the town's majority and minority populations, conviviality and cohabitation were frequently discussed hand in hand. Conviviality was commonly expressed through the concept of dobrosqsiedztwo, an apparently non-standard local expression for "neighbourliness". This neighbourliness was a set of practices, obligations and habits that recognised, minimised and organised difference within the pluralistic population of the town. One's neighbours were primarily defined as the people likely to gather around your kitchen table. It was not just proximity but praxis that created a shared local life, and this in turn generated neighbourly ties across religion and ethnicity. The practice of neighbourliness was not limited to interactions between people: individual actions - such as leaving your front door open - were also an important element of the practice. Unlike the relationships that formed through sharing gossip beside the church, neighbourliness had no connection to religious affiliation. The kitchen table, the centre of neighbourly relations, was a place where religious difference was minimised, and instead the shared experience of life in a small border town was emphasised. When someone spoke of their neighbour, this was not a simple indication of spatial distance: they could mean someone next door or equally someone living at the other end of

² I have addressed this history elsewhere, see Joyce 2017 & 2019. Other authors including Brown 2004, Zarycki 2011 & 2014, Straczuk 2013, Prusin 2010 and Hann 1996 have discussed the complicated history of this region in detail.

town. Rather the term contained a suggestion of relational distance: your neighbours were "like family" without being kin, they were friends in whose everyday lives and personal histories you were entangled. Yet there was a sharp edge to this definition of neighbourliness, as I have discussed elsewhere (Joyce 2017). Many neighbours came from different religious or ethnic backgrounds, and local discussions of neighbourliness always started from this position: that difference was present, but portrayed as unimportant in the practice of neighbourliness. Thus, neighbourliness was a practice that aimed to manage difference by constantly drawing attention to difference.

In many ways, the concept of neighbourliness expressed and practiced in Biała resonates with the work of Pasieka (2015), Lehmann (2009) and Buzalka (2007) on the south-eastern Polish border and with that of Głowacka-Grajper on the history of the Kresy (2015).³ Pasieka's work untangles the practices and discourses that underlie religious and ethnic plurality on the borders of Poland. She demonstrates that in the practice of neighbourliness, religious and ethnic boundaries are simultaneously blurred and bright (Pasieka 2015, 153). As a result, neighbourly practices are also boundary making practices. Lehmann is likewise interested in a contradiction that neighbourly behaviour elucidates. Reflecting on the writings of British anthropologist Max Gluckman, she unpicks how the "weak ties" of neighbourliness bisect the strong ties of kinship, religion and ethnicity as "cross-cutting cleavages". In this way, weak ties "establish a bridge between various densely-knit networks" which functions as a key mechanism for managing ethnic and religious conflict in a local area (ibid, 139–140). Lehmann's argument connects nicely with Buzalka's theory of "ordinary tolerance" (2007, 157), whereby people reject extreme nationalism in favour of traditional agrarian practices of cooperation, local trading activities and neighbourly relationships of trust (ibid).

Buzalka points out that ordinary tolerance is often understood as a part of a broader celebration of diversity which invigorates politics in southeast Poland (2007). Working with biographies of residents from the same area, uncovered in the Oral History Archive in Warsaw, Głowacka-Grajper's work demonstrates the longevity of neighbourliness as an organising principle of social life (2015). Scattered throughout these life stories are references to the importance of neighbourliness, and an explicit connection between neighbourliness and place-making/belonging. As Głowacka-Grajper notes, "The words 'I am from here' fixed all national matters" (2015, 171). Yet, as was also the case in Biała, the constant recourse to neighbourliness also meant constantly having to admit to your ethno-religious identity – before you could be reassured that it did not matter. The question of who does this reassuring is very important and tells us something about the power dynamics in the area. While everyone minimises difference when discussing neighbourliness, when it comes to discussion of ethno-religious difference outside of discussions of neighbourliness, only the Roman Catholic members

³ The Kresy refers broadly to the eastern borders of Poland and is a complex and evocative term.

of the community continued to insist that these differences are irrelevant. When the discussion moved beyond the idea of neighbourliness, most of the Eastern Orthodox Christians, Protestants and Ukrainian Catholics I interviewed were quick to explain how their religious denominations excluded them from power.

While everyone benefited from the practice of neighbourliness, it is not wrong to suggest that it also insulated the most powerful members of the town from the need to address ongoing conflicts around ethno-religious difference. Like kin, the neighbourly relationship survived across generations. Even in situations where historical upheaval had caused ruptures, current practices of neighbourliness acknowledged division, while attempting to surmount it. Your neighbours were not just those who *lived close* to you, but also those who *lived with* you (Henig 2012, 15) even as they *lived differently* to you. Managing the ambiguity of the borderlands' position in wider understandings of the nation is part of the work of everyday life. In Biała, the residents had found that neighbourliness – as a prevailing local mode of existence – allowed them to do this.

DESERTED PLACES

Underneath this focus on cohesion, conviviality and neighbourliness, Biała seemed to be full of abandoned places, missing buildings and strange public objects people did not talk about. So much of what people said, either in interviews or in everyday conversations, referred obliquely to history or local memory that many conversations and interviews were like half-finished puzzles. I dedicated much of the early part of my research to discovering the "true" stories about the town. Working out what historical information I needed in order to contextualise what I was hearing required: getting to know the local gossip, identifying the key events of local life according to different religious and ethnic communities, exploring local archives and reading copious books on the history of the region. Yet, even as I became familiar with the history of Biała and the lives of the people with whom I worked, still the gaps remained. I began to realise that there were some events in local memory that people could not, or would not, tell me about (Joyce 2019). About halfway through my year in Biała, I began to understand the hesitation and contradiction in what people said and how they acted. In my effort to get at the "true" stories of Biała, I had tried to bring together traces and fragments to fill in the silences that emerged in the stories I was being told. I had approached these silences as problems to be resolved. But the silences, and respecting these silences, were essential elements of the stories. By trying to make fragments and traces act as evidence I had misunderstood their inherently multifaceted quality. A trace does not provide evidence for a single story or memory of the past; it cannot be made to speak in a single voice. Instead, the trace is manifold: it can invoke many different histories and might not always be able to "speak" (Napolitano 2015). In this way, the

material traces of conflict in Biała were frequently tasked with holding or suspending memories, rather than invoking or speaking them.

These fragments of conflict were not just present in the incomplete stories that people told. Living in the town also drew me to notice the absences and traces in the landscape. Traces and silences are not just found in the accounts that the anthropologist records: often the trace is a gap in the material world where we know something should be, or a conspicuous refusal to engage with a powerful material presence. It is not just that there are silences in the town's records, or historical events that people do not talk about. There are spaces in the landscape where the presence or absence of specific objects speak to the fact that something is missing, and people do not speak about these absences. This is part of the reason it is so difficult to distinguish between absences and silence, or the practices of silencing. Absences and traces only become apparent when there are silences surrounding them. Silence is a necessary medium for the emergence of traces in the material world.

Biała was full of places, monuments and buildings that still existed for people, even as their physical remains did not. Then there were the buildings and objects which people ignored: the places people would not walk to or engage with. There was no clear way to draw all these objects, ideas and memories together to create a linear narrative of conflict in the town's history. This was partially because, alongside the gaps in many of the stories I heard, events I observed or places I interacted with, certain phrases or objects seemed to contain traces of other stories and events. Studying the history of Biała since has been filled with contradictions and vacuums, with a single piece of information often being used in multiple and different ways. I have come to see that my task as an anthropologist is not to order these fragments and fill in the gaps. Rather, my task is to find a method of analysis that includes the traces and silences that are an essential part of understanding how the people of Biała live with conflicting historical narratives and different memories of the past.

Traces and fragments are essential – but complicated – parts of studying the imbrication of history and social life, and the ways in which communal memories relate to the historical record (Connerton 1989). Speaking about history making, Michel-Rolph Trouillot has demonstrated the power of fragments and traces to upset hegemonic narratives and practices (1995). Silences are not accidental. They are the result of individual historical processes that seek to legitimise the powerful by making their stories and histories seem inevitable and universal. Silence for Trouillot is an "active and transitive process" that involves stopping a story or fact before it is shared, archived or uncovered in order to offer a single interpretation of historical facts (1995, 28; 48). In this way, the memories and events that are silences in local practices and discourses echo through the state authorised historical record. Paying attention to when and how silences are made is important as it leads us to recognise that not all silences operate in the same way. Some silences are deeply meaningful and generative, while others are almost incidental. Singular events or places can contain multiple layers of silences, overlapping in different ways. However, even these silences are not total: silencing leaves traces. The task of analysis then is to look to the traces in history and draw them into the conversation. But Trouillot cautions against the idea of developing a singular "alternative history" narrative from these traces and silences (1995, 28; 58-59). This was the key challenge I faced when learning to write about traces and silences. As I will demonstrate in this section, discovering traces and stories in the landscape of the town was not challenging. The challenge came when deciding how to present and analyse these traces. Primarily, this involved resisting the pull to use these traces as evidence: avoiding the temptation to try to fill in some of the spaces in conversations about ethnic cleansing and forced relocation with the material fragments of these histories to be found in the town. These traces could not provide an alternative way of addressing historical evasions, because these traces were integral to the practice of evasion still at the centre of how difference is managed in the area. Beyond this, discovering traces of specific silences around one particular event in the town's history in one location revealed that those same silences existed simultaneously in other spaces, and in local concepts and practices relating to that event.

To explain more clearly what I mean by this I want to move to ethnographically discuss the relationship between silence and trace in two locations in Biała. The first location is a big, gravel filled garden enclosed by a rickety wire fence and a large iron gate. The garden was on the right-hand side of a large, square, concrete family home on one of the main roads in the town. The size of the garden, the fact it was covered in gravel and its position in relation to the house were all unusual for the area, where most gardens surround the home and are filled with vegetables, plants and flowers. I had noticed the garden and its mismatched gate and fence at the beginning of my fieldwork. But one evening, just over halfway into my time in the town, a local amateur historian, Henryk, pointed it out to me again. We were at the end of the road when he discretely gestured to the big double gate made of wrought iron painted black. He drew my attention to the centre of the gate where - worked in iron - were the numbers one, nine, four, one: 1941. "That's an important date," Henryk told me with an air of significance. Over the month prior to showing me the gate, Henryk had, unprompted, shown me a number of sites which he told me related to the town's Jewish history. This was the context for his pointed statement about the number on the gate. In this way, without mentioning the Holocaust, Henryk drew a clear line from the out of place iron gate to a period in which all traces of the town's Jewish population had supposedly been wiped out. This way of speaking about the Holocaust was a good example of how silence was at the centre of many conversations about the event. When pointing out the gate, Henryk never mentioned the extermination of the Jewish population of the town, yet it was the unspoken heart of his statement about the importance of 1941 as a date.

A couple of weeks before showing me the gate, Henryk had brought me to the other space I discuss in this article: an empty field covered in apple trees. This, he had insisted, was all that remained of the town's Jewish graveyard. There was no trace of gravestones, brick walls, plaques or anything that would indicate that the site was anything other than what it appeared: an abandoned field. After visiting the apple orchard, I spoke a lot with Henryk and many of the other people I knew in town about the possibility of it being a Jewish cemetery. As I have discussed elsewhere (Joyce 2019), I could find no consensus. What was obvious was that in a town in which apples were treated as common property, none of the trees in this field were ever harvested. The apples fell to the ground and were left to rot. While the older men and women I interviewed could speak at length and in detail about land ownership (who owned what, who they rented or had sold it to, which son or daughter felt slighted, whose' great grandfather had once been evicted from where, etc., etc.), when it came to the abandoned apple tree field, no one seemed to know anything about either its current or past owners. After a couple of weeks, I realised I would never discover anything definite about this abandoned site - which Henryk told me was all the proof I needed to know he was right.

While Henryk and I spoke regularly about the former cemetery during the rest of my time in Biała, he never again expanded on the significance of the gate. It was Henryk's wife Polina who eventually explained to me that it was "widely known" in the town that the iron gate stood on the site of what was once the town's synagogue. This supposed consensus was based on two facts: firstly, that the synagogue had been destroyed in 1941, and secondly, that the family who were now owners had not owned the land prior to 1941. Yet these facts seemed impossible to prove. In 1941, the occupying Nazis removed the Jewish families of Biała from their homes and placed them in an open ghetto in the centre of the town (Spector and Wigoder, 2001). After this point, the dates of various key events become less certain. At some point between 1941 and 1942 the synagogue was demolished: there are no records of the event, simply the synagogue is mentioned in descriptions of the town from before 1941 and not mentioned again after 1942. During this same period, the Jewish residents of Biała were removed from the ghetto and executed (ibid). Beyond the bare outline of this story, there are few well-established facts to build on. While you can access a number of Yizkor books written about the town's Jewish population, few of these have access to accurate information, much of which was destroyed after 1945, and sometimes they directly contradict one another.⁴ According to some local sources and those accessed

⁴ Yizkor (memory) books are remembrance texts created by descendants of Poland's Jewish population. They are varied in their form and content, but aim to act as records of the daily lives of Polish Jews prior to the Holocaust and list the names of all those eliminated during the Holocaust. A Yizkor book will focus on a specific town and use all available databases and archives to reconstruct the Jewish

via JewishGen, the Jewish population of Biała was sent to a concentration camp in 1941 or 1942; according to others, they were led to a forest and executed on mass in either 1942 or 1943. Even the site on which the synagogue stood is not documented in any of the records or maps I could access. While the date on the iron gate indicates that it was erected in the same year that the synagogue was likely destroyed, thus leaving its land available for use, there is no clear evidence that this garden was once the site of a Jewish synagogue. All of the local stories I heard about the gate, or the synagogue, had this silence at the heart of them. That there had been a synagogue was certain; but its destruction and location were only evident as traces. This was the context for Polina's knowledge of the iron gate. She framed her knowledge by informing me that the family who own the land were deeply annoyed by the local gossip about it. She believed that they were anxious that if too many people spoke about the old synagogue, they might start to wonder how the family had come to own the land. "Why not destroy the gate?" I asked, and she shrugged, indicating that she didn't know, before warning me against trying to ask the family behind it the same question. In the end, she did not need to warn me: the family behind the gate never responded to my requests to interview them.

The iron gate is an ambiguous trace. It provokes a story of the past that is built on a number of small silences. The story of the synagogue is uncertain, because no one spoke about its destruction in the years following the war, and no one made an official record of its existence. On the one hand, the gate marks a site where the past has been obliterated, nothing of the synagogue remains. Yet, after this wholescale destruction, someone still chose to weld the potential date of the synagogue's destruction into the new gate, forever highlighting this act of destruction. This story only works if you accept, without evidence beyond local hearsay, that the garden was once the site of the synagogue. Perhaps the gate has no connection to the Holocaust other than an unfortunate date of origin. Yet, since 1941, the families that have owned the land that the gate stands on have continued to maintain and paint it. It has remained in place throughout periods of intense iron shortages, which led to local people removing iron from graves in desperation (Joyce 2017). The family who owns the gate have ensured that it persists, even as they demand that no one discusses it.

history of that town. Most Yizkor books can be accessed online via JewishGen (run by The Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York).

SILENCE AND MEMORY

The absence that is engendered by the iron gate relies on a silence that is at the heart of all the stories that continue to circulate about the site. The silence that surrounds the abandoned apple tree field is of a different kind, and so the absence is rendered differently. While most people in the town will gossip about the iron gate, no one ever really talked about the apple tree field. As mentioned earlier, the field had first come to my attention as it was the only site in town where people did not pick apples, instead leaving them to fall from the trees and rot (Joyce 2019). Even after I was told that this was potentially the site of the Jewish graveyard by Henryk, no one else I spoke to could or would tell me anything about the site. Yet the practice of avoiding eating anything that grew on this land indicated that in some way it was understood as dangerous. It also potentially indicates that people realised that this was a graveyard: as in most of Poland, in this area it was considered unacceptable to remove anything from a graveyard.⁵

There were few parts of history that were not endlessly discussed and debated in Biała. Indeed, the history of the Holocaust was perhaps the only part of the recent past that remained unspoken, both in everyday conversations and in the majority of the interviews I made.⁶ Yet by a series of inferences young people learned to make a connection between the absences in space and the silences in the local historical record. Reflecting on their 25-year study of the transmission of memories of Jewish history in Poland, Nowak, Kapralski and Niedźwiedzki note that this transmission seems to have largely stopped for the young people across Galicia with whom they worked from 2013 to 2017 (2018). Jewish history is not a daily encounter for them. It has no appeal, given that navigating Poland's current economic and social reality "demands a temporal orientation on the present or the future" (ibid, 155). The authors further note that this disinterest in Jewish history extends to how young people discuss the landscape of their towns (ibid, 194). In Biała, one encounters a similarly disinterested attitude on the part of young people toward discussions of Jewish history. Yet, while young people may not speak about local Jewish history as present in the local area, they still engage with the landscape of the town in ways that indicate their knowledge of it. As Kapralski noted, even in those places where traces of the Jewish past remain, they are framed by the concerns of non-Jewish Poles (2001). This leads to a situation where even openly Jewish sites of memory may be communicating a history that focuses on the point of view of the dominant Polish society (ibid). Yet Kapralski complicates his own claim by reminding the reader that traces of the past are always the result of ongoing

⁵ Thank you to one of the article reviewers for suggesting this connection.

⁶ In a small number of interviews, I asked directly about the Holocaust, but in the majority I did not. In interviews I conducted relating to the town's history, it was striking that people never bought up the Holocaust unprompted.

negotiations of power relations. There is not necessarily a consensus among different Polish groups about how to handle the material traces of the Holocaust. Therefore, it is impossible to shape these traces of the Jewish past completely in accordance with the majority's intentions (Kapralski 2001). This final idea helps explain why material and immaterial traces of the Jewish past in Biała are sources of ongoing tension and discord.

The Holocaust was a critical event. In a town filled with historical ruptures, it broke apart what came before it, obliterating a whole segment of the region's population in a way no other act of ethnic or religious violence had done. It also demonstrated an emptiness at the centre of the practice of neighbourliness. Das has argued that critical events "institute a new modality of historical action which was not inscribed in the inventory of that situation" (Das 1995, 5). To some extent, this happened in Biała: new modes of action did emerge which redefined traditional ways of being. At the same time, the post-war communist government followed the Soviet approach to memorialising World War II, instead of developing a specifically Polish approach to framing the experience of the war and the Holocaust. The Soviet approach explicitly avoided specific commemorations of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Instead, its memorialisation presented a version of the Holocaust that resounded with Soviet ideology, in which victims were remembered as loyal Soviet citizens or innocent victims of fascism (Dobroszycki and Gurock 1994). Alongside this, the immediate post-war years involved the mass relocation of those deemed ethnically Ukrainian (Hann 1996), and a modernisation project which "took place 'over the dead bodies' of the Jews" (Nowak et al. 2018, 115). Throughout this post-war period, residents in Biała had to learn new ways to move through and engage with their landscape, absorb new ways to relate to the past and confront difficult insights into one of their core mechanisms for managing local conflict.⁷

The Holocaust introduced poisonous knowledge about the power of neighbourliness into the social life of Biała. Das first introduced the idea of poisonous knowledge in the book *Social Suffering* (1997), before expanding upon it in later work in which she explored the aftereffects of the communal violence enacted against Punjabi families in Pakistan after the partition of 1947 (2000; 2006). To do so, she focused on the everyday actions of families, rather than attempting to directly elicit stories of violent acts. In these everyday stories, violent events continued "attaching themselves as if with invisible tentacles to everyday life" long after the families had left Pakistan (Das 2006, 1). These events created doubt about the everyday social world: they introduced the poisonous knowledge that even the most taken-for-granted conventions of social life can dissolve into situations of extreme violence. The very rules of emotional and social connectedness are then replaced by an unknown void (Das 2000). Neighbourliness

⁷ I have spoken elsewhere about how the language of the Holocaust found its way into the framing of subsequent acts of ethnic conflict and forced relocation (Joyce 2017, 2019).

is the central mechanism for managing and organising difference in Biała, and plays a similar role across the pluralistic border regions of Poland (Straczuk 2012 & 2013). It is the praxis that prevents conflicts between local ethnic and religious groups, even as such conflicts are stoked on a national or international level. Yet the Holocaust reveals that it is a mechanism that has failed before, and failed disastrously. It also demonstrates that beyond the failure of neighbourliness is the limit of neighbourliness. As noted at the beginning of this article, neighbourliness is at the centre of practises of ordinary tolerance. The assumptions of neighbourliness are that communities function better when conviviality is emphasised over conflict; and that keeping communities together relies on avoiding, minimising or otherwise managing conflict.

In Biała, the silence surrounding the Holocaust reflects the reality that the annihilation of the Jewish population revealed that neighbourliness is not always an effective or necessary practice. This is the poisonous knowledge that the material traces of the holocaust force people to live with. During World War II, nearly one third of Biała's population disappeared overnight, and the physical landscape of the town was similarly rapidly reconstituted. Yet the town survived. It survived, shaped materially by the silences created by the loss of the Jewish population. These silences also continue to frame the current political, economic, social and cultural life of the town. They do not need to be remembered or forgotten; these silences are the structure that contemporary life is built on.

CONCLUSION

This article started with two related ethnographic questions: if Jewish history has been silenced in the town through the destruction of specific material space and interrupted transmissions of memory, then why do children still refuse to eat the apples that grow in the razed graveyard; and why do the family behind the iron gate not destroy it? I have previously argued that the silence and absences that mark the story of the Holocaust and other moments of ethnic cleansing in Biała do not indicate that these periods of history are being forgotten. Rather, they point to the impossibility of containing and inoculating against traumatic events without directly engaging them (Joyce 2019). This argument is similar to that made by Tokarska-Bakir, who has argued that Polish memories of the Holocaust are supressed and tabooed as a defence mechanism: a mechanism that seeks to manage the trauma of having witnessed and in some instances participated in the fate of the Jewish people of Poland (Tokarska-Bakir 2004). But as Nowak, Kapralski and Niedźwiedzki convincingly demonstrate, this model underestimates the power of the present by "search[ing] for the factors that determine social memory outside the present: in the traumatising events of the past" (2018, 221). For these authors, the silencing of memories of the Jewish past in Poland is primarily the outcome of historical memorialisation practices. During the

communist period, the Polish state failed to develop a uniquely Polish discourse on the Holocaust. In the years that followed communism, efforts to rebuild the Polish state operationalised specific cultural and religious ideas in the new mythology of the state. As a result, up until the 1990s any attempts to integrate social memories of Jewish history into the narrative of the Polish nation were set aside (ibid). While this led to an interruption of the transmission of stories, memories and histories of Polish Jewish culture, in many places small material traces of Jewish life remained.

While people in Biała did not want to speak about the destruction of the cemetery or the synagogue, they also did not seem to want to conceal it. No one I spoke to directly wanted to excavate the cemetery or turn it into an official memorial; but neither did they want to hide the site and thus prevent future excavations. Instead, the majority of people in the town continued to carefully elide the place and the memory.⁸ Only the practice of avoiding the apples from the abandoned field continued through the generations and carried with it fuzzy post-memories of the Shoah (Joyce 2019). The iron gate was a similarly ambiguous place of silence. It was the lynchpin for any number of stories of World War II. The materiality of the date 1941 welded into the gate opened up an array of narrative positions. But this openness, alongside the uncertainty pertaining to dates surrounding the obliteration of the town's Jewish population, also prevented it from clearly providing evidence for any particular story. Silence, like memory then, is not a constant; rather, it is a relational process, shaped by how people engage material objects and bio-physical spaces in discourse and practice. As the generation that remembers Jewish life in Poland dies without transmitting their memories to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, will these silent spaces tend toward entropy? With only general history, stereotypes and popular media representations of Polish Jewishness to frame these material traces of the Holocaust, will these silenced spaces one day be rendered functionally empty, unable to conjure any real memories?

This article demonstrates that the power of these silent places is not that they contain memories that can be made to speak for the lost Jewish populations. Silence does not need to be operationalized in order to be powerful. The material traces of Jewish history at both of these sites bring together complicated and contradictory accounts of the Holocaust and its reality in this area. The silence that surrounds material traces of Jewish history reveals how powerfully they undermine local practices of community building. These local practices of conviviality insist on a centrality and efficacy of neighbourliness, which these sites undercut. The silence that haunts these abandoned places is the poisonous knowledge that cohesion is not a necessary element of community building: that neighbourliness is not egalitarian, it is shaped by the same

⁸ A small group of people in the town, mainly Eastern Orthodox Christians, did (like Henryk) want to talk about some aspects of the town's Jewish history. But even this group spoke sparingly about this, unless prompted to during interviews.

local power dynamics as prevail in the rest of the town's affairs. In order to be a good neighbour, you do not need to tolerate difference, you simply need to minimise its importance. The silence at the centre of these sites does not need to be spoken or framed by social memory to be efficacious. These sites remain silent, because it is impossible to incorporate them into the day-to-day social life of Biała without challenging the key narratives which underpin this social world. Silence here is also a generative force. Neighbourliness underpins the conviviality necessary to avoid conflict in the town, but it is an imperfect model of tolerance: one that is sustained through local practices of silence and silencing.

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SELF-SILENCING STRATEGIES IN CASUAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT POLITICS IN RURAL POLAND

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Self-silencing can be a discursive strategy for presenting personal opinions in casual conversations about politics, especially when these take place in an unpredictable or hostile socio-political environment. In such situations, political identities may be performed through the use of inferred forms, such as allusion, irony or implicit suggestion. In this article, forms of muting one's voice by using indirect speech are tracked in interviews conducted among villagers in the mountainous Nowy Targ county in southern Poland at the beginning of the 21st century. The aim in presenting these examples is to show that sometimes self-silencing can serve to make an adversary's voice more audible, to help avoid definitive judgement and to create space for an exchange of opinions.

KEYWORDS: silencing, discursive strategies, indirect speech, political opinions, Podhale, Poland

Difficult, unspoken truths and the dark, hidden secrets of familial, local, regional and national histories frequently become a source of venom that can poison family, neighbourly, ethnic, national and inter-religious relations. Examples of the devastating effects of truths concealed down generations can be observed in various of the articles presented in this volume. However, I – somewhat perversely – ask a question about a constructive aspect of silencing. In this article, I will show that, in certain situations, muting one's voice becomes a positive action. In building this argument, I have looked for examples of an intentional muting of one's voice in casual conversations about politics. These types of discussion are usually loud and emotional: silences appear in them when the political identification of one's interlocutor is perceived as unrecognized, different or opposite to one's own. It is then that self-silencing strategies are introduced to soften the forms in which political views are expressed, so as not to emotionally inflame the discussion.

Casual talks about politics engage ordinary people uninvolved in shaping political life. Such discussions arise spontaneously in various public and private spaces: places as open to casual contacts as train compartments or the queues in front of a doctor's

cabinet, and as private as meetings with friends and family at home. In the Polish context, casual conversations about politics rarely have the character of a nice chat: they rather tend to quickly turn into more or less fierce disputes involving vivid emotions. The emotional involvement is so great because these are situations when individual identities are presented, or more precisely, when an essential aspect of one's identity is presented: that of one's political identification.

THEORETICAL APPROACH AND CONCEPTS

Political identifications are dynamic processes of creating and processing a narrative about individual or group political opinions constantly negotiated with the external environment. In an anthropological approach, the "emphasis falls on the dynamics of identification, framing, and alignment [processes] within limits that are cognitive or semantic, on the one hand, and social, economic, political, or legal, on the other" (Edison et al. 2017, 340). Furthermore, political identifications are produced in a process of continuous polarization through constant negotiation with the "constitutive outside" (Mouffe 1992, 30). As a result, they are relational and stem from various interactions in a game of a constant imposing and undermining, generated via a striving for consistency in the face of a simultaneous impact of complicating forces (Mouffe 2005).

Rhetorical aspects of casual conversations are objects of interest for "linguistic anthropology" (Hymes 1963), which explores the connection between speech and social relations. Using a method called the "ethnography of speaking" (Hymes 1962), linguistic anthropology focuses on the ways and forms of expressing content in various contexts. Social context was also very important in the interpretation method called "frame analysis" (Goffman 1974), as well as in "rhetorical anthropology" (Tyler 1978, 1987) which focused on the forms in which thoughts are verbalised. Rhetorical anthropology underlines the importance of rhetoric, revealing how culture shapes conceptualizations of reality. The alternative concept of "discourse strategies" (Gumperz 1982) focused attention on both verbal and non-verbal modes of expressing ideas and emotions. The popularization of Michel Foucault's ideas increased the interest in researching discourse, and subsequently provoked an the emergence of various trends in discourse analysis (listed in Van Dijk 1998). Thus, when using the concept of "discursive strategies", I refer to the "Discourse-Historical Approach" (Reisigl and Wodak 2016), located in the area of "Critical Discourse Analysis" (Fairclough 1995).

While I find the above theoretical strands useful for the ways in which they focus attention on linguistic forms, I also make use of Michael Herzfeld's concept of "social poetics". I find the latter term more adequate than that of "rhetorics", because it places greater emphasis on the social conditions in which rhetoric emerges and indicates the entanglement of the way ideas are expressed in the process of shaping social relations. It

is also more appropriate than "ethnopoetics" proposed by Dell Hymes (2003), because the entanglements involved in expressing ideas are socially rather than ethnically generated. Social poetics include clever ways to amplify or silence one's voice in order to fit a developing discussion. Some discursive strategies clearly have a calming function, making controversial content easier to convey in ways that do not arouse overtly vivid emotions or cause unpleasant consequences. In some aspects, they resemble James Scott's notion of a "hidden transcript" (1990), but this term is more adequate to approaches that stress a performative character of social relations.



FIELDWORK

Location of Nowy Targ on the map of Poland

The source material used in this article was created as part of research projects aimed at achieving other goals. However, the in-depth interviews conducted during the ethnographic fieldwork were open enough to enable them to provide answers to new research questions. I decided to browse through them in search of examples of social poetics and self-silencing discursive strategies. The interviews recalled in this text were recorded as a part of a series of research projects coordinated by the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Warsaw: "Ethnographic Science On Politics: Conversations About Politics with Highlanders" (1999–2000), "Imaginaries of the State, Power, Politics and Democracy" (2001–2007) and "Ethnographies of Media Reception and Common Knowledge" (2012–2014). A research team, consisting of me as the project manager and subsequent groups of undergraduate and graduate students of the University of Warsaw, collected recordings of over 500 in-depth interviews accompanied by participant observations focused on the situational and emotional contexts in which the interviews took place. Our interlocutors were informed about the research aims and agreed to participate in the interviews and recordings.

The interviews were conducted according to the methodologies specified by Martin Hammersley, Paul Atkinson (1995) and Steinar Kvale (2007). The fieldwork was carried out in the villages of Nowy Targ county, an area encompassing the ethnographic regions of both Podhale and Polish Spiš located at the foot of the Tatra Mountains, the highest range within the long stretch of the Carpathian mountains. The interviews were recorded with randomly selected villagers, aged 35–80, who were mostly Catholic and mostly had received a vocational education or, less often, a secondary technical education. The interviews were conducted in village houses, village public places and at the town market (mainly at the section dealing in livestock). Conversations at the market often took the form of multi-vocal debates, which usually had a high emotional pitch. Both the village dialogues and the polyphonic market conversations displayed the specificity of local social poetics.



Panorama of the Tatra Mountains viewed from the Nowy Targ basin. Photo by Jacek Mrugacz, published with the consent of the author.

During the interviews, our interlocutors were put in a situation that was not very comfortable. As a result of an accepted but quite random meeting, they were confronted with students and a tutor: i.e. with partners whom they perceived as better educated, and at the same time, as people whose intentions were not entirely clear. Of course, the researchers explained their goals and asked for permission to record the interview: however, this did not entirely clarify the possible hidden goals pursued by educated people from the capital who bother to go to the countryside and ask people with primary or secondary education about matters of which they must certainly have better knowledge. Our interlocutors saw in this unusual situation an opportunity to be ridiculed or condescendingly mentored. However, on the other hand, they also reported a certain kind of superiority with regard to the researchers, considering the inhabitants of big cities to be "indoctrinated". They were convinced that due to their education the newcomers were more susceptible to the propaganda and ideologies transmitted by the media. They told us directly on several occasions that the liberal media (they mentioned the television channel TVN and the newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza") that the students watched "had brainwashed" them. Following this line of thought, our interlocutors believed that local common-sense thinking, in their opinion undistorted by external ideas, is more effective in recognizing "real" political mechanisms and dependencies. Driven by two opposing lines of reasoning - one based on an awareness of their lower education and the other on a conviction of the superiority of local common-sense thinking – the interviewees often made use of a self-silencing strategy in expressing their views. These strategies included irony, relativization, suggestion, allusion, particular expressions and whispering.

SELF-SILENCING STRATEGIES

Irony

Irony, a rhetorical technique which "conveys meaning by indirect reference rather than by direct statement" (Osterreich 2001, 405), was one of the self-silencing strategies most frequently encountered in the interviews. One of the reasons why it was willingly employed was as a result of discomfort stemming from the fact that a large part of the research group was comprised of young women (female students), whereas talks about politics in these rural environments are usually conducted in male groups. If female voices appear in such conversations, they tend to belong to mature women (therefore, the person leading the research group did not provoke such concerns). Our interlocutors used irony to "save face" in this unusual situation. Irony also served to build a distance into a conversation which would certainly not have been conducted were it not for the desire to appear polite and open-minded, and finally also for the undoubted pleasure of talking to young women from a big city. Irony, a trope which "makes something understood by expressing the opposite" (Osterreich 2001, 404), is seen as a legitimate strategy for the presentation of political views à *rebours*. The sentences spoken by our interlocutors sounded as if they were a presentation of views opposite to those held by the speaker. Only the speaker's intonation, gestures and facial expressions indicated to the researcher that the statements should be understood inversely. It is worth emphasizing that irony and sarcasm are extremely difficult to convey when transcribing interviews. If the person transcribing the recording does not indicate that the reader is dealing with an ironic or sarcastic utterance, the written sentence conveys a meaning that is completely inconsistent with the speaker's intention. Such situations can happen when the transcription is conducted by a non-researcher outsider (or now also by technology). The irony is only noticeable in direct contact.

Irony was particularly notable in judgments of politicians, in which it took the form of declarations of emotions that were precisely the opposite of those experienced. Our interlocutors made such comments as: "We like it very much when politicians say one thing and do quite another", or "We, here in Podhale, love politics."¹ The use of irony changed the verbs "we like" or "we love" into their opposites, making it possible to avoid the use of the words "we hate" which would directly denote the vivid emotions evoked by the actions of the politicians.

Sometimes, irony turned into bitter sarcasm. Memories from the early nineties, i.e. a period of economic transformation and high unemployment, were often conveyed using this convention. During this process of transformation, an enormous (employing up to 7000 workers), state-owned shoe factory in the Podhale region was liquidated. Our interlocutors described the transformation processes as "selling off the national wealth, the toil of the entire nation", usually ending their statements with a sarcastic assessment of the ruling parties: "The state was so well managed then!" The expression "so well", full of sarcasm, was supposed to convey the enormity of the hatred aimed at the managers/decision-makers of the time. Even two decades later, the experience of economic transformation continued to evoke emotions that were so hot that our interviewees found it difficult to talk about them. In such cases, irony and sarcasm emerged as strategies of silencing one's expression not only with a view to the audience, but above all because of the speaker's own emotional state. Our interlocutors often said that talking about these matters irritated them so much that it "raised their blood pressure" and was "harmful to their hearts".

Irony reveals its greatest potential in the form of ironic jokes. During the research, we encountered a revealing situation during interviews about electoral preferences in the presidential election in 2005. Our interlocutors quite consistently declared support for one of the candidates: the representative of the Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej

¹ All the translated quotes in this text are deprived of dialect words and local syntax.

Polskiej (Farmers' Party, an alternative to the main Peasants' Party – Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe). After a few days, we realized that this was an ironic joke, despite it surprisingly being used by interlocutors who did not know each other. When we cottoned on to the situation, we asked interlocutors with whom we had friendly relations about the reason for such a collective joking with researchers. We learned then that the joke resulted from a locally-shared belief that newcomers from the city would expect that villagers would vote for a representative of this Farmers' Party (which did not enjoy local support), and therefore perversely gave a false answer to the question about voting preferences. It was amazing that this activity was uncoordinated and yet quite widespread.

Irony was also used when talking about matters from which our interlocutors distanced themselves. In 2012–2014, they spoke ironically about ecology, climate change, vegetarianism, equality parades and LGBT+ issues. They would sneer phrases such as: "It's cold today, eh? That's your global warming!", or "What, you don't eat meat, eh?", or "You lot probably go to these parades [gay pride] and those other quirks, eh?" The interviewees, assuming that the researchers disagreed on these issues, rarely made a frontal attack on these "quirks", as they called them. In their conversations with us, they mitigated themselves by ironically adding "Well, it's normal now", and commenting among themselves "I can't get my head round what is happening these days." The ironic statement "this is normal now" constituted a very strong, though a very muted way of building a distance to the new phenomenon under discussion.

Relativization

The local social poetics also included the tactic of answering the researcher's question with another of one's own. For example, after the question "Who will you vote for in the presidential election and why?", an interviewee might reply "What do you think? I suppose it would be good to vote for politician X?" By observing the reaction to such a question, the interlocutor would gauge whether his favourite was an acceptable option for the researcher. A lack of a negative reaction expressed through facial expressions or gestures encouraged the speaker to develop his statements and describe the qualities of the presidential candidate who had earned his trust. The tactic of presenting opinions in an interrogative form was also used to raise particularly sensitive topics. In 2001, we recorded a very controversial opinion expressed in the form of a question. Our interlocutor said "I guess it's good that Adolf Hitler exterminated some of these Jews, right?" This opinion shocked the researcher recording the interview to such an extent that he expressed his strongly different views on the Holocaust in a very emotional way.² Seeing the irritation and unambiguousness of the researcher's response, the

² During the fieldwork with the student group, we carefully analyzed this situation by continuing to reflect on it during a university seminar. All the participants of the seminar agreed that certain

interlocutor withdrew from his controversial statement, saying "Well, if that's what you think." The use of the question form when presenting his own opinion allowed the interlocutor to "save face" (at least in his opinion) in this verbal confrontation by relativizing the positions expressed. The questioning form opened up the possibility of various answers, allowing as a possible option the decidedly different view put forward by the researcher.

Suggestion

Another self-silencing strategy was concstituted by suggestion. In a situation where our interlocutors were not sure about our attitude to media news, they gently suggested their interpretation with phrases such as "You might think that..." A characteristic example of this is provided by conversations about the plane crash on April 10, 2010, in which the President of Poland, his wife and 94 other people died. This event, and especially its causes, were topics for political discussions and aroused great emotions. Not knowing whether we thought the catastrophe was the result of intentional acts or an accident, our interviewees suggested their interpretation by saying "you might think it was an attack". Proposing this idea in the form of a suggestion made it possible to reveal one's views, while also leaving open the possibility of withdrawing from them if the adversary found them wrong, absurd or ridiculous. However, if the researcher remained neutral, the statement was usually continued, with the speaker arguing in favour of the thesis about the planned attempt on the president's life, and presenting various arguments previously discussed with neighbours and friends. Of course, we also encountered interlocutors convinced that the plane catastrophe was an accident or a result of negligence. And they, on observing the researcher's neutrality, also developed arguments in favour of the suggested beliefs. Suggestions usually constituted an introduction to a topic that strongly polarized its audience.

Allusion

The social poetics of local conversations about politics also included allusions. In an attempt to discover the views of the researchers, interviewees alluded to issues discussed in the region. Introducing allusions into an ongoing discussion was accompanied by a careful observation of the researchers' reactions. An expression of understanding on their faces, supplemented by statements proving that they understood the allusion, reassured the speaker that they shared specific local common knowledge to a sufficient level to comprehend meaning conveyed in a veiled manner. Guesswork and allusions

opinions expressed by an interviewee may be so oppressive for a researcher that he or she has the right and social responsibility to an emotional response. Currently, the most interesting reflections on the difficulties of conducting research in an environment of people with political views different from the views of the researcher are published by Agnieszka Pasieka (2017).

acted as an act of casting a fishing line, in the hope that the conversation partner would take the bait. If the adversary seemed to understand, then the conversation could be continued. The study of whether we "understand each other" without an explicit elucidation of views was aimed at checking to what extent the researcher knows and can decode content appertaining to locally shared common-sense knowledge. Common sense is what appears to users as "obvious" and "natural", although its obviousness and naturalness are culturally generated features (Geertz 1983). Grasping an allusion, and understanding the unspoken meaning that was suggested through it, acted as proof of belonging to a group of people who understand locally shared interpretations, evaluations and opinions. This type of testing allowed the interlocutor to be considered a person with whom one could speak more openly.

In this way, interviewees checked whether we shared local conceptions about the past, and thus whether they could afford allusive references to the stereotypes that informed them. An example of this can be found in the discussions about Polish foreign policy commenting on the more severe course in relations with Russia after the Law and Justice Party took power in 2005. Statements of the type "Well, it is known from history that it is better not to tease the bear" alluded to the stereotype of Russia being as dangerous and unpredictable as a bear. This belief was supported by ideas about centuries-old Polish-Russian relations and summarized in the comparison of Russia to a dangerous beast. When talking about Polish-German relations, the phrase "You know, Germans are Germans" was often the only summary and explanation of the whole argument. Such an expression synthesized all the richness of ideas about the history of Polish-German contacts, combining pieces of common-sense knowledge about numerous wars - from the Battle of Grunwald to the events of World War II - into a strongly mythicized whole. The whole notion was inextricably intertwined with the idea of the "national character" of the Germans. The phrase "Germans are Germans" encapsulated this stereotype.

Allusive strategies were also used in discussions about various players in the political arena. When our interlocutors wanted to outline the profile of a politician, "who he really is", i.e. his local image, one could frequently hear veiled references to his origins. In the case of local politicians, allusions were made to their private lives and the situation of family and neighbours; in the case of politicians connected with central government, the allusions most often referred to their alleged Jewish roots. Our interviewees realized that locally popular conspiracy theories (Pipes 1997) tend to be references that researchers do not know or share. One of the popular theories was a belief that people of Jewish origin dominate Polish and world politics. Our interlocutors especially suspected politicians of liberal parties of having such origins. Assuming that researchers would keep their distance or criticize these kinds of phantasms, they referred to them by way of allusions and suggestions ("You might know who politician X is") or questions ("Don't you know who politician X is?"). Our interlocutors considered the "Jews-in-politics" conspiracy theory to be a common-sense, obvious truth. The researchers' failure to accept these local conceptions was proof of the indoctrination of the newcomers from the big city by the liberal media. When they observed the disapproval of researchers towards such beliefs, however, they used various forms of indirect speech to talk about conspiracy theories that served to make the problem blurred and indistinct.

In casual talks about politics, participants risked joking only when they were sure that communication was good enough to laugh or even smile. Highlanders like to joke; many of their jokes make an accurate point, although they often have a vulgar form. They predominantly allowed themselves to joke in polyphonic conversations, in which the position of the researcher with the voice recorder was relegated to the background. Due to the annoyance generated by talking about politicians, most of the jokes were sarcastic. The bitterness with which people talked about the irregularities of political life, about the unpopular decisions of the central authorities and about fiscal policy was expressed in the form of sarcastic jokes so that the conversation would not take on a too melancholy tone and in order to build distance from these irritating and depressing matters.

Particular Expressions

It is also worth emphasizing a further strategy involving a precise choice of words in talks with researchers. When talking about politicians, instead of resorting to common profanity, our interlocutors applied mocking terms, sometimes taking the form of quite amusing word games. For example, members of parliament were referred to with the rhyme, "posty – osty" ("MPs = donkeys", these words rhyme in Polish). This word play when talking about parliamentarians who were the object of vivid aversion made it possible to avoid the vulgar terms that would more probably be used. Mitigation of the use of heavy invectives and vulgarisms can be understood as a kind of courtesy towards the researchers (who were mostly women). On the other hand, they also functioned as a means to lower the emotional level of the conversation and soothe irritation. Interpreting the local social poetics therefore involved paying close attention to the types of expressions used by discussants. Identifying the particular phrases and words used to construct statements enabled a quick and accurate diagnosis of the speaker's political preferences. Such expressions frequently clearly indicate the ideological and political profile of the media from which they were taken. Terms such as "cursed soldiers" and "unborn children" used in statements indicated that more right-wing media had a significant role in building a speaker's worldview. Referring to the same issues using the terms "forest gangs" and "fetuses" suggested that a speaker was more influenced by liberal media. The use of words taken from the media coverage of a specific radio or TV station, or internet portal quite clearly defined the political identification of the speaker. Attention to specific turns of phrase thus proved an

effective way of classifying views without obtaining a clear declaration of political identification. This mode of self-presentation was not always an intentional act: on the contrary, it constituted a kind of denunciation that made it possible to decode the political identification of someone who otherwise might have been trying to conceal it.

Another component of the local social poetics was explanation by comparison. Such comparisons conveyed complicated content by referring to a well-known, and therefore understandable and tame situation. By dint of comparison, speakers sought to mitigate the anxiety-provoking feeling of alienation. From a vast pool of examples, I here choose a comparison intended to reflect a certain political strategy. During the interviews held in 2012, references were made to the Katyń massacre, the 60th anniversary of which was celebrated in 2010. One of the interviewees sought to explain to students the political strategy of Joseph Stalin, in ordering the murder of Polish officer prisoners of war at Katyń. In explaining Stalin's political intention, he compared his action to that of King Herod in ordering the slaughter of the innocents (the murder of all boys younger than 2 years old in Bethlehem in the year of Christ's birth, described in the Gospel of Matthew). The assumption of shared knowledge of this popular evangelical narrative provided the interlocutor with an interpretative key to explain Stalin's strategy, which, as he put it, "was to protect Stalin by preventing a new Józef Piłsudski from growing up and liberating Poland from Soviet dependence." This comparison had great explanatory power, and at the same time enabled the speaker to somewhat mute the indignation provoked by the Katyń massacre.

An additional interesting linguistic feature that often appeared in conversations about politics was the use of the category "normal". The word "normal" was a key term to describe proper patterns of social, economic and political relations. If these patterns had been realized "things would have been normal", but currently "the situation is not normal." The word normal established a certain ideal as obligatory, natural, and obvious, and thus imbued the views of the speaker with great force. The muting tactic, in this case, is to render uneccessary long, expressive arguments, since the word "normal" establishes an individual's belief as universally valid. The normative power of the word is hard to challenge, while its form in itself seems neither aggressive nor offensive.

Aside from a quiet way of asserting one's worldview as a universal norm, another feature of the local social poetics was constituted by ways of gently distancing oneself from views that are difficult to accept. An example of the tactic of softly expressing disapproval is the use of the phrase "it seems excessive to me". The use of the verb "seems to me" emphasized that what was being expressed was an individual and uncertain opinion, and the adjective "exaggerated" was a mild form of conveying a personal judgment that in fact might be interpreted as tantamount to the word "unacceptable". Our interviewees used this tactic when commenting, for example, on news about the special treatment of African-Americans in the U.S. or about more open attitudes towards people who are gender non-normative. Assuming that the researchers might have a different opinion on this subject, the interviewees, wishing to avoid confrontation, used such phrases as: "It seems excessive to me that the Americans get all so delicate with black people", or "These parades [Gay pride], I think they are an exaggeration." The use of such turns of expression served to lower the emotional temperature of the discussion, and at the same time to check the interlocutor's reaction and diagnose the level of convergence of opinions.

Whispering

In accordance with the main interests of the research projects in the frames of which they were undertaken, the interviews were generally focused on current political affairs. However, the interviewees themselves included numerous other threads that they associated with the main topic. It was in such an unexpected or grassroots way that the figure of Major Józef Kuraś, nicknamed "Ogień" ["Fire"], appeared in the conversations. In 1939, Józef Kuraś was a soldier of the Polish army who fought against the German army. From 1941, the group of resistance fighers led by "Fire" was subordinated to the Tatra Confederation, a part of the resistance movement which constituted a great challenge for the occupying German authorities. After the end of the war, Kuraś briefly cooperated with the new communist authorities. Later, he abandoned this function and, together with his group, continued illegal, secret, "forest" partisan activities until his death from wounds in February 1947. The character of Major Józef Kuraś, who provokes controversy among historians, also aroused various reactions from our interlocutors. In interviews, speakers expressed both their fascination with this historical figure and critical attitudes towards him. The latter were noted especially in conversations with inhabitants of villages in the Polish Spisz region.

The figure of "Fire" was an important thread in conversations about the historical policy of the Law and Justice Party, in office in Poland in 2005–2007 (as a minority government) and from 2015 to the present (2021). This historical policy prioritized publicizing knowledge about the post-war activities of partisan groups which had been silenced during the five decades of communism and the years following transformation. As a part of the implementation of this policy, the term "cursed soldiers" was introduced and popularized in the media; in addition, historical research conducted by the Institute of National Remembrance was intensified³, and numerous commemorative projects, including unveiling monuments and commemorative plaques, celebrating anniversaries, organizing historically themed runs and field games, were promoted. These actions met with mixed reactions from interviewees. Despite differences in views,

³ The Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation was established by the Polish Parlament in 1998. The mission of this institution, as described on its webpage, is "to research and popularize the modern history of Poland and to investigate crimes committed from 8 November 1917, throughout the Second World War and the communist period, to 31 July 1990"; https://ipn.gov.pl/en/about-the-institute (accessed 20.06.2021).

most of them agreed that such popularization was not favourable to the heroes of times as difficult and ambiguous as the first post-war years in Poland, which found itself under the Soviet sphere of influence as a result of the international agreements of 1945.

The stories about the partisan groups led by "Fire" and their daring actions during German occupation and the first post-war years were passed on in Podhale for decades in the form of whispered stories shared in a trusted circle. They were discussed with strangers only reluctantly, as a result of recollections of the fear that accompanied these topics in the 1950s when the threat of arrest was still real. Silenced narratives circulating in trusted circles created, conveyed and strengthened the legend of the forest partisan units. It is worth noting that in the villages of the Polish Spisz region, such stories also circulated in a silenced form; however, in this case their meaning was the opposite. As a result of the implementation of the commemoration policy of the Law and Justice Party, the activities of "Fire" and his group were made public. As expected, coming out of the sphere of whispered stories into the public sphere also laid bare differences in positions towards this legendary character. The muted form of the narrative protected the legend, preventing it from colliding with alternative stories that illuminate and evaluate the same historical figure in a different light. Therefore, in commenting on the implementation of the historical policy of the Law and Justice Party, some of the interviewees suggested that there are topics that do not benefit from publicity and popularization, and as such should be conveyed in a whispered form, in limited circles. Many people argued in favour of silencing issues as difficult, ambiguous and controversial, and as emotionally charged as the post-war activities of "Fire". In their opinion, silencing serves to neutralize judgments which out in the open become too explicit and definitive.

CONCLUSIONS

The self-silencing strategies diagnosed as a result of interviews in Nowy Targ aimed primarily at lowering the emotional intensity of the discussion and exploring the views of partners. They are therefore, I argue, best understood as an expression of a certain openness to other political identifications. The use of irony, allusion, suggestion, questioning and doubting all constitute indirect forms of admitting different perspectives. Using them mollifies the categorical nature of an individual's own opinions, reduces the indisputability of the views expressed and softens the unambiguity of assessments. This openness, however, should not be overestimated as the applied strategies more often serve to mask one's convictions than to question them. Nevertheless, the social poetics described above undoubtedly deepen the dynamic game of negotiating political identifications and make it less aggressive. An unrecognized or unfavourable audience forces discussants to attempt a more balanced way of articulating their views, and often requires in-depth explanations to make a position more understandable. Whereas conversations among like-minded people restrict worldview echo chambers, conversations between people of different views increase an openness to different political identifications. The various strategies of muting one's voice make it possible to avoid a stiffening and subsequent sharp polarization of positions. Thus, a conscious and intentional silencing of one's voice makes an adversary's voice more audible. In such a way, self-silencing plays an important role in making different voices audible to each other, not only in everyday conversations about politics, but also in the wider public debate.

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UNDERCOMMUNICATED STORIES IN BOUNDARY BUILDING PROCESSES: SUCCESSFUL ROMANIES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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This text focuses on the narrations of Romani in the Czech Republic with regard to conversational topics which are usually not communicated in either conversations across group borders or in the media. The topics covered in these conversations range from everyday life issues and stories about success in employment to stories about experiences during powerful moments in the state's history that resonate for all its inhabitants. The narratives analysed in this text include the experience of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the adventures of a group of boys who tried to illegally cross the state border during socialism. The interviews were filmed with a camera. From a methodological perspective, an interesting feature throughout the project was that during the conversations the narrators did not stress their Romani identity. The dominant tone was rather that of plain interpersonal communication. Thus, these narratives can be characterised as acts of everyday communication – a mode of interaction which is not common in the communication of Roma with non-Roma – which emphasize the shared overall context in which all inhabitants of the Czech Republic find themselves.

KEYWORDS: de-ethnicization, stereotyping, Czech Republic, narratives, Romani, communication

INTRODUCTION

As in many other European countries, the Romani population in the Czech Republic is widely perceived as poor, uneducated and socially excluded. However, these characteristics should only be seen as corresponding to the situation of some members of the Romani population (approx. one-third). Many Romani have educational and professional qualifications, and experience economic conditions that are in fact comparable to those of the majority population. As a result, when members of the Romani population talk about such issues as experiences of everyday life or important historical events, they often narrate their opinions in ways that are strikingly similar to those of other inhabitants of the Czech Republic. While the Romani population is often spoken of

¹ This study was written with the institutional support of the Charles University Progres Q 18.

primarily in ethnic terms, it is important to note that these people's everyday lives relate to their ethnic specificity only occasionally. Their lives are primarily interwoven with their families, work and the pragmatics of everyday life, issues which tend not to be given adequate voice in either academic or popular articles investigating the Romani. This text focuses on the stories of selected actors of Romani origin. In so doing, it aims to demonstrate this de-ethnicization of everyday life through practical examples of stories about work, emigration and other everyday experiences.

The first section establishes the conceptual framework by describing the historical development of research on narratives. It shows how views of narratives have developed over time, particularly with regard to how narratives are contextualized in terms of their function of creating intergroup boundaries. In the second section of the text, the Romani minority in the Czech environment is briefly introduced. This section also clarifies the reason why this text was written. In the third part, I discuss the project in which the data was collected, and at the same time talk about the methods of data collection. The fourth, empirical part presents a selection of narratives with my short comments. The fifth section completes the text with some reflections on the further implications of this study.

BOUNDARIES AND INTERGROUP INTERACTIONS IN CONVERSATIONS

The topics of how intergroup boundaries are both maintained and bridged are issues that have long been at the forefront of the interests of social anthropology. There is a long tradition of working with the processes through which people conceptualize their boundaries, exploring how they generate intergroup mental maps and cement these through narration. As Fredrik Barth already noted, construing of intergroup (ethnic) boundaries is connected both to the self-ascription of identity and to the ascription of identity by others: "A categorical ascription is an ethnic ascription when it classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background" (Barth 1969, 13). In this connection, Barth went on to state that although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, "they are not the sum of 'objective' differences but only those which the actors regard as significant" (Barth 1969, 14). The significance of markers demarcating intergroup boundaries is negotiated within the group and also occasionally between groups. Here, Barth touches on a topic that has long-term continuity: intergroup boundaries are, among other things, created by concepts, words, labels and agreements generated both inside and between groups of people who are interested in maintaining them. Negotiations about boundaries can sometimes be useful: on other occasions, they increase social tensions.

Reflection on the conceptual processes through which boundaries are created also has a long-standing tradition. Johann Gottfried Herder, whose work became a source of inspiration for ethnocultural nationalism, was well aware of such ideas. However, his reflections stress that the boundaries between communities are natural: they are shaped by the long history of a community and its coexistence with other groups, and thus are internally rooted. According to Herder, a language as it is spoken cannot be written in letters, and thus a foreigner who does not live in a group will not learn its language in its entirety and richness. In order to strengthen his argument, Herder demonstrated connections between animal sounds and human speech in way that was very modern for his time, opposing the then common idea that speech is a divine gift. However, the notion of the longevity and continuous development of language also led him to assert a close connection between environment, activities, thinking and oral expression: "Every generation² will introduce a house and family into its language … The organs of speech and, therefore, language, are influenced by climate, air, water, food, and beverage" (Herder 1927, 99).

According to Herder, therefore, the differentiated activities, perceptions and life experiences of actors lead to linguistic differences between groups; however, in Herder's conception, these differentiations do not contradict the universal foundational role of language for humans. In Herder's essay, we perceive a strong emphasis on actors' practical experiences and authenticity; less emphasis is placed on intergroup communication, the malleability of groups and their intertwining, all of which are essential features of the modern industrial society on whose threshold Herder stood (notwithstanding the fact that plurilingualism is also common in pre-industrial societies). The mechanisms involved in these latter aspects of human development would be found in the germinal features of intergroup connections described in the work of Robert Redfield more than 150 years later (Redfield 1953).

Herder's groups use only one native language. However, even the native language has many variants. For instance, Herder does show that the language of men and women in one group is not exactly the same. Compared to one's own language, other languages are foreign. In contrast, the contemporary individual masters not only a whole range of varieties of his/her own language, which he/she mixes dependent on the situation, but he/she is also familiar with a whole range of topics related to the particular varieties of language used in different communication situations. This notion was particularly developed in the 1960s and 1970s, receiving an overall theorisation in the variationist sociolinguistics of William Labov (1966; 1970).

Variationist sociolinguistics focuses mainly on the variability of language in different contexts and less on the message's content: the form of the message and its variability seem more important than what it actually has to say. Qualitative sociology, on the other hand, has long paid particular attention to content. In the concepts of qualitative

² In the original German, "*Geschlecht*". It is also possible to translate this term as "race or kin", and these terms are also used in other translations.

sociology, the meaning of a particular act of communication is closely related to human practice and experience and to an individual's inclusion in a social group. In the works of the Chicago School, analysis of the content of speech and the practice of utterances frequently coincide. For example, Nels Anderson's *The Hobo* is an interesting early example of working with the content of a message as well as with the speech of speakers. In the book, Anderson shows how street life gradually creates a new vocabulary connected to stories that can only be experienced in this specific environment (Anderson 1923). In this regard, the work of George Herbert Mead, and in particular his reflections on the role of temporality in organizing attitudes to relationships, also has a great influence (Mead 1972, 125). However, it was not until the interactionist conception of sociology and the new ethnography that emerged after the Second World War that work with the contents of acts of communication accrued a new dynamism.

Erving Goffman's symbolic interactionism provided great inspiration in the period after the Second World War. Particularly, his work The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life makes it possible to understand people's attitudes in everyday situations in terms of acting. People prepare the stage for their performances, look for props and rehearse collective shows. From this point, it is enough simply to take the step of bringing interactionism closer to hermeneutics and of engaging the researcher more closely in the dialogue with the actor in order to attain the perspective of the contemporary anthropologist. Among the many authors who have shaped the current perception of dialogue between actors and researchers, Foucault, Bourdieu and Hymes are particularly important. In terms of the current text, I would like to highlight Paul Ricoeur and his Time and Narrative (1984–1988), which has been fundamental in adding a hermeneutical dimension to many approaches and is a work whose contribution in this area has been praised many times (Ezzy 1998). I would also like to mention a work that is less frequently quoted, that of Paul Rabinow's Reflection on Fieldwork in Morocco, which provides not the first, but a very subtle and malleable approach to the topic of power relations. According to Rabinow, the roles of actor and researcher in terms of dominance can change and intermingle. Rabinow suggests that the researcher does not simply choose his informants, rather the informants also choose him, and in certain situations they have power over the researcher and power over the information they provide (Rabinow 1977).

The efforts of the actors concerned to control the situation that the researcher encounters and the data that he or she collects have been described many times (for instance, Whyte 1943; Shore 1999; Kandert 2004). Indeed, in Rabinow's account we can already encounter a detailed and revealing description of data manipulation, the influence of the informant's personality on his/her qualitative data collection and the relation of key informants' profiles to that of the researcher. On the other hand, it is clear that the researcher also plays various roles and can tell various stories when interacting with actors. Simultaneously, at least in the first phase, the researcher engages a given actor as a potential source of specific information or as a teller of a particular type of story. For instance, the actor in his/her turn knows that he/she is interviewed because he/she has witnessed the Holocaust, a fire or a sporting event. If actors are asked several times about a single phenomenon by different researchers, they may get the feeling that this particular event or experience is valuable, and they will style themselves in the role of narrators of this frequently requested story. In other words, they will use this story to boost their own sense of identity. This process of moving part of one's story to a central role in one's own identity can be all the stronger and more effective if the individual is addressed by people from ruling circles or from the media, for instance through the intervention of a documentary filmmaker behind a camera. In these processes, we see how professional collectors of narratives also create professional natives. Such mutual influences have been described, for instance, by Frederic W. Gleach in his analysis of the case of anthropological research of native Americans (Gleach 2002). However, a similar process can be identified among all communities, since they all have their spokes-people, people who know their histories and people who teach about their ethics. In our case, we could talk about a similar process of creating professional (media) Romani.

An academic's individual dialogue with a narrator has parallels with the rules guiding intergroup communication and processes of stereotypization. Andreas Wimmer described a whole range of strategies for creating intergroup boundaries. He also showed that topics articulated at the macro level are transferred to the micro-level and vice-versa (Wimmer 2013). This means that, for example, topics important for a state's communication with a particular category of people, such as poverty alleviation, unemployment, crime and integration, co-shape communication between individuals and communication that concerns other issues in the local environment. This phenomenon, which has its origins in human cognitive abilities, has been described many times. As far as ethnic categorization is concerned, Rogers Brubaker speaks of it in terms of groupism (Brubaker 2004). Groupism frequently distorts interpersonal interactions: one group attributes characteristics to individuals that they do not have, and as a result individuals in the other group come to attribute characteristics to themselves that do not apply to them. As Rogers Brubaker shows, ethnic boundaries are social constructs that, as far as everyday behaviour is concerned, do not have clear contours (Brubaker 2004). The project on which this text is based works with this aspect of communication.

ROMANI AND MAJORITY INHABITANTS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

In the Czech Republic, most of the Romani population is composed of first-fourth generation Romani settlers from Slovakia after the Second World War (Powell 1994; Uherek 2007). Only a very few are descendants of survivors of the Romani Holocaust

in Bohemia and Moravia during the Second World War. There are no exact numbers of how many people classify themselves as Romani now. Demographers and statisticians have made assessments that the number of people of Romani origin is about 250,000, and thus approx. 2.5% of the state's citizens (Nesvadbová, Šandera, Haberlová 2009). However, in the 2011 census only 13,150 declared their nationality as Romani (Davidová, Uherek 2014).

Some Romani in the Czech Republic belong to poorer sections of the population, and probably about a third live in localities that may be deemed as suffering from social exclusion (Čada et al., 2015). This circumstance affecting a part of the population creates a strong stereotype in Czech society that the Romani as a whole are poor, uneducated and socially problematic. This stereotype is partly true. However, if a third of the population is poor and socially excluded, it equally stands to rights that twothirds are not. Indeed, some Romani are also rich and successful. They live as wealthy and successful citizens in the Czech Republic or abroad, and have rich and successful lives, and experiences and worries, that are not always tied to their origin, just as their Czechness does not substantially limit the lives of Czechs. However, this aspect of the lives of Czech Romani is not apparent to the majority population. When they meet Romani in public space or see them in the media, they perceive them primarily as Romani. Romani who appear in the media also primarily do so as Romani: as members or spokes-people of their minority. This reduction of Romani experience to its ethnic dimension does not correspond to how people live. The overethnicization of the relationship with the Romani is dysfunctional. It was this consideration that inspired me and filmmaker and screenwriter Martin Pátek in compiling a project supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic called "What you do not want to know about the Romani".

THE PROJECT "WHAT YOU DO NOT WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE ROMANI"

The aim of the project was to present topics regarding the Romani that remain more or less hidden from the majority population. As a result, we focussed on rich, successful people, among them excellent doctors, artists, musicians and other specialists. When talking about their lives, our interlocutors focussed on private and everyday concerns, and stories that are not tied to their Romaniness. They described experiences of historical events in the Czech Republic in ways that are often very similar to the reactions of other inhabitants of this state. These people do not fall under the umbrella of the dominant ethnic stereotype of the Romani: as a result, the majority population does not even want to know about them as Romani, because they do not fit with the dominant notion of "real Gypsies". This is why the project is called "What you do not want to know about the Romani".

We selected for the project twenty narrators who declared themselves to be Romani and belonged to the middle or upper strata of the population. Amongst them were people who ran their own businesses, had regular jobs or were retired; equally, the sample included both people who lived in built-up areas together with residents from the majority population and those who lived in areas that while home to a majority of Roma population were not districts that might be termed socially excluded. We did not use any probability sampling techniques. Sociologically speaking, our sample was purposive or judgemental. It was a selection of people specifically chosen to fulfil the aims of the project: some of the narrators we knew in advance as we had already been in contact with them in previous projects; other interviewees were recommended by a project advisor representing Roma NGOs in the House of National Minorities in Prague; and others were selected during the research with the aim of having a diverse generational structure, equal gender representation and a diversity of professions. We did not aim to have a statistically representative sample: it is not possible in such a research to claim for anything more than a plurality of examples. Our goal was to show how differentiated this group is and how difficult it is to grasp it through a single stereotype.

The interviews took place in narrators' apartments or offices, or in a range of establishments throughout the Czech Republic, while some of our interviewees were also interested in filming outdoors. One interview took place, for example, in Brno in the park under the Spilberk Castle, two in a museum, one in a café and a part of one in a pub. The interviews also represented a geographical spread across the Czech Republic: four narrators were from Prague, two interviews were filmed in Brno, the second-largest city in the Czech Republic, one in Ostrava, the third biggest city, three in rural environments and the others in small and medium-sized cities. The gender breakdown of the principal speakers was 11 men and 9 women. However, these main interviewees often did not perform alone. Although there were 20 selected actors, many more people joined the dialogues and expressed their perspectives. With a number of our interviewees, we arranged several meetings. Although the aim of the project was to capture the stories of the actors we interviewed, the work with them itself also became a story. Reaching an agreement on the interview and choosing the time and place for the recording became an interesting part of the research wherein the main force-exercising component - at the outset, the academic and the person behind the camera – gradually transferred power to the actor who negotiated the time and chose the situation in which the whole performance was to take place. The actors knew that we were contacting them, among other things, because they were Romani. However, especially during the dialogue, we tried not to communicate with them as representatives of the Romani population. We constructed the dialogues on other bases. Mostly, this proved a successful strategy, because these were interesting and active people who told compelling stories which usually did not have much to do with being Romani.

For the purposes of this article, I have selected three narratives: one is related to work abroad, a second to emigration and the third to the experience of a significant historical event. While many other topics also emerged during the course of the interviews, I have selected these three narratives on account of their diversity and of the universality of experience implied by their stories. Equally, all three themes – successes at work, unusual adventurous stories and experiences connected to frequently mentioned historical events – were recurrent motifs during the conversations.

DEETHNICIZED NARRATIONS

Work Abroad and Work Achievements

A subject of frequent stereotyping of the Romani population in the Czech Republic concerns their low employment status and, more widely, a perceived unwillingness to work. However, Romani often conceptualize themselves as hardworking people.

The interview I am describing took place in a terraced house in Ostrava. The narrator was at home alone. He led us into the living room, and told us his stories under the portraits of famous Marxist leaders, including Marx himself, on the wall behind him. After the interview, he took us to his basement and showed us a prototype of a device that he is developing in order to significantly save energy. The narrator, now retired, was born in Slovakia into a blacksmith's family. He trained as a locksmith in Karlovy Vary, a regional town in western Bohemia, but spent most of his life in Ostrava, the third-largest city in the Czech Republic, located in the north-eastern part of the country near the Polish border. The narrator has always had an affection for cars, so initially he took a job in Ostrava's public transport company and went on to become an excellent employee. However, he was not comfortable with his colleagues' behaviour, and denounced some of their illegal practices. The police investigated the cases, and M. Č. found himself in danger of suffering revenge from colleagues. As a result of this growing conflict between himself and his co-workers, he finally decided to flee to Germany. He had joined the Communist Party in what was then Czechoslovakia in 1955, but now found himself in West Germany, a country conceptualized as hostile by the communists, and needed somehow to establish himself there and make a living. The following sequence from the narrative is the story of a clever man who in the end turned out to be a little lucky in life:

I emigrated; I had no choice. And now, when I, a communist, came to Germany, I saw a completely different life... I arrived in Frankfurt and got off at the train station, and I went through the subway where the girls were, with all the lights and the bars, and I was just saying to myself: "Where in the world have I come to?" I can't even talk about it. Then, if I could, I would have gone back, but I couldn't. And so, I stayed on there. I couldn't speak a word of German. ... But I had the luck of the

unfortunate. I had been there for only three days, when I got a job. By a stroke of luck, I encountered a Czech German: his name was Němec.³ He was from Český Krumlov.⁴ They had been officially evicted,⁵ and he ran a petrol station there, right next to the railway station. So, I immediately got to my feet and I told him, "I'll sweep your forecourt." And he says, "Many people would like to sweep here." And I say, "I don't want anything, just not to sit around." …?!⁶ "So, here you go, can you change the clutch?" So, we became friends.

What is striking in the account quoted above is the stress on the commonality of the experience of Czech migrants to the West, regardless of their ethnic origin or political affiliation. This commonality was based in shared deficiencies: a lack of local networks, the inability to speak the local language, a tragic past in one's homeland which it seemed would never be seen again, and a desperation to become part of one's newly found home by means of having a job. In the face of such misfortunes, all emigration stories tend to downplay the boundaries existing in the motherland. Such experiences also had an emancipatory power to free the Romani from ethnic stereotypes and the crude classifications that these imply, such as that of being an unreliable worker (or, in the case of this narrator, equally from the strictures of his communist worldview).

We recorded a relatively large number of similar stories. In particular, stories from a business environment were often markedly free from stereotypes, because employees, as well as entrepreneurs, all face similar problems. In other words, business and employment are governed by a specific set of rules, wherein the quest for profit is the dominant motif. Although economic and racial discrimination do frequently intertwine, in our research we encountered examples where the work environment opened up the opportunity to overcome ethnic barriers to social advancement: employees and employers appreciate efficiency, reliability, skillfulness, the ability to manage difficult situations, diligence and perseverance over questions concerning one's background.

Emigration and Life in the West

Living and working abroad was a significant topic amongst the narratives we gathered. For our narrators, experiences abroad are usually conceived as events full of twists and turns: foreign regions are shrouded in mystery. The more distant and inaccessible a foreign region is, the more questions arise. This was all the more true of the countries west of socialist Czechoslovakia when the border was open only to a limited number of Czechoslovak citizens. At the same time, however, cultural production was constantly flowing into Czechoslovakia from Western countries, thus increasing the attractiveness of these countries as potential places to live. The youth of that time was primarily

^{3 &}quot;Němec" means German in the Czech language.

⁴ A Czech town in South Bohemia, near the border with Austria.

⁵ He meant evicted from Czechoslovakia.

⁶ The actor made a grimace of surprise.

influenced by western music and film production, which enhanced young people's desire to emigrate and live in the better conditions these destinations promised. Not knowing exactly what was behind the borders as information about life in the West was distorted, there was plenty of space for speculation. As a result, fleeing abroad was a big topic for the majority of inhabitants, and especially for young people in search of a better perspective. In anthropology, Frances Pine has dealt with this topic with regard to the example of Poland – where the more difficult economic situation made the preconditions for migration more significant than in Czechoslovakia and caused the issue of emigration to resonate in Polish society even more strongly – by exploring migration through the prism of hope (Pine 2014).

Our research shows that the theme of emigration was non-ethnic: it touched the Romani population in the same way as it did the Czech majority. We recorded a nice story in Děčín, a town of north-western Bohemia not far from the German border. The Děčín region was thus adjacent with former socialist East Germany. The narrator is a musician and to this day an admirer of many western bands. During the socialist regime, he could hear the music of foreign bands, but such bands did not perform in Czechoslovakia. Therefore, he decided to go west with his brother and cousin and launch such a band. They did not reach the border at the first attempt. The following excerpt from the narrative describes their second attempt. Unfortunately, they did not realize that they were fleeing to the wrong, East (socialist), Germany:

Then, we tried again. My cousin, he was older, he was eighteen [and he said then, full of excitement]: "And ladies, now you are afraid! Come with me, it will work this time." And he took us to the village of Žleby⁷ [unaware that this is not the home of Western music and freedom of which they dreamed]. And it is still the East. Hřensko,⁸ right? And down that alley, it was hell, and we walked down that alley, with backpacks like spies. And there is a train station, and we got about a hundred meters towards that train station and [we saw] a "gazík"⁹ behind us. It was the customs officers or whoever, and [they started to scream] right away, "What are you doing here?" [We answered:] "We just arrived." [Then the officer said:] "You wanted to run across the borderline." [And he continued to interrogate:] "And where are you running to? [Wherever it is, the fact is that] you're running. Here you will be driven three hundred meters, or five hundred, and then the Germans will catch you there." [Meaning that we are fleeing to East Germany which will immediately imprison us or hand us over to the Czechoslovakian authorities]. So, he frightened us that, to put it bluntly, we were all fucked up. [He] threw us back into the gas station and sent us off to the central railway station in Děčín.¹⁰ And I said, "I'll never try again!"

⁷ A village in North-West Bohemia nearby the then East German border.

⁸ A little spa town in the border with the then East Germany.

⁹ Gazík – a little military car, the Soviet equivalent of a jeep.

¹⁰ A bigger town not far from the German border.

In this account, the striking feature is again the commonality of the youthful experience of life under a strict socialist regime, regardless of the ethnicity ascribed to the story's main proponents. All young people across the region dreamed of freedom and direct access to Western cultural production, and encountered similar experiences imposed by closed borders and a constant surveillance.

Experiences of Significant Historical Events

As both a majority population and ethnic minorities live in a single state, they usually experience the same historical events. They are similarly affected by economic collapses, wars, disasters and other events that have a marked impact on social life. However, different communities do not always communicate about their shared experiences. In addition to social events, these various communities are also influenced by the same mass culture. Many interesting memories relate, for example, to the events of 1968: to the invasion of Soviet troops into the Czech Republic. This was a very traumatic experience for a large part of the population of Czechoslovakia. In particular, the subsequent process of "normalization" - the re-establishment of a dependence of life in Czechoslovakia on Soviet governance - marked a whole generation as strongly as the experience of the Second World War and German occupation had impacted on the previous one. The Soviet attack started on August 21st, and one of the narrators recalled how on August 23rd, the day of the general strike, she had to get to a maternity hospital on foot when all traffic was paralysed. This is the story of a pregnant mother who rushes to a maternity hospital during a military operation, and suddenly finds herself in the midst of silence. The narrator, now a multiple grandmother, told us the story on a Sunday morning in the garden of her family house after she had returned from church with her relatives.

At noon, when the general strike began, she was in the process of crossing the bridge across the Vltava River:

The trams stopped, all was silence – you could hear a pin drop – maybe this lasted for a few minutes. For us, it was like a year. And we just walked over that bridge, with the armed tanks and all. I can tell you that those who have not experienced it will not understand what the fear was like. But I did not understand, because I just told Fečo¹¹ here: "I don't know, will we stop? Yeah?" So should we stay standing and wait for the siren to sound for everything to move again? So we risked it, and when we got across, I don't know, a bucket of water would not have been enough for us. Well, that's how I made my way to the maternity hospital, and on the 29th, Liduška was born to me.

Through this story we wish to present an example of a commonality of human experience against the backdrop of a dramatic event. One of the most significant moments in human life, the birth of a child, happens here to a frightened woman

¹¹ The name of her husband.

who faces tanks on the bridge separating her from the maternity hospital. At the same time, this dramatic event marked the lives of an entire generation of Czechoslovakian citizens as a historical moment: it constitutes a key node that is significant for the continuity of nationhood. In this light, the story of Liduška's birth depicts both that her individual life is forever tied to a political event of national significance, and that the experience of giving birth in uncertain, horrifying conditions is universal and thus located beyond ethnic boundaries.

CONCLUSION

There are a vast number of stories of a type similar to those we have cited above. Indeed, it is probably this type of story that predominates in family memories. Their essence is that they are de-ideologized, de-ethnicized, and are silent and useless for creating clearly defined group borders and political identities. Despite the fact that there are so many of them, these narratives are occluded by a discourse wherein the Romani act as a minority characterized by low education, poverty and unemployment. From the stories themselves, it would be unclear who the narrator is in terms of ethnicity or nationality. Of course, national rhetoric can be incorporated into them and they can become expressive of group identity: but many narrators do not want this. They want to remain secluded from social tensions, or they feel unable to create narratives that fit ideological models. They may even feel frustrated at feeling forced to navigate their lives between clearly defined ethnic or nationality positions. Nevertheless, their narratives have a specific ideological value precisely because they are de-ethnicized and the perspective from which they are narrated is not clear.

In the book *Ethnic Boundary Making*, Andreas Wimmer shows that the boundaries between groups are socially constructed, but that they are not all as intangible and fluid as social constructivists might imagine (Wimmer 2013). Wimmer agrees with Barth's argument that intergroup boundaries can be anchored in cultural differences, kinship ties and power relations that persist even as people move from one side of a border to the other (Barth 1969). We argue that this insight is important also in terms of understanding how the social construction of intergroup differences involves articulating a person's socio-economic situation in ethnic terms (and vice-versa). If individuals change their stratifying social characteristics, it is as if they have changed their ethnicity (or crossed boundaries). They no longer live as Romani: they cease to be Romani. The de-ethnicized stories presented in this article are essentially the stories of the majority population. Being told by Romani, they break the boundary whereby social characteristics are construed as ethnic ones. They show that the narrators' Romaniness lies in something other than the fact that they are poor, uneducated and unemployed. On the contrary, they show that the context that the Romani share with the majority

population has a strong formative influence, and results in similar stories which the majority, and perhaps also parts of the Romani minority, do not know about and often do not even want to know.

However, the people telling these stories did not draw any significant political conclusions from them. The excellent worker who emigrated to Germany returned to his home town of Ostrava after 1989. Despite his long experience in a German environment, he remained an Ostrava patriot and an admirer of communism. His children, however, studied in Germany and live in Frankfurt. The narrator from Děčín still lives in his hometown and in the end never emigrated. The family who in 1968 lived in Prague bought a house in the countryside.

In the above text, we tried to capture stories that do not have a strong potential to be articulated as boundary-making processes. They rather remain quiet on this issue. However, these are the stories that compose the daily lives of their narrators. They are essential both for their character and their uniqueness, and at the same time for their universality.

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STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL ANTHROPOLOGY: POST-TRUTH, SECRECY AND SILENCE IN SOCIETY AND ACADEMIA IN HUNGARY

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Anthropological interest in secrecy and silence – and in related aspects, such as lying, knowledge, memory and forgetting – has been both long and ambivalent. Through what may be called personal anthropology, in this article I describe both private and professional anthropological experiences including family memories, fieldwork sites and academic practices. By recalling state socialist ideology, censorship and family secrets, I illustrate how citizens have relied on each other in order to counter state hegemony. I highlight how surveillance in Romania expressly encouraged my informants, as well as the secret police, to engage in mutual intelligence and observation as evasive tactics. Building on these strategies, I argue that Hungarian academic life is not immune to secrecy, silence and covert action. I introduce an anthropologist who worked for the Hungarian secret police, and consider how academic life continues to rely on covert programs and an institutionalized hierarchy to promote and maintain its structures and interests.

KEYWORDS: secrecy, silence, surveillance, personal anthropology, academic hierarchy, Hungary

"Real power begins where secrecy begins." (Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*) "The Fake News is working overtime." (Donald Trump, tweet, May 9, 2018)

A recent public controversy concerning Hungarian journalists' attempts to obtain information about corruption and the embezzlement of public funds has prompted me to continue my investigation into the ways in which Hungarian politics and society continue to evolve in worrisome ways (Kürti 2016, 2019a). Since the beginning of 2021, a new law known as the Drone Act (Act CLXXIX of 2020) requires registration and special permits to operate drones in residential areas. Although largely in concert with EU safety rules, especially Regulation 2019/947 on the use of drones, the new Hungarian law has a more sinister story to tell. For the incident that prodded the Hungarian government to act involved reporters who were accused of obtaining illicit data by taking drone videos of a private estate of Hungary's richest entrepreneur, Lőrincz Mészáros, a close confidant of the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. The billionaire businessman filed a criminal complaint against the journalists for securing drone videos without obtaining the owner's permission, claiming an invasion of privacy.¹ It would thus appear that the government can change the law at will, by dint of prior legislation on private property, in order to guarantee secrecy for cadres and close associates who are suspected by reporters of misusing public funds for personal gain. As the lawyer representing the journalists put it: "If criminal proceedings will indeed be instituted against journalists for a drone video of a house, it will be a confession on the government's part that it is the privacy of politicians and oligarchs that is protected by law, and not the freedom of the press."² I propose in this article that the Drone Act directs our attention to larger issues of special interest to anthropologists studying East-Central European post-socialist and post-transitory states in general, and Hungarian society and culture in particular.

Secrecy and silence have long been interesting and exciting subjects for scholars, and as Max Forte has observed: "Anthropologists are no strangers to secrecy, obtaining secret documents, working with secret documents, respecting local secrets, and debating the unethical practice of doing secret research" (Forte 2010). Anthropologists have also been involved with government and military intelligence agencies, as David Price suggests in his study on culture and personality orientation during World War II and subsequently in the anthropology of the Cold War (Price 1998, 2002). Of still more concern is the fact that the relationship that anthropologists have addressed between silence and explanation seems so precarious and ambivalent; moreover, questions relating to secrecy and silence seem to be a recurrent and unresolved concern, as can be witnessed in special issues of *Current Anthropology* in 2015, a year later of *Ethnologia Europaea* and in 2019 of the *American Anthropologist*.

In what follows, I will present past experiences both from my youth and various fieldwork settings; in so doing, I intend to interrogate the reasons for an apparent abyss between our professional existences and our private lives. As professionals, we conduct research, teach in academic positions and, as required, uphold a professional code of conduct in order to maintain our integrity by living within the limitations of institutional regulations. As citizens and members of our immediate and extended relationships, we are obliged to be lawful, pay taxes and adhere to duties that are either assigned or taken up voluntarily. This does not represent merely a clear separation of public and private spheres, although that is also part of what intrigues me here, but requires a steady maintenance of various identities, of public and private selves.

I See the Law on Privacy, 2018. évi LIII. törvény a magánélet védelméről, https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1800053.TV&searchUrl=/gyorskereso (accessed 03.05.2021).

^{2 &}quot;Freedom of the Press. Journalists might go to prison from next year for camera drone recordings of private property." Átlátszó, English: https://english.atlatszo.hu/2020/12/22/journalists-might-go-toprison-from-next-year-for-camera-drone-recordings-of-private-property/ (accessed 03.02.2021).

Bearing in mind these multiple practices, I focus on the power relations that determine the said and the unsaid, the known and the secret, or that keep our professional and private lives constrained. Secrecy is a constituent element of both political and social relations, and forms a significant component of our everyday activities. To paraphrase Michael Taussig who, in a different context, writes that knowledge about secretive facts is never rigid and constant, we may well note that trusted insiders "knowing what not to know" (Taussig 1999) are constantly needed to guard, operate and disseminate information. In order to discuss secrecy and its myriad incarnations, I begin by discussing childhood and family cases, before then turning to the beginning of my professional, anthropological encounters with silence and secrecy and finally to the secretive world of academic conduct. These vignettes are by no means exhaustive or unique – many similar precedents exist elsewhere as well – yet they nevertheless offer evidence that we as professionals, as well as citizens, are not and cannot remain immune to the power play of secrecy and silencing no matter whether it be in a political, academic or private context.

SECRECY, SILENCE AND LYING INFORMANTS

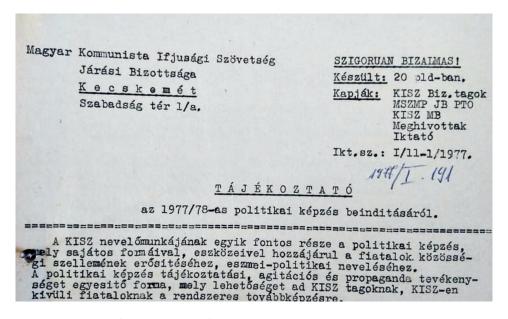
At least since Milan Kundera's highly acclaimed 1978 novel, The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, we are aware of the fact that states and governments use forms of mass culture and aestheticized political propaganda as potent instruments of silencing and organized forgetting. Structurally related to these political strategies are the concepts of secrecy and lying, which also constitute an integral part of human existence. As Georg Simmel wrote more than a hundred years ago, secrecy "is one of the greatest accomplishments of humanity" (Simmel 1906, 462). As a child growing up in communist Hungary, I gradually learned about remaining quiet and keeping secrets. As I recall, one of the foremost taboos was that of the repressive nature of the socialist regime, especially with regard to the 1956 revolution and the terror that followed it. Equally dangerous topics concerned the (eroding) power of the communist party ("You pretend to pay us, we pretend to work", was a muted joke), and being identified and labelled as an internal enemy of the state (Kürti 2013, 78–79). Other equally risky subjects ranged from sexuality to the Treaties of Versailles and Trianon, and from poverty to rampant alcoholism.³ As teenagers, we only whispered about The Voice of America or Radio Free Europe as stations of "foreign imperialists". We discussed excitedly the internal problems of our communist state and listened to the latest LPs produced by American

³ For an anthropological treatment of the Treaty of Versailles, also known in Hungary as the Treaty of Trianon, and the historical controversy between the Romanian and Hungarian states over Transylvania, see Kürti (2001), especially Chapter 2.

and British rock singers and bands. Even today, this whispered or "hidden silence" (Nakane 2012, 159) seems quite reasonable, especially as it is succinctly summarized in Hungarian proverbs, such as: "One person knowing something is a secret, two people become a council, and with three people the entire world is involved", or another: "Never-ceasing lies turn into truth". These sayings also reinforce the idea that issues of silence and secrecy are anchored in ideology and repression, and that a condition of ignorance functions by shutting out truth and information from elsewhere (Dilley and Kirsch 2015). State socialism, like fascism and post-fascist dictatorships, operated through lies and corruption by limiting freedom and suppressing information, in particular by means of widespread censorship. In this way, the maintenance of the privileges of the East European communist parties and their trusted elites was assured. At least in Hungary, this situation persisted until the late 1980s, when workers' and civil rights movements and democratic oppositions, both within and outside the party structure, were able to emerge and then play a significant role in the eventual demise of communist power in 1989-1990.

Throughout my academic life, both east and west, I have learned that lessons derived from the above proverbs accompany professional conduct whether we wish it or not. Silence and secrecy of various forms, some altruistic, others used in the service of ideological or sinister purposes, persevere in higher education and research institutions, colleges and universities, as they protect their interests, and by so doing guard their knowledge production. In progressing from graduate student to full professor and conducting several multi-site fieldworks in North America, Romania and Hungary, I have survived by dint of the "knowing what not to know" power paradigm. My doctoral fieldwork in the mid 1980s in Hungary was conducted in Csepel, the industrial, 21st district of Budapest (Kürti 2002, 2018). In addition to mingling with youthful workers, I was also invited by the management to production meetings on one condition: taking notes and pictures was forbidden, and the matters discussed were not to be communicated to anyone. These high-level meetings were held on Monday mornings and attended only by selected representatives of the "Four-corners" (üzemi négyszög) Trade Union, the Socialist Workers' Party, the communist youth organization and factory management. Crammed into a smoke-filled room, about a dozen individuals discussed targets or, more often than not, why targets were being missed, personal conflicts or how shabby machinery bogged down production. An especially noticeable feature of these closed meetings was the circulation of several dossiers, all sorted according to level of importance, with different headings: "internal use only" (csak belső használatra), "confidential" (bizalmas) and "strictly confidential" (szigorúan bizalmas). These I was never allowed to touch or read, and no permission to take photographs inside the premises was ever granted. While the secrecy at Csepel Works was specific, as it had been designated a sui generis military installation, such secrecy was ubiquitous and salient in communist era Hungary: every political organization, even

the communist party's youth league, the KISZ, espoused the officially imposed silence. It is instructive to compare this all-pervasive secrecy with one of the commandments of the Young Pioneer organization, "The Young Pioneer does not lie, and acts justly" (*Az úttörő igazat mond és igazságosan cselekszik*), that we were all made to memorize as children.



Strictly confidential, a circular for party cadres about a regional political education of Communist Youth League leadership, 1977

At that time, this role of secrecy or confidentiality in official business seemed quite logical to me, even though the Central Statistical Office published data annually on industrial outputs and the changing labour force. With workers and their family members, with whom I established close working relationships both inside and outside the factory gates, I was able to converse about these matters freely. As I discovered, workers, both blue- and white-collar, had their own "little secrets" in opposition to "real" company secrets (*vállalati titok*): reasons for absenteeism, alcoholism or slow work tempos were accepted subversive actions that circulated as quite elaborate stories. Among the employees, in workers' youth clubs or at home, these "small secrets" (*titkocskák*) served to alleviate the stresses of work and assisted them in cementing a special camaraderie across age, occupational and gender lines.

In the late 1980s, I managed to travel to Romania as a tourist and investigated ethnonational relations and cultural identity in Hungarian settlements in the north-eastern, Transylvanian part of the country (Kürti 2001). Crossing the Hungarian-Romanian border by train or car at that time was an exasperating activity well-known from contemporary descriptions. I do not exaggerate by stating unequivocally that citizens of both countries were involved in intricate clandestine transactions, transporting illegal goods to friends, family and business associates. Even research unauthorized by local government was illegal, and staying overnight with families could result in hefty fines. Both Hungarians and Romanians, while suspicious at first, slowly warmed to me during fieldwork, often informing me about tragic personal and family stories during a period renowned for the terror and anti-minority repressions enacted by the totalitarian regime of Nicolae Ceauşescu. One of the important lessons taught to me by locals was that one does not talk in the presence not only of strangers, but of anyone who was suspected of being a police informer (Kürti 2001, 68). Some indicated specific individuals who were suspected of being collaborators or spies (*besúgó*, *spicli*) of the dreaded secret state police, known as the Securitate. Others resorted to silence, but remarked that there were certain individuals who should be treated simply as "lying informants". The latter, as Frank Salamone has argued (1977), often prove to be prominent characters identified by anthropologists in various cultural contexts.

The proliferation of evasive or distorted narratives made perfect sense as I was well-aware that urbanites and villagers alike existed in limbo, in perpetual fear of surveillance by secret police or their collaborators. The situation at this time in the Romanian borderland region was truly an existential 1984, just as George Orwell had imagined it in his novel. I mean this not only in terms of the ubiquity of Orwellian 'newspeak', or simply boastful, empty and distorted language, but more importantly in an essential role of silencing: in this context, silencing meant not only keeping quiet in the presence of duplicitous individuals, but also maintaining an unambiguous and absolute separation between private and public lives, keeping the former muted and secret at all costs. At least since George Simmel's work, we know that secrecy is both a powerful means and institutionalized tool in the hands of the state, but that it can also be quite subversive as well (Simmel 1906). Anyone conducting research in state socialist Romania learned quickly that the government of Nicolae Ceauşescu forced a style of discourse on its citizens that fundamentally altered all aspects of social relations. The more the state sought to disclose what ordinary citizens engage in and think about, and in the process camouflaged its practices in order to obtain as much information about this as it could, the more individuals endeavoured to hide everything from the state. Moreover, ordinary citizens also desired to secure information concerning those who were involved in covert police activity. In a true cat-and-mouse game, state and citizens were locked into a system of double surveillance in which people were eager to know as much as possible about each other's secrets, lying and spying. Naturally, the Romanian case was not a unique one: all communist dictatorships used secret police to monitor their citizens. In this context, the East German Stasi and the Romanian

Securitate were the two most dreaded institutions, alongside the Soviet KGB and the Hungarian AVH, known after 1962 as the III/III subdivision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁴ How could a researcher deal with ethical issues in those years? Even during officially sanctioned fieldwork, although I fully disclosed the communities I studied, I resorted to evasion and at times outright lies as the only effective means to protect informants' identity and privacy. Some interlocutors were quite forthcoming about their participation in my research, but interestingly they argued that, if questioned by the authorities, they would willingly deny everything that I said or wrote about them. We both came to the conclusion that this sort of secrecy or denial functioned as a "good lie" for a good cause (*jó kis hazugság lesz, de megéri*). Even though many anthropologists do not like to admit this practice, I am certain that this has long been a standard method used in order to protect anonymity.

The above experiences are revelatory not only of actual secretive and unmentionable elements in different contexts, they also point to another issue of central concern for our discipline: that of anonymity. The primary method of anthropologists when conducting fieldwork is to observe even the mundane aspect of informants' lives, and in so doing they needed to obtain informed consent in order to protect informant identities and data gathered at all costs. In this context, secrecy functions as part of a two-pronged approach: the first we might term permitted seclusion, or in other words a permission to allow certain information/knowledge to circulate among trusted participants. The second aspect is a refusal or denial of the right to know. Even the ASA ethical guidelines state: "Participants should be made aware that it is rarely, if at all, legally possible to ensure total confidentiality or to protect the privacy of records."⁵ As also illustrated in my Transylvanian case, one of the most debated ethical practices in the social sciences has been the anonymization or removal of identifying information in order to protect informants and their communities (Thomson et al. 2005). From the second half of the twentieth century, this has been an accepted ethical norm similar to obtaining informed consent, but one that is variously implemented. Depending on the fieldwork context, anthropologists disguise the specific locations of fieldwork sites and camouflage the names of informants. Of course, this practice is anchored in the anthropological idea, or ideal, that anonymity is one of the necessary ethical

⁴ For scholarly treatment of the communist secret police of East Germany see Gieseke 2014, and on Romania see, for example, Deletant 1995, Vatulescu 2010 and Verdery 2018. Steven Sampson also documents this topic in several earlier papers on his home page, https://stevensampsontexts.com/ (accessed 02.28.2021). For an interesting revelation on how the Securitate utilized members of Hungarian communities to spy on their fellow countrymen, see Könczei 2019. On the operation of the secret police in Hungary, see Takács 2013.

⁵ The Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice, adopted by the Association at its Annual Business Meeting in March 1999. https://www.theasa.org/downloads/ethics/Ethical_guidelines.pdfcce (accessed 03.02.2021).

features (together with honesty, objectivity and peer-reviewing) utilized in order not to harm those involved with the research or allow anyone to take advantage of them. But there are enormous differences in how successfully anthropologists can maintain confidentiality and keep things secret from the authorities or colleagues, or even from other natives not directly involved in the research.

Naming the exact research location, be it a city, a village or a particular neighbourhood, offers anthropologists a legitimate raison d'être for writing up data and claiming authenticity ("I was there, I know, I have the evidence"). Yet, as Bellman puts it: "The production of secrecy is always a problematic concern of participants because some are much more successful than others at practicing it" (Bellman 1981, 1). At times, and with the possibility of subsequent fieldwork in the same location by other researchers, the identity of any given informant could eventually be disclosed anyway, or on the contrary, anonymity of location may skew important socio-economic, political and historical details (Nospor 2000). The trailblazers of anthropology in Hungary have utilized various tactics with regard to their actual research sites. For instance, Chris Hann, representing the best of Malinowskian social anthropology in his pioneering work on Hungary, has not shied away from disclosing the name of his "village" (Tázlár), a settlement in south-central Hungary where he conducted fieldwork in the late 1970s (Hann 1980). His revelation of location is in fact so conspicuous that the name of the village appears in the title of his book, in which can also be found plenty of statistical data and three maps assisting readers in locating the settlement in its proper historical and socio-cultural context. Two more anthropologists, Martha Lampland and Ildiko Vasary, also both identify the community they studied (Lampland 1995, Vasary 1987). The German sociocultural anthropologist, Tatjana Thelen, has continued on this trajectory; her communities are openly disclosed in her book published in German (Thelen 2003). Other anthropologists on the other hand, such as Peter Bell and Marida Hollos, also produced monographs on Hungary, but both used pseudonyms instead of real names for their fieldwork sites (Bell 1984, Hollos 2001). Hollos worked in central Hungary, while Bell carried out research in the northern part of the country, but both provided rather insufficient anonymity in their books: for anyone looking at the demographic and historical data could easily locate the Hungarian settlements described. Maya Nadkarni, an American anthropologist, has opted for a unique identification procedure: she has conducted fieldwork in Budapest, as she readily reveals, but also visited a "village" whose identity in her published work remains hidden (Nadkarni 2020).

Maintaining invisibility not only renders authority dubious, it also flies into the face of an opposite practice wherein certain individuals are singled out for an entire chapter (as key informants) or even an entire monograph, and thus endowed with celebrity status both within the profession and in the informant's local or national community. Anthropologists must undoubtedly select a more moderate and appropriate solution when situating their participants somewhere between the Scylla of anonymity and the Charybdis of stardom. It is helpful in this instance to recall here the Cheshire Cat of Lewis Carroll who, in a cunning response to Alice's request for direction, replied: "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." The moral is clear: what to disclose is up to the researcher, and depends on what he or she wants to do with the material presented, in what context, for what kind of theoretical persuasion and for what goals he or she wants it to serve.

In my own publications, I steadfastly utilize the official toponyms of the fieldwork sites I have researched. However, a different dilemma arises when participants are indifferent about their locale's identity or official name, especially when several historical toponyms exist. Similarly, as I have learned, informants – both rural and urban citizens - are sometimes adamant about the printing of their names. For instance, when my two-volume monograph on the local history of the town I have been researching for the past two decades was published, it took only a few months before a few individuals approached me. As custom would have it, I listed all the names of individuals who assisted me, including those who were my informants and interviewees (Kürti 2019b). Several people complained about why their names were omitted while those of others were printed in my book. During initial interviews, participants willingly offered their full names and provided details of who and what could be seen on family photographs. In specific cases, however, my interlocutors wanted to "leave out" certain aspects from their narratives: "Do not write this down", they often expressly requested. Interestingly, some of such statements concerned hefty fines and prison terms received during socialism that to them were "unjustified" or "politically motivated", but nonetheless considered too "personal", or often too shameful, to be included in the published monograph. As one man in his seventies put it: "I was jailed on trumped-up charges. I did not steal anything from the cooperative farm: we simply distributed surplus corn at the end of the harvest to co-op members as we have always done." And this latter point is important. Workers that I interviewed at the co-op all agreed that "stealing" from the company was not theft *per se*, as such an action was "an open secret known by all" (nyílt titok volt, mindenki tudta), but they nonetheless did not want such information to be disclosed in a publication. On the contrary, other aspects of their lives were full of memories of impudent bravado, whose inclusion in the book actually generated a sense of empowerment. A man in his sixties, for instance, bragged about his clever scheming in obtaining sizable arable land during the 1994–1995 land restitution process. A woman in her seventies boasted about her excellent organizational skills as a minor trade union representative at the state collective firm: "When I told my co-worker 'girls' *(lányok)* about extra volunteer work during the weekend, they all heeded my call. We were always a real team (egy igazi csapat voltunk). I was a real organizer and they followed me, because they liked and trusted me." She specifically requested this statement to be included in the section depicting the workings of the socialist cooperative firm

where she had worked for two decades. At the same time, she remained evasive about her private life and resisted disclosing details about her marriages (she was married three times). With a single sentence – "Oh, it's not that important, I made mistakes" – she brazenly and abruptly finished the interview. I respected her wishes and this aspect of her life is not in my book: I refer to it for the first time here.

ANTHROPOLOGIST AS A POLICE INFORMER: THE BORSÁNYI CASE

Anthropology in Eastern Europe has a chequered history – in an earlier text, I termed it an "intellectual enigma" - one of the main reasons for which is its overtly centralized, state-controlled nature (Kürti 2011, 126).⁶ But this is nothing specific to anthropology. All cultural and educational institutions were nationalized and centralized after 1948, the year in which the communists took full power in Hungary. After the suppression of the 1956 revolution, the work of the secret police became especially important in maintaining state hegemony and order. People of all walks of life were approached and successfully recruited by the police into its ranks. This came to light after 1990, when the archives were opened and police files revealed the names of many individuals who had worked as secret collaborators; incriminated politicians and illustrious filmmakers, musicians and literary figures all made the headlines, whereby some attempted to lie about their involvement, while others grudgingly admitted their complicity. One Hungarian anthropologist, by the name of László Borsányi, was among them. I knew László Borsányi (1944–2014) quite well, as we had first met in the late 1980s when he visited the United States and later, when I moved to Budapest, we became friends. Indeed, I lived in László's Budapest apartment when he was conducting fieldwork in New Mexico on Native American popular culture. In the 1990s, he was instrumental in assisting me in finding employment in Budapest; it was not his fault that I could not find work, and later we both became employees of the University of Miskolc. In Miskolc, we often discussed his work and especially his publications about fieldwork methods and observational techniques, but not once did he mention to me his student years in Budapest. I did think that his early trips, first in 1974 and then in 1980-82 to stay at the University of New Mexico, were somewhat suspect as it was extremely difficult to obtain visas to travel to any western countries, and especially to America. Citizens could obtain two kinds of passports, a red one for traveling to communist countries and a blue one for western states; the latter was a possibility only once in every three years. The question of how he was able to leave several times for the United States of America baffled me. Answers to my query came only in 2005, when a historian

⁶ For an alternative and more elaborate versions of this argument, see Sárkány 2016 and Hann 2015.

revealed that Borsányi had been a collaborator working for the III/III division of the secret police (Szőnyei 2005).

I tried to ascertain answers from László Borsányi, but he opted for early retirement from Miskolc and stopped all cooperation with his former colleagues. I could gather only some answers to my questions by looking at a brief response to his public shaming that appeared in national newspapers. Barely 19 years of age and only beginning his first year of study in Budapest, Borsányi was approached by the secret police and agreed to spy on his classmates as an informer (*ügynök*) of the III/III division under the alias György Fung. Through his acquaintances, he was successful in infiltrating various alternative youth groups, and artistic and music gatherings, his prime target group being a special circle of friends, called Indians: a group of intellectuals who organized summer camps to play at being Native American Indians. Borsányi was pressured by his supervisor officer (*tartótiszt*) to collect as much incriminating evidence as he could not only against those glorifying Indian ways of life, but especially against those suspected of being "Maoist anti-communists and anti-state activists" (Borsányi 2009, 65).7 After his clandestine activity was made public, Borsányi defended his past by pointing to threats of a lengthy jail sentence and the termination of his student status forever if he refused to cooperate with the authorities. One of the people in whom the state was especially interested was István Poór. Poór was adamant about organizing an alternative musical club in Budapest, and this put him in constant conflict with the authorities. This "reckless" youth was eventually kicked out of the Eötvös Loránd University for immoral behaviour not consistent with the socialist ethic. Constant harassment forced Poór to defect from Hungary in 1972, whereupon he settled in the United States of America, specifically in New York City where he embarked upon his life-long dream to become a film director.8

After the publication of the Szőnyei book, it became very clear that Borsányi's willingness to collaborate had paid off: he obtained his degree, immediately found employment as a "propagandist" museologist at the National Museum of Hungary (*Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum*) and was able to secure grants to conduct several trips to the United States to continue his fieldwork among Southwestern Indian tribes.⁹ Soon after the public controversy concerning his secret service activities, however, he opted for a retirement plan and lived a rather private existence for the rest of his life. If there

⁷ The entire Borsányi case can be read online: https://anblokkegyesulet.wordpress.com/ megfigyelesi-ugyek-2009-3/ (accessed 02.26.2021).

⁸ I happened to meet István Poór (1945-) in NYC when he became involved with a Hungarian amateur dance ensemble and jazz band; he was fond of playing the tárogató and the hurdy-gurdy. After 1990, he has repatriated to Hungary and is presently involved in filmmaking. László Borsányi never disclosed to me whether he was able to reconnect with István Poór.

⁹ In this context, it is revealing to read the political tone of his publication concerning public relations and museum organizational activities (Borsányi 1976).

is a moral to this secret life of a colleague, it is one of courage: for Borsányi was able to look in the mirror and face the consequences. He willingly confronted his accusers and told his own version of what happened and why he collaborated with the police. What makes his case so compelling is the fact that he was both an anthropologist and a part of the secret police operation: he was indeed a collaborator. Unlike Katherine Verdery or Steven Sampson, who were spied on by the Securitate in Romania (Sampson 1983, Verdery 2018), László Borsányi actually worked for more than ten years as a secret agent for the police, and although his story does not have a happy ending, it points to the possibly dangerous choices with which one may be confronted at a key moment in one's life. How would we act in such a case: do you know?

"IT'S A ROTTEN JOB, BUT SOMEBODY HAS TO DO IT"10

My final example concerns my experiences living and working in various academic environments since the early 1990s. Sustaining silence as a normative feature of academic enterprise has many ramifications and has been with us for a long time. Every company employee has to be familiar with its Nondisclosure Agreement: such agreements exist also in Hungary (Titoktartási kötelezettség), including in universities. These agreements mean that employees are required by law to keep confidential - internal - matters secret. In fact, I am not so sure that by writing this now I am not in violation of Hungarian law. This is not the end of the story, as most academic business, ranging from hiring to promotion, from evaluation to auditing, and even writing letters of recommendation is cloaked in confidential correspondence, meetings and "doings". Most of these simply constitute parts of the everyday functioning of the legal system, both state and institutional; others, meanwhile, are closely related to the functioning of secret societies within academic life. One of Simmel's propositions (1906, 462–463) might well hold true for the forms that this institutional secrecy takes in both socialist and post-socialist Hungary: the oppressive or totalitarian nature of the state encourages the development of more institutional secrecy in other (educational, health, cultural, business) areas as well (Kürti 2020).

Since 2010, first the Bologna declaration caused havoc, and then a few years later various conservative program directives have generated far-reaching changes in higher education (Kürti 2011). All these innovations in the organization of university education have been overtly politicized: tuition fees have been raised, the number of state-funded admissions has been curtailed, university programs and departments have been eliminated and new quality control procedures have been established. What has not changed

¹⁰ This phrase, which tends to be uttered colloquially as 'It's a dirty job, but somebody has to do it', originally appeared in Agathe Christie's 1929 crime novel, *The Seven Dials Mystery*.

is the pervasive secrecy that remains part and parcel of scholarly engagement: ranging from evaluating grant and job/promotion applications or manuscripts to writing chapters for colleagues' Festschrifts or even adulatory remembrances of one's colleagues. All these necessarily involve a compliant group of scholars: all those who agree on being silent and secretive and, as needed, use language that is highly bureaucratic, evasive or oracular. Dissimulation, an artful language of opinion, can be seen in Edmund Leach's recollection of his education and references to his former colleagues. Even though he is adamant "to put the record straight" on some issues, he refrains from mentioning certain names, and especially from critiquing his seniors: the "sensitivity of British scholars" made him realize that to do so "is simply not practical" (Leach 1984, 3).

In my own academic life, I have experienced a similar sensation: as is well known, while sitting on various boards often what goes on behind the scenes is more important than what is publicly revealed. Written evaluations, for instance, can be a far cry from what has been said in committee meetings. At times, certain committee decisions, as is also the case in national parliaments and local councils, are made during what is called closed sessions (*zárt ülés*): the minutes of such meetings are rarely, if ever, made public, and even if they are, such records are never true reflections of the actual proceedings of the meetings in question. Personal conflicts are bound to arise after such meetings or when someone decides to speak out, or conversely they can also emerge when all involved agree on remaining silent. I have seen – or have myself been – a candidate whose application was not funded and who was provided with bogus reasons for rejection.

Progression within the academic hierarchy is plagued with institutional secrecy and anonymity. Aside from those directly appointed for their political loyalty to the state or government, the neoliberal Hungarian educational system is built on a slow progression up the academic ladder (ranglétra). Advancement is based on academic performance, teaching and publications accumulated over the years. In general, there is little or no transparency of appointment or promotion, and both low and high-level decisions are rarely, if ever, open to everyone. Even if a department advertises a position opening, as required by law, open searches are non-existent as positions are set aside for those insiders who are eligible to rise up to the next rank. Evaluators are instructed to write about the applicant following strict guidelines and to act according to professional standards, whatever that means, even if they know that the whole process is awash with irregularities. The oscillation between formal and informal evaluations is just one of the academic "myths", to use the term in which F. G. Bailey described the ethos of the behind-the-scenes world of academia (Bailey 1977). My experience has been quite unequivocal: anonymity or secrecy has rarely, if ever, persisted for an extended period of time. I agree with Graham Jones who argues that secrecy and risk are fundamentally intertwined, especially as "concealment entails the possibility of unwelcome revelation" (2014, 54).

Individual candidacy for grants or promotion, or procedures for establishing new departmental programs are a convoluted process tethered to quality control, or what anthropologists Chris Shore and Susan Wright call "audit culture" (Shore and Wright 2015). In the post-socialist higher-education bureaucracy, this is framed as modernization, increasing effectiveness and establishing due democratic process. The reality of the past twenty years, as I can attest from my previous involvement as an evaluator of professorships and proposals for academic degree programs, both activities modestly remunerated by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (MAB), has been otherwise. In fact, what David Graeber calls the bureaucratic and marketization process of the new capitalist university (Graeber 2014: 77–78) has arrived in Hungary. Both individual and team evaluation proceedings have been shrouded in mysteries, with the latter in particular being similar to rituals of tribal secret societies wherein only anointed members are allowed to participate. At the university level, a similar evaluation of colleagues is an equally taxing procedure: which is why I have declined on numerous occasions to serve in such a capacity. It seems natural that we accept confidentiality as paramount in the status quo of academic life, knowing well that such procedures involve information about colleagues that at some time may be utilized at the discretion of others. Yet, engaging in such clandestine academic business raises many questions, not the least of which is: what happens to trust and openness?

Evaluation is one of the prime testing grounds of academic business that transcends institutions by following the trendy path of neoliberal audit culture. Measuring scholarly performance has turned largely into a numbers game in which primacy is afforded to measuring publications in national and, more importantly, international academic, specifically ranked disciplinary journals. Since the 2010s, evaluating scholarship has emerged as a quasi-mathematical science based on a system called quality control. Journals are peer-reviewed, which assures measurement through metrics, impact factor and rankings from QI to Q4. It turns out that the northern hemisphere (Western Europe, the UK, and the US) leads the way by publishing most of the QI English-language journals, with a select number of individuals on their advisory or editorial boards most of whom are scholars from universities within the same specific geographical terrain. The outlook for East European scholars publishing in such leading knowledge-producing (and maintaining) journals is bleak, and almost all academic periodicals published in East-Central Europe are relegated to the level of Q3 or Q4, with a few Russian and Slovenian periodicals included in Q2.¹¹ Peripheralization, or

II Russian periodicals ranked in the Q2 category include Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie (Ethnographic Review), a journal known previously as Soviet Ethnography and published by the Russian Academy of Sciences. The Slovenian Slovenski Etnolosko Drustvo is also placed in the Q2 category. Q3 journals include Collegicum Anthropologicum, Etnolog, Folklore, Traditiones; and examples of Q4 are the Czech Cesky Lid, the Polish Etnografia Polska, the Hungarian Ethnographia, the Croatian Narodna Umjetnost and the Romanian Revista de Etnografie si Folclor.

even ghettoization, works both ways: privileged Western journals maintain their status by utilizing a large reserve army of Western scholars, and thus *de facto* relegate minor anthropological traditions within their respective national academic cultures to the margins. Curiously, this Matthew effect – or the rich get richer complex – seems to continue unabated, as scholars who have managed to publish in QI or Q2 journals seem to generate more visibility in other academic pursuits as well (Demeter 2020).

Evaluating colleagues or writing a review about their work can be emotionally onerous, despite the standard practice of anonymous peer-reviews. The key to this game of hide-and-seek is well-known to all participants: authors' identities are secret for the reviewer and reviewing is a clandestine act known only to editors. According to Michael Herzfeld: "Academics familiar with the peer review system will immediately recognize the phenomenon: the anonymity of authors and reviewers creates a civic fiction (since the chances are great that the identity of each side is known or at least accessible to the other), one that is designed to avert unseemly conflict while permitting the free expression of critical disagreement" (Herzfeld 2009, 138). While internationally it is easier to achieve anonymity and secrecy, my experience within the Hungarian academic community has been rather negative. A lack of general standards, unethical review processes and hasty decisions, instead of anonymous peer-reviews and rigorous editorial judging, mar academic publishing. For instance, one editor of a prominent Hungarian journal wittingly engaged in a double clandestine operation, both revealing my authorship to reviewers and, in turn, disclosing to me the names of the two reviewers tasked with evaluating my manuscript. Further exacerbating my frustration was the fact that both colleagues praised my article, suggesting publication in the journal and, some minor revisions aside, emphasized the important contribution of the manuscript to the field of Hungarian anthropology. When I decided to raise the seriousness of this issue, a colleague involved with the journal seemed nonchalant about the question of anonymity, ethics and professionalism, arguing: "This is a small country and a small field, what is the purpose of playing anonymously? Everyone knows everything about everybody anyway" (úgyis mindenki tud mindent mindenkiről). When I replied to him that this harkens back to the darkest days of a Stasi or KGB system and is unbecoming of post-socialist academic business, we both burst into laughter. Laughter, however, is a double-edged sword (pace Milan Kundera), and mine was rather acrimonious. As the entire process smacked of hypocrisy and unprofessionalism, I have declined any further business with the journal.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON POST-TRUTH AND ANTHRO-LEAKS

My purpose in this article is not to sound a wake-up call for scholars about secrecy, silence, truth (or post-truth) or lying; that has already been done by others (Mair 2017, Sidky 2020). Truth, ethics and objectivity have been our moral guiding lights, even

though we all well know that both are susceptible to personal motivational biases. Yet we all stake our careers on our analyses of other societies, especially other peoples' lives, based on ethnographic accuracy and impartiality. In so doing, we aim to preserve anthropology's scholarly status, even if it is a "monstrous" one as Edmund Leach once famously observed. In this endeavour we also adhere to the rules, and rules as well as rulers are many. But we are also not separate from our fellow citizens, friends, neighbours and family members, as our life is not, I like to think – even though democracy can acquire monstrous forms (Kürti 2020) – genetically monitored in a petri dish.

Moving beyond the binary of memory and forgetting, truth and post-truth, I would argue that silence - its many definitions notwithstanding - is a purposeful action of knowing when to remain reticent, when to play the game in order to keep the system alive. We know, of course, that there are many kinds of silence – villagers hiding from the secret police or the Borsányi-case are only a few that I have offered above – as high and local politics influence the ways in which such behaviour is valued. Yet while we question a lack of transparency and openness in politics, we have seemed less eager to do so in our academic proceedings. Thirty years after the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and of living in a democracy, a persistent question remains: how can we analyse and understand democracy and openness in science and society in the post-Wikileaks age? I suggest that, while we live in a fully-fledged democratic polity, based on openness and civil society (founded on transparency), this is only an aspirational state as continual and unquestioned secrets, both institutionalized and individual, continue to function as ideological Berlin Walls that serve limited interests. For secrecy "is controversial because it seems inimical to democracies, where open discussion and accountability serve as touchstones" (Chinon 2009, I). Or, as Eva Horn similarly argues: "Secrecy serves to protect and stabilize the state, and as such it is the precondition for the functioning of the law; but at the same time secrecy opens a space of exception from the rule of law, an exception that can breed violence, corruption and oppression. [...] On the one hand, the state secret acts as a constituent element of power; on the other hand, it fuels its excess; it marks or, more precisely, secretes the state's vulnerable spot, the turn into violence, corruption and chaos" (Horn 2011, 4–8).

It may well be that a similar catch-22 exists for scholars, especially fieldworkers whose claim for authenticity – being there and knowing what is not to be known – may be undermined by redundant anonymity, secrecy and silence. Is there a way to dissolve this inherent contradiction without evasion, make believe or lies? It would seem unlikely. The inability of scholars to face the vicissitudes of academic existence and secretive lives has remained one of the major obstacles in legitimizing transparency that also prevents new perspectives in anthropology from advancing studies on secrecy in a novel way. Affecting the social sciences in general and anthropology in particular, a new intellectual agenda should promote further democratization in the discipline, as well as challenge state ideology and governmental policies that create a wedge between nationalized academic disciplines and the international community. To be sure, secrecy, anonymity, mimicry and truthfulness are parts of our existence, either as written disclosures in the form of ethical standards or as good guidance for fieldworkers, especially those whose work involves human subjects. As Thomas Beidelman has argued, "Something is always hidden, always a secret; if we expect a society to work, nothing should ever be utterly and entirely known, anymore than Goethe's Faust could bear to confront the horror of the true visage of the Earth-Spirit" (Beidelman 1993, 46). But there are other, lesser known, or rather silent or muted conventions that, whether we wish it or not, act as countervailing forces. Scholarly life is prone to follow established or fashionable standards: even if these are often in direct contrast to earlier practices, this tendency makes it difficult to transform academic hierarchy and bureaucracy due to its close association with the powers that be, more often than not greedy corporations and the state. I began by recalling proverbs about secrecy and close with a Biblical adage, one that notwithstanding its optimistic overtone might serve to guide us: "Everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open" (Mark 4: 22).

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SILENCES AND SECRETS OF FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND THE STATE

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In this article, we suggest that silence is often more about remembering than forgetting. We consider ways in which silences can occupy and dominate state discourse, community knowledge, family stories and individual narratives. Drawing on research material from Poland and the Czech Republic in the late socialist and post-socialist periods, we look at ways similar patterns of narrative fusion take place in various contexts in which both the public and the private domains are often shadowed by things veiled in secrecy and hidden from the general gaze. We argue that personal family and kin accounts of private things which for some reason cannot be spoken become entangled with, and to some extent communicated through, broader and more public historical narratives, and vice versa, and show how partial accounts are thus transmitted from generation to generation even while remaining largely unspoken.

In developing our argument, we focus on the idea of *walls of silence* and on the process of drawing boundaries between people and the state, between generations (grandparents, parents and children) and between insiders and outsiders of communities. Suggesting that silence may be loud or quiet, we look at registers of silence and the ways in which they operate at the different levels of state, community and household. We ask what it means to hold certain kinds of knowledge, or to be excluded from these. At times, and for some people, knowledge may be a source of power or social or economic capital; for others, or in other contexts, being excluded from or rejecting knowledge, and thus not being privy to the subtexts of silence, may be a source or freedom and potential or possibility.

KEYWORDS: Walls of silence, registers of silence, gender, generation, household, socialism, post-socialism, memory and commemoration, history, the state

INTRODUCTION: THINKING ABOUT SILENCE

"There is no speech proper without this background of silence;... all speech answers to the sound of silence" (Slavoj Žižek, in Kenny 2011, 68-69).

Secrets and Silences Under and After Socialism

There is a certain ambiguity to the idea of silence. It may be associated positively with peace, and a calm stillness; but conversely it is often linked negatively to restriction, repression and coercion. In the latter case, it is represented as something which, like a layer of ice or glass, has to be broken or shattered. This ambiguity of the term is a reflection of its power.

The power of silence caught the imagination of feminist writers in the 1970s and 1980s. In *On Lies, Secrets, Silence* Adrienne Rich wrote: "Lying is done with words, and also with silence." (Rich 1979) Her book centred on trust and honesty, exploring the emotional dimensions of lies and secrets. Tilly Olsen, in *Silences* (1978), discussed similar issues in relation to the voices that should have been there but were hauntingly absent: women's voices, black voices and voices of people of colour and excluded ethnicities. For both of these writers, silences were political, and were affective, emotional. They showed that silences generated at the level of the individual and maintained within close personal relationships were simultaneously perpetuated by popular culture and by state policies and ideologies. Silences punctuated personal, popular and state discourses. They spoke to an absence that should have been present.

In oral history and ethnography we can find a similar relationship between what is uttered and what is not, between the story told and the omissions that mark it. As in the work of Rich and Olsen, what is often striking is the political sound of silences, related to power, authority and regimes of truth and memory, and the relation between these "big" silences and the silences of everyday/ordinary life.

Over the past few years, a number of radical attempts to reject mainstream history and to provide space for different, often very divergent, stories have taken place. In North America, Europe and Africa, monuments have been toppled or denounced and the long-acclaimed heroes that they represent – military and political figures, and members of current and former social and economic elites – have been discredited, and their connections to slavery, racism and colonialism publicly revealed. One of the main aims of these acts has been to break public silences, and to reveal concealed truths and alternative histories.

Strikingly similar scenes took place three decades earlier, in 1989 and the early 1990s, in an extraordinarily public breaking of collective silences and exposure of collective secrets. Statues of Stalin, Lenin and other communist heroes in cities, towns and villages throughout Eastern and Central Europe were defaced by angry crowds, pulled down and relegated to the dustbin of history or moved to themed statue parks. With changes in political systems or regimes, heroes were transformed into villains and criminals, and former villains resurrected as the "real" heroes (see Witeska-Mlynarczyk 2014). In the wake of such enormous shifts in the tides of history, entrenched silences, which ordinary members of the public and the apparatus of state institutions had colluded to maintain, dissolved into confession and accusation. People came forward to tell their hidden stories or to throw light on hidden pasts, as old silences were broken and new ones emerged and grew. Processes of lustration – a form of public reckoning - were put into place, but were often highly contentious and politicized. As silences around the crimes and misdemeanours of 'the state' (in the persons of officials, police, politicians) on the one hand and of ordinary people living *in* "the state" on the other were broken, questions were raised about who was culpable.¹ Throughout the whole socialist bloc, everyone knew that members of their families and their closest friends and neighbours might be informers, but they carried on with their daily lives. Silence shrouded truth at every level of society: there were the secrets that the state held both about and from people, and the secrets that people hid from the state (see Kotkin's account of surveillance during Stalinism, Kotkin 1995; for more recent accounts, see Alexievich 2013/2016). There was often a tension between loyalty to the state and loyalty to the family; but even more common was distrust and fear of the state, and trust (albeit slightly edgy) in family and personal networks of friendship, neighbourhood and work.

Perhaps because of the critical way the state socialist regimes have been portraved in western political discourse, as well as internally by dissidents and more recently by politicians, academics and generally in popular culture of post-socialist societies, these silences, associated with oppression, corruption and opposition, have been dominant themes explored by historians and political scientists of the region. But, in ethnographic accounts and popular culture, other realms of silence are also revealed: silences within communities, families and households, silences between genders and generations, and silences held closely inside individual people. Many of these are small silences, halfknown or half-guessed at truths, stories carried by the members of one generation, or one house, but kept from another. Of course, there are other far heavier, sometimes terrible, silences which permeate this local level, as we see for instance in Jan Gross's account of the pogrom in the Polish town of Jedwabne in 1941 (Gross 2003) that revealed a complicity of silence between the community and the state. The official line of the socialist government, that the violence and atrocities inflicted on Jews had been carried out by the occupying Germans, matched and reinforced the community account. In this case, the local narrative, masking a terrible act under the guise of war, and the socialist state narrative, which pushed a nationalist agenda, converged.

I We are aware that, throughout this essay, we are using concepts like the state, the nation and the community in ways that may appear to reify them, and to suggest that they have a clear and anthropomorphic existence in time and space. We want to stress that this is not how we understand these institutions and relationships.

During socialism there were many political events and histories which, although they were not spoken of explicitly, were reflected upon obliquely (see for example Niethammar, 1992, Wanner 1998, Richardson 2004, Liber 2021). Ongoing critiques were kept alive in jokes which circulated widely, in rumours and stories recounted in kitchens over tea or vodka, and in films, plays and exhibitions that contained veiled references which everyone recognized. Since the fall of socialism there have been concerns about a kind of collective amnesia sweeping across the region, reflecting an apparent lack of engagement with the traumatic aspects of actually lived socialism (Ringel 2013, Trnka 2013). Politicians, local leaders and members of the general public call for a revival of historical memory. The fear of forgetting is connected to the ways that silence is managed, to the technologies of silence and memory. Walter Benjamin wrote about the obligation to remember, arguing that we must keep remembering, even when memory is most painful or seems long past and irrelevant, because to forget is to deny the lives of the dead and to allow a slide into a repetition of atrocious pasts. Benjamin described the angel of history, whose face is turned toward the past:

Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin 1968, 257–258)

Benjamin captured the tension between the heavy anchor of the past and the compelling pull of the present/future. The storm of progress is a direct challenge to remembered pasts and histories; when the impetus to move forward overrules the inclination to remember the past, the resulting silence or forgetting seems more political than personal. But both personal and political contexts can generate boundaries between what is spoken and unspoken, and between those who hold and keep knowledge or memory and those for whom it is blocked or unknown.

Silences of Different Weight

Silence is often more about remembering than forgetting. Ethnographic accounts show that traumatic silence is a black hole which cannot be filled, an absence which permeates and disturbs family memory and disrupts transmission from generation to generation. Gendered spaces of silence often surround embodied events and memories: sex, pregnancy, miscarriage and abortion, domestic abuse and violence, illegitimacy and unequal status or class relations.

There are however different levels or registers of silence. Some silences are so *loud* that they constantly evoke memory or recognition. These are so laden with their unspoken content that it is impossible to escape their image or their weight. Silences

such as those which for years surrounded the Holocaust both within and beyond Jewish communities, or those which veiled sexual abuse and violence within families or institutions, carry that weight of loudness; although things are unspoken, they are inscribed indelibly into people's lives and consciousness (Boyarin 1994, Antze and Lambek 1996, Hirsch 1999, Young 2000, Gross 2003). Other silences may be quieter. Such silences are not pressing but still uncomfortably present: things that are not mentioned or brought to the fore, because they are embarrassing, shameful or painful, or because they are illegal or ambiguous and better left below the public radar. And finally there are uneventful silences that carry little or no weight.

In this article we look at how different kinds of silence work together, at when and how they mirror or echo each other, and under what circumstances they may be broken. We focus on the idea of walls of silence. By this we mean the boundaries erected around and enclosing certain events or pasts experienced by individuals or families, within communities, or more widely within a region or nation. We consider the ways that the state imposes walls of silence, and how these resemble and differ from those erected within families and households. All silences are not of the same intensity or weight, and we want to distinguish between loud (sometimes deafening) and quiet (less marked) silences. Focusing on different registers of silence allows the consideration of what it means to hold certain kinds of knowledge, or to be excluded from these. Big events often bring different memory regimes together. They tend to take over and reform and reformulate history, but in so doing they may partly or temporarily silence other stories, memories or ways of seeing. At some times, and in some contexts, knowledge may be a source of power or social or economic capital; alternatively, being excluded from or rejecting knowledge, and not being privy to silenced subtexts, may be a source of freedom or possibility.

The ethnographic accounts we present are drawn primarily from our own research, beginning in Poland in the late 1970s (Pine) and in the Czech Republic in the early 1990s (Haukanes), and continuing into the first decades of the 21st century.² Researchers encounter different aspects of silence: there are the silences of people with whom we are working; silences produced by our methodologies (see Lamphere 2019); and silences in our own ethnographic accounts, prompted by ethical and personal decisions about what should and should not be published, by our sense of what is ours to tell and what is not. The latter has influenced the selection of material we present, as well as the mode of presentation and the presence or absence of particular details.

² Haukanes started her ethnographic research in Czechoslovakia right after communism fell, and followed the post-communist transformation process in rural areas of the country throughout the 1990s. In later years, she has done work in the Czech Republic among young people, exploring their imaginations of the future.

Pine began research in Poland in 1977, and has worked in southern, central and eastern Poland at different times, looking at kinship and gender, generation and households.

The ethnographic cases from Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic and Poland we are considering here are quite different. We want to explore certain themes and concepts through our discussion, but to make absolutely clear that the discussion is not straightforwardly comparative; we are not comparing like for like. The article is intended more as a thought piece, in which we try to consider different aspects of what silence is and means.

CONTEXTS AND SPACES OF SILENCE

State Generated Silences: Dialectics of Subversion and Compliance

Throughout the socialist bloc the state guarded its own silences, while simultaneously trying to break down the secrets of families and communities, erasing certain histories and people and promoting other histories which effectively silenced the alternative versions. Neighbours, friends and family members were encouraged to report on each other, breaking shared silences and revealing shared secrets. One of the most poignant and painful examples of this was the practice of rewarding school children if they informed on their parents. In 1950s Poland, village children were given sweets and praised if they told their teachers what their parents discussed at home. So silence was invoked, and broken, in an ongoing battle between state and family, most famously represented in the tragic case of Pavlik Morozov, who became a Soviet child hero for reporting on his father. Loyalties were torn apart. The state was in essence claiming for itself the status of the true family, and in so doing attempting to engineer the rejection of the kin-based family. In communist ideology, the family was a bourgeois concept, underpinning the corruption at the heart of class structure, and something which would be replaced by the communist state: the state was to become the family (Khlinovskayá Rockhill 2010). So Pavlik, breaking silence and revealing the small secrets of his family, came to represent symbolically the affective triumph of the state. Not surprisingly, silences encircling and protecting the family against the state became deeper and more entrenched.

The historical metanarratives of the communist regimes were carefully constructed to make empirical realities fit the law-bound march towards communism (Verdery 1996), enforcing a rather one-dimensional version of public "truth". Through this, huge "no-go" areas of public memory were generated, creating a split between public and private remembering (see Passerini 1992; Watson 1994). The following case demonstrates both the state's attempts to impose walls of silence, and the cracks that these walls inevitably contained.

In the 1990s Haukanes examined local history books, called chronicles, written by lay people in a few villages in South Bohemia and South Moravia.³ She explored the

³ Haukanes has presented this case in detail elsewhere, and here we offer a shorter rendition of the original account (Haukanes 1999, 2004 a and 2004b).

relationship between state narratives (including state regulation of and prescriptions for chroniclers) and the narratives produced by these lay historians. The relationship of the Czech chroniclers to the big and small events they witnessed was complicated by competing claims to their voices. Haukanes found a clear demonstration of the eagerness and effort expended by the regime to insert its version of events into the chronicles and achieve control over what was told. In the 1950s, the means employed were indirect. Through guidebooks and directives a framework was laid for the rendering and interpretation of local events, but no measures were taken to stop personal and/or subversive utterances. When in the 1950s one chronicler wrote critically about the collectivisation process, no attempt was made to silence him or change what he had written. However, in the years following 1968 control became more intrusive and direct. The same chronicler who had expressed his discontent over collectivisation, now wrote with enthusiasm about the Prague Spring, before moving on to describe his and other villagers' disappointment about the August invasion and to report that people had now started to hate the Soviet Union. This time, however, his utterances were not accepted: he was forced to correct his own writings in the chronicle and overlay his original account with a version which followed the state sanctioned line. His voice of opposition was silenced, although his initial rendering of events, and the corrections which had been written over them, remained in the chronicle for everyone to see - one clear crack in the wall of silence.

Although he did continue as a chronicler, his yearly accounts became short, factual and apolitical. He continued to write more detailed accounts of village history though, in the form of a "private" village history book, a book which was *not* for public display and which thus was not subject to state control. In this book, beautifully decorated with maps, drawings and calligraphic letters, he did not include his former protests and critical comments. On the contrary, he employed both the periodisation and the vocabulary of the communist regime when describing the course of events. By the late 1970s, it thus seems that the state's desired domination and control had been obtained, and alternative narratives of events had been muted. A loud silence, stretching even into the chronicler's private local history writing, had been imposed.

However, the chronicler's "non-regulated" accounts of "controversial" events, such as the collectivisation of agriculture in the 1950s and the end of the Prague Spring in 1968, were not totally erased; rather, they were relocated to family spaces and oral accounts. According to his son, whom Haukanes interviewed, the chronicler spoke about what happened after 1968 to his children, and told them of the humiliation he suffered from having to correct his own rendering of events.

This case is a good example of ways in which the state attempted to enforce the telling of some narratives, inscribing them as history, while silencing others. But as we can see, cracks in the wall of silence are visible, both those displayed publicly through the corrections in the official chronicle, and those privately voiced.

Silences of Communities: Hiding From the State

During the last decade of socialism, Pine observed many instances in the Polish Podhale where the house became a site of opposition to state control, particularly over economic activity, but simultaneously itself acted like the state in relation to the regulation of house members.⁴ The public face which the house presented to the state usually reflected a mixed economy, with some house members working in the state sector, in the service sector or in factories, shops and so forth, and some working wholly in agriculture and delivering milk, meat and grain to distribution cooperatives, and some working in both. However, nearly all houses had at least some members who were also involved in the grey or informal economy: providing services privately to tourists, selling foodstuffs and crafts privately in the local market or further afield and producing a range of goods for sale, some of which, such as sheepskin coats, were extremely expensive. Some of the more successful market women travelled all over the country and sometimes across borders to Czechoslovakia, Hungary and even Turkey, selling their wares and bringing back scarce goods much in demand in local markets. Finally, nearly every house in the village had at least one member who had travelled to Chicago on a tourist visa and had overstayed often by 3 or 4 years, working illegally and sending remittances home. All of these activities were hidden from the state, untaxed and performed in secret, at least from the eyes and ears of the outside. They were of course well known within the village and in the area (see Pine, 1993, 1999, 2014).

Older villagers told Pine stories about the past, which revealed a similarly ambivalent attitude to the state and ways in which villagers held secret knowledge close to them under a veil of silence. Stories of violence towards German or Soviet soldiers during or immediately after the war, and of political manoeuvring by clever villagers of German officials and Polish partisans during the war, were known inside villages, but hidden from the outside (see Pine 2002, 2007). Such narratives formed part of the narration of house, village and local identity, which pitted Górale against agents of the state in all of its guises: poor, uneducated Górale took on the power of greater forces and sometimes won, through various combinations of cleverness, trickery and violence (Pine 1999, 2002).

The important point about these examples is that they reflect the selective nature of silence. In the case of the Czech chronicles, the state attempted to silence the rendering of certain events, even though they were known by local people and shared within families. In the Polish case, conversely, local people themselves set up a boundary, or wall of silence, between inside and outside.

⁴ House here is used in the sense of a named group of people, primarily but not exclusively kin, who lived in one or more houses of the same housename, and who worked together on the same fields and were part of a joint economy; see Pine 1996.

Secrets of Houses, Families, and Generations

Looking within households and families adds yet another dimension to our consideration of silence. Within the house, different generations may withhold information or parts of their lives from others. Men who have fought in wars or women who have been subjected to sexual violence may not pass on stories of those life events to their children, and perhaps not even to their spouses or parents. A migrant worker may send home remittances, stories and photographs all suggesting a successful life abroad, while in fact they may be unhappy and lonely, living on the edge of poverty in order to send their meagre earnings home. When they return home, they may maintain silence about their sufferings and continue to be seen as having completed a successful migration. A woman and her children may hide the extent of her husband's violence and alcoholism from the rest of the household, or the whole house membership may maintain a silence around sexual transgressions (premarital pregnancy, adultery, abuse), a public denial in relation to neighbours and the rest of the village. During the late socialist period, and in the very unsettled decade which followed socialism's demise, Pine observed and was told of many such silences in mountain villages.

Thus, secrets of the house were often in fact guessed, speculated upon or known by neighbours, and sometimes undoubtedly embellished in their re-telling. In such cases, silence was at the very least incomplete. It tended to be attached to interactions with, or transgressions of, ideologies of family, gender, church and state. Ultimately, these registers of family and state silences, and the ways in which they interweave with memory and forgetting, come together and address each other, implicitly or explicitly, time and time again (Pine 1999, 2007).

The story of Zofia, a Podhale woman very powerful in her village during the war and the early socialist years, illustrates these points. Zofia's son gave an account of his mother in the late 1970s. He was in his 50s at the time and had been talking rather emotionally about his family. Then he suddenly said that his mother was a whore. Zofia had been dead for some years, but was still talked about often: she was, people said, very beautiful, she was a witch, she had the evil eye, she was a very shrewd business woman, she collaborated with the Germans and the partisans at the same time and fooled both, and so forth. In the regional archives, Pine came across a Góralenvolkkart in her name. This identity card was issued by the Germans to certain Górale deemed to be true Aryans, and could be taken to give some credence to the allegations of collaboration. But the bitterness Zofia's son expressed was not about this. Zofia had been intimate with the house's domestic servant, had a child with him, and physically bullied her husband. For her son, political trickery or collaboration, transgression at the level of state or nation, was less significant than the transgression of the rules of the house, social status and gender. This was a "known" silence of the house and the village, something that was spoken of, but rarely as specifically as her son had spoken about it to Pine on that occasion. Conversely, although the rumours of Zofia's dealings with

the Germans were still brought up in passing, years after her death, this was mainly with a sense of admiration at her cleverness. The existence of the Goralenvolk card was unlikely to have been known in the village, and certainly not widely. It was more of a state, or outside, silence than a silence of the house.

Escaping the Past by Closing off Sound?

Zofia's story shows that silence can be a lack of telling; but it also may reflect a failure to transmit knowledge, or a part of the story that is left out in one context, but may appear, possibly in a different guise, in another. Within houses and families we see both the weight of traumatic silences and the lightness of silences which represent something forgotten because it is no longer told, or is told but not heard. Below is an account of such a lack of transmission, in both an affective and a material sense, between generations.

In rural South Bohemia, Haukanes became acquainted with a woman who had been married during the 1940s to a large landowner. The family lost all their land to the cooperative in 1957, and experienced many hardships thereafter: "I have lived here for 50 years, but 33 of them weren't very happy," she said. "You cannot even imagine what I have lived through.... My husband didn't want to join the JZD [the cooperative farm], so they put him in prison.... Velvet revolution, puh, it shouldn't have been velvet; they should have been properly punished, all of them" (see Haukanes 1999, 2004a).

Františka seemed to remember everything that happened to the family in great detail. She referred to conversations that had taken place in the 1950s and 60s, and quoted directly what was said to her and her husband. In public, she appeared to be reticent. To her family (and to Haukanes), however, she spoke endlessly about the injustices committed against her both by fellow communist villagers and higher officials. She was strongly attached to the land they once owned, and would have liked to take it back through restitution from the agricultural cooperative and to farm it again with her family.

Františka was very bitter. But she had been unable to pass on her bitterness to the next generation. Her son did not want to listen to her stories, distancing himself from the troubles of the past. And to Františka's great disappointment, none of her children was interested in taking up farming. Františka tried to teach her two grandsons about their family land, hoping that one of them would be willing to make private farming a way of living. But in vain. After finishing school in the mid-1990s, the two grandsons trained as mechanics.

This case may be seen as an example of a rejection of the past, and perhaps as an attempt to erect a wall of silence in order to escape the weight of family obligations. Františka's grandsons were young in the turbulent years following 1989. In planning their futures, they turned their back on the family's past as landowners and farmers, closing a door in order to move forward. Haukanes found a similar (but not identical) lack of engagement with the past when she investigated the future plans and dreams of young people born in the 1990s (Haukanes 2013a, 2013b, 2017). The many topics discussed

during interviews involved the young people's imaginations of the future of their society/country. During these vivid discussions, no references were made to communism, state socialism or the communist/socialist regime. No comparison was made with former times when they described their fears for the future, not even when dictatorship was mentioned, as it was on a couple of occasions. Haukanes asked them about their family histories, what their parents and grandparents do or did for a living and their roots in the region where they were living. Some of the young people had vague ideas about their ancestors' whereabouts, while others spoke in greater detail about their families, but references to communism/socialism were very rare and just made in passing.

In this case, we do not have direct access to the intergenerational transmission of experiences and knowledge, i.e. to what actually happened in the families, and can only speculate about what the young people's lack of interest in the past may signify. It may result from a wall of silence intentionally erected by parents and grandparents, for example to avoid exposing their own "non-heroic" pasts during communism. We are just as inclined to interpret it as a residual silence generated by the desire of younger generations for a different kind of future, a future where the socialist past of their country does not feel of relevance at all.

In the Podhale in the early 2000s, Pine noted a similar move away from the past and towards a more open imagined future. In the last decade of socialism, a generational change was taking place within Podhale village families. Oral histories and life stories from older villagers, those who had become adults before or during the Second World War, paint a picture of a very poor village, quite isolated and excluded from wider Polish society. Those born during the Hapsburg Empire remembered the massive out migrations from Galicia to Chicago in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the "transition" from Austro Hungary to Poland, Nazi occupation and the establishment of state socialism. They identified themselves in terms of their house, village, and region, and as Górale, not as Poles. Their children and grandchildren, born into socialism, had mostly attended school for at least 5 years. Unlike their parents, they were literate. They were still caught in poverty, and also experienced the Stalinist regime of fear, remembered primarily as pressure to report on their parents in exchange for sweets at school.

But the next generation of children, born in the 60s and 70s, had been educated in the state socialist school system. On the whole, this generation learned and internalised a version of being Polish that was different from being Górale. These children could switch easily between dialect and Polish, which meant that they could speak easily to teachers, officials and other outsiders – and also that they could move into dialect to mask their conversations from these people. A few dreamed of university or different lives, but most expected to stay in the village and continue farming. By the early 2000s, however, many young people identified themselves first as Polish and as European, rather than as Górale. Some moved to the city to study at technical college or university, or worked abroad for some years, planning eventually to set up in business, possibly in the mountains, but equally possibly elsewhere. In effect, the walls of silence that had been erected by the Górale against outsiders for decades were being eroded by a new sense of being part of the outside, of a wider, even global, community. With these changes, new histories are being forged and old stores forgotten, while different absences and silences are also being formed.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Silence is particularly complicated because it cross-cuts social contexts, spaces and relations of both intimacy and power. We have tried to show here that coerced silence and voluntary silence are different, but may co-exist, and that they can be heavy or light, conventionalised or subversive. Parallels exist between the power structures of different spaces and the ways that these interact with silence and secrets. Starting with the state and continuing on to the community, the house and the individual, we have argued that different regimes of silence have their own archaeology, of which each layer is potentially a site of struggle or counter-history: the silences that hide the state's own secrets, the silences that the state tries to impose and the silences others build to keep the state out that the state in turn tries to break or shatter. We have suggested that there are parallels to this pattern in other spaces, those of the community and the household/family. The community may try to impose silence on its members, in relation to the state or a wider public, it may use silence to cover its own secrets and it may, as a collective, try to reveal what lies behind the silences of its members. Families hold their own silences against other households and families, and powerful members within the family silence less powerful ones, while less powerful members also hold on to their own secrets. Members of the junior generations turn on senior kin to expose their secrets to the outside or, perhaps even more commonly, they refuse to listen to the stories the seniors want to pass on, as we have seen in several examples in this article. Although the registers of silence vary according to institution and structure, very often the silences themselves evoke events and relationships which may hold great significance at a collective or individual level, even without being spoken aloud.

What also emerges from this discussion is that silences are nearly always partial, in both senses of the word. They are imposed to serve, or are partial to, particular interests, and they are only partly (partially) effective. Nothing that we have discussed in this article has been totally silenced – much of what we speak about in discussing silence is relational, silenced in relation to some audiences and heard or known by others. To go back to our earlier references to feminist writings, what we are really talking about is an absence: something missing from an account, or from history or memory, which should have been present. But also, on another level, something which *is* remembered and recounted in some other context: to a later generation, at a kitchen table, with reference to a much bigger (or smaller) event, when a regime changes. The silences which are recognised and identified as such, which are in a sense the loudest, are also the most evocative, precisely because they speak to submerged or erased memories, or to times and events which are not spoken but are nonetheless, at some level at least, recalled.

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LONG-TERM "ETHNICIZED SILENCES", FAMILY SECRETS AND NATION-BUILDING

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This article demonstrates the dynamic relationship between long-term ethnicized silences, family secrets and nation-building in Central and Eastern Europe. How have modern nation-states been imagined and formed on the basis of these long-term silences? In order to illustrate what we believe could be the contribution to anthropology (principally to nationalism studies) enabled by introducing this analytical category of silences, in this research we will focus on a close analysis of the life story and identity journey of a self-identified "Slovak woman with Hungarian-Roma roots" who settled in the Czech Republic in 2009. Through this ethnographic example, and in an attempt to go beyond particularities, some of the themes covered are: what meanings, uses and processes of silences can we find in Slovakia, and what is their relationship to the construction of minorities and to an ethno-cultural model of nation-building (an imagined community)? In which domains and under which power relationships have long-term silences and hidden family secrets prevailed in everyday life? To what extent have those silence frameworks been negotiated and used as intergenerational strategies of family unity and protection? And finally, within the context of migration and the complex processes of Europeanization and globalization, how have those long-term, in this case "shamed", ethnicized Roma silences been contested and broken, and what is the meaning of this development (at micro and macro levels)? In other words, for nation-states that have long been imagined on the principle of ethno-cultural homogeneity, I ask what can long-term ethnicized silences tell us about the process of nation-building (from the bottom up) and the quality of our EU democracies? Where do we come from, where are we now and, at least in terms of a warning (due to the rise of xenophobic forms of populism and radical nationalism), where are we going?

KEYWORDS: silences, family secrecy, Roma, Slovakia, ethnonationalism, Central and Eastern Europe, migration

INTRODUCTION

The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9th November 1989 and the years that followed generated a spiral of events that changed the face of the world provoking, as anthropological literature shows (Bridger and Pine 1998; Hann 2001), transitional processes of many kinds. This new European and international scenario was marked by the transition from totalitarianism to democracy and to a market economy, the reunification of Germany, the emergence of new nation-states as a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia¹ and the fragmentation of Yugoslavia after a period of military conflicts. Today, three decades after these momentous events, new post-transitional scenarios have generated notable uncertainties and raised new questions.

Among the current questions and dilemmas confronting the EU², those of how to respond to a worrying increase of xenophobia and radical nationalism are particularly troublesome. Being a part of the EU, as it has turned out, does not make member states immune to the rise of a social phenomenon which implies the categorization, stigmatization and rejection of the imaginary, uncomfortable "Other" (Todorov 2014). Immigrants, local domestic minorities or anyone who represents "matter out of place" (Douglas 1966), even in some cases in their own homeland (e.g. the Roma or "Gypsies"), or who just through their presence, or even their possible appearance in the near future (as in the case of people escaping from war, as in Syria), are seen either as suspicious and/or as a potential threat to national unity and integrity. This model of the national "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) understood in ethno-cultural and even religious terms (e.g. Poland or Slovakia), and therefore with little space for the recognition of differences and fluid and multiple identities seems to be the one that has prevailed in some of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, or at least to indicate the direction in which we are heading.

Based on the premise that, as Georges Kalamaras stated, "silence is not opposed to language ... rather silence and language work in a reciprocal fashion in the construction of knowledge" (1994, 8), in this article, I intend to demonstrate how, even after 1989, long-term ethnicized silences (in this case Roma, but the same could also apply to other ethnicities) and family secrets, which in some cases have even been strategically passed from generation to generation because they have not found a secure context to be broken and revealed, have a lot to say in the process of nation-building.

In other words, the term "ethnicized silences" proposed in this article aims to offer new theoretical anthropological insights into the dynamic relationships between silence, ethnicity, power and agency. For nation-states that have been based on the principle of ethno-cultural homogeneity (such as Slovakia and the Czech Republic) this term can be used to identify ethnic power dynamics within a hierarchical social structure. Therefore, these kinds of silences can be considered an integral element in the complex and dynamic processes of nation-building.

I On 1st January 1993, the split of the federal state of Czechoslovakia came into force, leading to the creation of two new states: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This event, given its peaceful nature and in accordance with the so-called Velvet Revolution of 1989, is known as the Velvet Divorce. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the work of Czech anthropologist, Ladislav Holy (1996).

² In 2004, within the frame of the enlargement of the European Union (EU), the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland (known as the Visegrád group (V4) were, along with other countries, incorporated as EU members.

CASE STUDY FAMILY SECRETS AND LONG-TERM ETHNICIZED SILENCES: AN IDENTITY JOURNEY

As anthropological literature reminds us (Basso 1970; Le Breton 1997), the meanings and uses attributed to silence (whether individual or collective) are neither self-evident nor stable across or even within different cultural and historical locations and contexts. Silence, just like verbal language or other corporal gestures, is a mode of human communication. Silence can be consciously and unconsciously forced upon people, by dint of the dynamics of different social, political, economic and even religious contexts, or it can equally just be voluntary. It is not the same to study silences under a totalitarian regime (e.g. Stalinism or Nazism), wherein thousands of people are forced into silence, as it is to study silences after 1989 and in post-transitional democratic Central European states (that since 2004 are EU members), which will be the socio-cultural, political and economic historical context this study is based on.

Considering long-term silence as a useful analytical category essential to understand nation-building (how the nation has been built, among other elements and factors, on the basis of imposed silences and self-silencing³), this article focuses on a close analysis of the life story and identity journey of a self-identifying "Slovak woman with Hungarian Roma roots", who settled in the Czech Republic in 2009. In so doing, the article attempts to cover and try to answer the following main themes and questions:

- What are some examples of the many meanings, uses and processes of silences and silencing as well as indirect forms of muteness that we can find in Slovakia, and what is their relationship to national minority constructions (ethnic and linguistic), and to a particular ethno-cultural model of nation-building based on an imagined "pure" community?
- In which domains, and under which power relationships, have long-term silences and family hidden secrets prevailed in everyday life?
- Following on from the work of Maurice Halbwachs (1950), to what extent have these silence frameworks or domains of silences been understood and used as intergenerational strategies and resources for family unity protection, stability or even resistance in order to provide answers to traumatic experiences or difficult situations of prejudice, indifference and social exclusion?
- How has the unspeakable and/or unsaid shaped people's subjectivities and the representation of the self, and what role have emotions played in silence practices?

³ In this regard, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, in the book *Silencing the Past* (1995) differentiated between *story* and *History*. Trouillot noted how power is everywhere: thus, any attempt to achieve objective national History will be impossible, because it will always be incomplete and intentionally fragmented due to the use and abuse of silences and silencing.

– And finally, within the context of European transnational migration, under which conditions have these family secrets and long-term ethnicized, and even gendered silences been broken, even at the cost of generating intergenerational conflict within the family. And what is the underlying significance of such a development (at micro and macro levels)?

In order to try to respond to these questions, and primarily based on the selection and anthropological analysis of particular fragments of our informant's story (what a psychologist would call *episodic memory*), I have structured this article into three parts. And, the information on which it is based was collected in the spring of 2018 in the city of Prague through in depth face-to-face autobiographical interviews and some informal conversations, all conducted in English.

In the first part, as our informant who is in her mid-thirties is the daughter of a mixed ethnic couple (a Roma Slovak woman and a non-Roma Slovak man), I will focus on memories which relate to her childhood with her family in a small village in the Eastern part of Slovakia, and her youth and high school years away from home. These were periods of denial of Roma family roots, maintained secrets and conflicting ethnicized identity silences. The second part focuses on how those long-term or deep silences began to be questioned and challenged when she decided to go to London and stayed in this, as she called it, multicultural city for two years. And the third part covers the period from 2009 to present, during which she chose to settle in Prague. It is within this context of migration that our informant decided to move away from family secrets and self-silencing, and to instead celebrate all types of ethnic mixing and differences by proudly and publicly identifying herself as a *Slovak woman with Hungarian-Roma roots*.

As we shall see, in this research we encounter a relational, dynamic and fluid post-national identity journey which challenges the narrow ethno-cultural meaning of "Slovakness" and that can only be understood within the context of the process of Europeanization and globalization because, as our interlocutor stated in one of our interviews, "she had to go and live abroad in order to get home."

Family Secrets and Long-term "Shamed" Silences: Childhood and Youth in Slovakia

The first time we met for an interview was in a café in Prague. After I explained the project I was involved in to her and why I considered that her life story and her perspective on some of the issues could be really relevant to it, I asked her to please introduce herself. She responded with this short, but relevant biographical introduction:

My name is Lenka.⁴ I was born in a small village close to Rožnava which is in the Eastern part of Slovakia, let's say two hours from Košice. Košice is the biggest city in East Slovakia. I was born in

⁴ The interviewee's name has been changed in order to protect her identity.

117

a family in which my mother is Roma and my father belongs to the majority: so, he is Slovak. I grew up with the idea that I am not Roma, and that everything in my life was related to my education and basically to Slovak culture, because I was in denial.

Then, when I asked Lenka why and what she meant by being in denial, she explained that her mother, who grew up in Communist Czechoslovakia (1948–1989), had felt discriminated against all her life. Lenka's mother felt discriminated not just because she was Roma or Gypsy, but also because she came from a very poor immigrant family: her parents had emigrated from Hungary to a small village in Slovakia (called *Paskahaza* in Hungarian, and *Pasková* in Slovak). As a result of this, Lenka's mother was not proficient in Slovak: her native tongue was the Romani language and she also knew some Hungarian. Then, we started to talk about the Hungarian population in Slovakia, which according to the census of 2011 constituted the largest ethnic minority, followed by the Roma⁵, and the historical explanation for the existence of this minority. In response, Lenka told me that she did not know if her grandparents had really crossed the Slovak-Hungarian border or whether the border had crossed them as a consequence of border changes in this southern part of Slovakia (formerly part of Hungary), an example of the wider phenomenon of border change in Central Europe.

Then, Lenka continued by telling me that this is why, after her mother met her father at their workplace and a few years later married him and moved to his village, she tried to forget about what she considered to be Roma culture and the Romani language, as both of these were important ethnic social markers. As Lenka put it:

It was not appropriate, otherwise she would not be able to be accepted in our village. Because in my village 98% per cent of people are Slovaks and they hate, really hate Roma. Because the only Roma who are in Slovakia, or in our village, are those who are really, let's say, you know [pause] marginalized.

As the conversation advanced, Lenka started to recall how her parents met and the family struggle they faced from both sides during the first years of their initially secret affair. It was an undercover secret which could not remain so for long, as her mother became pregnant and her body shape began to change. The evidence spoke for itself.

⁵ In the official Slovak Census of 2011, out of a total population of 5,440,602 Hungarians are the largest ethnic minority, with 8.5% of the population (458,467) declaring themselves national (ethnic) Hungarians and 2% Roma. These are the official numbers, but the actual number of Roma is suspected to be much higher. So the question is: why did so many not want to be listed as Roma? One explanation could be that there was no opportunity to choose more than one nationality. This made the visibility of the diverse and multiple dynamic ethnic identities of Slovakia difficult to record, since it forced the population to choose one nationality over another. Another explanation, as I have been told several times in Bratislava and in Prague, is because it is just safer not to declare one's identity as Roma.

On the one hand, Lenka's mother's Roma side of the family did not accept the relationship due to local norms and the fact that endogamy among such closed Roma communities is quite common. In fact, she had been expected to marry a Roma man who had already been chosen for her by her father and brothers. However, instead of following the family and local social expectations, – as Lenka put it, "because they just fell in love and they are together to this day" – she rather consciously decided to cross-cultural and social ethnic boundaries (Barth 1969) by not marrying the man assigned, who according to her mother "was wild and uneducated", and instead carried on her relationship with the so-called *Gadjo (e)* (non-Roma). Lenka designated him a "Slovak white man", who according to her mother's Roma family, not in her own opinion, dishonoured the whole family when her mother became pregnant as a single woman without even knowing if he would take care and responsibility of her and their child, and not simply abandon them.

As anthropology of childbirth demonstrates, different social and cultural contexts provide scripts for all stages of reproduction, and people use these as social markers of group identity. In this context, therefore, the potential shame and loss of honour not just for Lenka's mother, but for the whole family through an unexpected pregnancy, as we can also see in other cultural and social settings and contexts besides Roma (Pitt-Rivers 1972), is connected with the idea that single women are expected to marry early and remain virgins until their wedding night. This defence of sexual purity explains why, during the pregnancy, in order to avoid any kind of local gossip and moral judgement Lenka's mother had to be discreetly hidden at home.⁶ In other words, as anthropologist Emily Martin (1987) would say, this "gendered" silent pregnant body, which was an object of powerful male discourses (in this case, from the male members of the Roma extended family), represented something amoral and polluted that should be hidden from the public eye.

In this context it is important to bear in mind that, as anthropologist Maurice Bloch (1975, 3–9) noted when studying oratory and speech making among the Merina of Madagascar, most human knowledge is not acquired verbally. In the hierarchical oppressive situation in which she found herself, the obedient and silent attitude demonstrated by Lenka's mother can only be understood within the context of the long-term ingrained gendered silences women learn, mostly by observation, but also by being told what can be said and what not to say from early childhood. Gendered

⁶ In the Pasiego Valley of Northern Spain, for example, in the first part of the 20th century women who became pregnant outside the Catholic holy sacrament of marriage, aside from emigrating had no other choice but to hide their pregnancy at home and to deliver the considered illegitimate newborn child in a church or in a local Maternity House, and remain silent about what happened all their lives (Soler 2011, 94).

silences even muteness (Ardener 1975)⁷, in most cases are passed from generation to generation, because within this strict social control, women just learn to be quiet.

However, as we have seen in recent anthropological literature, especially that which makes reference to post-colonialism, such as the study of Christine Salomon and Christine Hemelin (2008) in New Caledonia, the contesting and breaking of these gendered silences can function as a form of women's empowerment and agency. This is what happened afterwards through her mother's decision to continue with her loving relationship with Lenka's father, even though this decision also had deep-running consequences.

If these were the reactions of the Roma side of her family to her mother's relationship, on her father's side, the Slovak side as Lenka called it, the disapproval and objection was even deeper. In fact, the news was received as a complete shock. Lenka's narration continued as follows: "Yes, my father's family was very much against it. During the first year they had a fight, because his family was totally outraged. How is it possible? Our only son (because the rest had died, one in the Second World War and the other from meningitis) and with a Gypsy?" Lenka then tried to explain to me that they had the biggest dreams for him because he was already in his early thirties and came from a rich family. So they wanted the best Slovak bride for him. As a result, she said:

They kicked him out and he had to sleep for one year in a car, while my mother's family tried to keep her at home. But then my sister was born and my grandma heard and wondered, "Who is this child? If it is white, maybe it will be accepted." So, then my mum came with the child and grandma just fell in love, and this was regardless of what the child looked like.

Then, after a pause, she continued: "So, my mum, with not much knowledge of the Slovak language, left her place and lost almost all contact with her brothers and sisters, but not with her mother. She needed to get out: she escaped."

Thereafter, once this relationship was finally accepted (as she proudly emphasized), they were able to marry and settle in the father's village. This new family, consisting of Lenka's parents, her older sister and Lenka herself, became an important social unit in which shared silences and secrecy (related to her mother's Roma origin) became a part of everyday life. In other words – as we can see in other ethnographies, like the work of Pihla Maria Siim entitled *Family Stories Untold. Doing Family Through Practices of Silence* (2016) – these long-term secrets and silences, which at this moment served as a form of protection, were part of what made the family. As our informant stated while trying to justify her mother's decision to opt for this Roma origin denial, she did so "because it was better not to say."

⁷ The Muted Group Theory (MGT), developed by anthropologist Edwin Ardener in the 1970s, is a communication theory related to power and gender. It focuses on women as a muted and marginalized group (via the use of language and in social discourse).

If we focus on the dynamic relationship between memory, silence and forgetting in Lenka's story⁸, the term "structural amnesia" (also known as "selective amnesia") used by structural-functionalist anthropologists can fruitfully be applied. In Lenkas's narrative for example, we can see parallels with Laura Bohannan's work (1952) looking at family genealogies among the Tiv of Nigeria or in that of Evans-Pritchard (1977) among the Nuer of Sudan. For in both these authors studies, only ancestors who were considered to be relevant and convenient to the present where evoked from the past (in Lenka's case, the Slovak father's side of the family), while others (here, the maternal Roma side) were just deliberately forgotten and silenced.

At this point, I asked myself how Lenka emotionally experienced this Roma maternal family denial, and to what extent it affected the construction of her own subjectivity, the construction of the self? Was it internalized and fully accepted? Or the opposite: did it just bring her some kind of long-term anxiety and identity conflict?

Even though in Central and Eastern Europe, due to its complex history, movements of people and border changes, empirical data shows that a significant number of Roma are married to non-Roma (mixed ethnic marriages), the fact is that some of the children born from these unions still face emotional and psychological stress related to an identity crisis. And this is the case, as Romanian Roma activist Valeriu Nicolae and other scholars (Kusá and Findor 1999; Vaclavík 2019) have stressed, because the concept of a plurality and fluidity of ethnic identities and the acceptance of such identities – even though they are a common enough social reality – seems to go against the very core of the ways in which some of these European nations are imagined in ethno-cultural terms.

In other words, this reflection is corroborated both by observations that I made myself while living and working in the Czech Republic, and also by something I was told in an interview with one of the historians who work at the Romani Museum in the Moravian city of Brno (June, 2019) while we were talking about this project on longterm silences. We both agreed that the existence of this mixed-ethnic community, rather than being openly presented to the society as an excellent opportunity for combating racism and xenophobia, instead is most of the time ignored, silenced or self-silenced.

Lenka's childhood and the way she was raised, not just by her parents, but also by her Slovak grandmother, a very religious Christian woman who used to read the bible early in the morning by the light of a candle, is an example of a continuous forced denial of her Roma roots until her life trajectory changed. Before this moment came, family secrets and everyday ethnicized silences played a strategic role in enabling her to be fully accepted and move on, if not successfully then at least safely within

⁸ Connerton (2008) differentiates at least seven different types of forgetting: repressive erasure, prescriptive forgetting, forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of new identity, structural amnesia, forgetting as annulment, forgetting as planned obsolescence and also forgetting as humiliated silence.

the so-called majoritarian or mainstream Slovak society. At the same time, as I aim to demonstrate in this article, through her self-silencing, Lenka, albeit unwittingly, contributes to a particular ethno-cultural model of nation-building.

One clear example of the identity struggle that Lenka experienced because, as narrative psychologist Jerome Bruner (1993) put it, she was possessed by a family story she could not tell, relates to her high school years. At school, Lenka's silencing of her Roma roots was not entirely successful because of the colour of her skin (which is a bit darker than the average in Slovakia), or as Lenka described "it sometimes just spoke for itself". She narrated this part of her life story as follows:

During my high school years, I went to a Lutheran Gymnasium and I had to do a [research] paper, and I chose the Roma, because at that time, you know, it was self-identification, trying to find your identity. However, I did not want anyone to know that I was half Roma, but I think some other students knew or suspected.

In fact, Lenka clearly remembered some of the prejudices and mocking that she experienced in school: this was mainly perpetuated by one classmate who used to call her "Gypsy". She then went on to emphasize that the Slovak word for "Gypsy" is "Cigán", and that it is very pejorative because "the association unfortunately is of being wild, uneducated, dirty and stealers."

After a few seconds of reflective silence, she continued: "Even my mum! She was afraid to come, you know, like to parents' meetings, because she really looks like a typical Gypsy. She was always pushing my father to go because she did not want them to see that she was Roma." She then told me that she felt a bit ashamed narrating this passage of her life, because her mother only went to her school for her graduation: so she went to school just on one day, the last that Lenka spent there.

In another interview, Lenka recalled how she felt she always had to prove herself in school because, even though she always performed well, there was always an additional pressure. As her mother once told her: "You have to prove yourself twice over, because in this society unfortunately you have this border. It is not your fault, but from the very start you are not equal. When you are called on the first day in class and they see you, then there are always doubts, always."⁹

Even when we talked about language use, not just in school but equally in other areas of daily life, it was obvious that for Lenka not all languages had the same significance. Despite the fact that in most of our complex and plural societies the co-existence and use of different languages is common, these languages, especially within the context

⁹ The study of Iulius Rostas (2012) about desegregation and Roma schooling in Central Europe shows not just how today's education is twice as difficult for Roma than it is for non-Roma, but also how, even if a Roma(ni) person is well educated, finding a good job and achieving success still remains a challenge.

of nation-states, are usually hierarchically ordered and understood in terms of social differences (such as ethnic, religious, etc.).

In Slovakia, for instance, the Romani and Hungarian languages¹⁰ are the languages spoken by the two biggest ethnic minorities (those perceived as "others", as stated in the introduction, in their own homeland). On the one hand, the Romani language, with its internal variations and dialects, represents a stigmatized and historically persecuted and silenced language which was exposed to the assimilationist policies of the former Soviet Bloc governments (Hübschmannová and Neustupný 1996, 85-109). The Hungarian language, in its turn, functions rather as a *site of memory*, to use Pierre Nora's term (1984). Hungarian is seen by the majoritarian Slovak society as a symbolic carrier of a conflictual past: of the period of forced Magyarization (Hungarization) during the time of national awakening when the territory of what is today Slovakia was under the rule of the Hungarian Kingdom (i.e. the implementation of the Hungarian Nationalities Law of 1868).

The negative connotations associated with these languages explain why Lenka's mother with a Hungarian-Roma social background decided not to pass knowledge of these languages on to the next generations. "What would have been the point?" as Lenka rhetorically asked me. These languages were meant to be left behind within this self- silenced past. At the same time, Lenka and her sister were encouraged by their parents to learn other foreign languages, like English and German. These were languages which in this context were perceived in a pragmatic way, as a passport for a better future. In this regard, language can be seen an important social marker of continuity and change.

Contested Long-term Silences Within the Context of Transnational Migration: London

On graduating from high school, Lenka went to London with some schoolmates in order to improve her English. However, she liked it so much there that, even though her initial plan was to return to Bratislava and start theology studies at Comenius University, she decided to postpone her studies and stay in London for two more years, living on part-time low paid jobs in the fast food sector. It is within the context of migration, in which she had different new encounters with social diversity, that we see those ethnicized silences, which were an essential part of her identity construction and the way she grew up in Slovakia, start to be questioned. This occurred even to the

¹⁰ Even though in Slovakia these two languages (alongside others such as Czech, Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Ruthenian, Ukrainian and Yiddish) should be protected and promoted under the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (ratified by the Slovak government in 2002), and there are well-known Roma writers (such as. H. Lacková and T. Fabiánová), the fact is that Romani is still perceived by many people (both Roma and non-Roma) as a language of shame and poverty. This renders its acceptance, preservation and a willingness to learn it, or just pass it on, very difficult.

point that her Roma "otherness" started to lose its initial meaning and, as she told me, became part of "us" and "me."

Beneath I offer some of the narratives focused on her two year stay in England which can help us to understand the different negotiations that shaped her relational identity journey:

The first time I was in England I just liked it there, and then I just fell in love with an Afghan guy. Then, that summer in September, I was supposed to go to theology studies in Slovakia, but now I know that maybe I was too childish, but I was brave too because I called home and I said: "Mama, I am not going home". And she was agitated, saying like, "What? You don't have money, where are you going to live, what?" And I said, "Don't worry, it's going to be ok, it's my responsibility". Then I stayed there for two years.

At that point in the interview, I asked her whether she was working, and she responded: "Yes, I was working firstly in a pizza shop where that guy who I fell in love with was like a manager." I then asked if that man was still her boyfriend, now? (Let me point out that in another interview she had already explained that now she was living with her boyfriend, who was a foreigner). In response, she clarified:

No, no, my boyfriend at that time was from Afghanistan, he came from hell. He was from Kabul and he told how they fired a bomb at his house. He was running, so the worst ever. So me, like a good girl with no problems, I really saw how hard life was and what childhood trauma is, and my problems just became like, what? Then my mum, instead of worrying about him, she was totally agitated and said, "Hey, I was trying to take you away from Roma, and now you are bringing a man from almost the same culture."

As this conversation advanced, I asked her if, in this new context, she had told anyone that her mother was Roma or had she kept it a secret as she had done in Slovakia? Her answer was as follows: "Yes, with pride, because everybody saw that I was different. Even though I could say I was Slovak, they kept on telling me that I did not look Slovak." Then I said, "But you are Slovak, no question about it?" Her answer was: "Yes, but when they say Slovak, you know what they mean. There is a certain meaning, like white Slovak. This is what I wanted to say, because for Roma people it is really hard, even with me: how do I identify?".

This passage is important because, as I have commented in a previous work (Soler 2016, 70-89), the idea of whiteness related to ethnic Slovak identity, based on one religion (Christian)¹¹ and one language, is still very ingrained within Slovak society,

II In 2011, the Slovak official data on religious affiliation was: Catholic Church (62%); Greek Catholic Church (3.8%); Reformed Church (1,8%); Orthodox Church (0,9%), Evangelical Church (5,9%) and the rest are other confessions or people with no specified religion. In this regard, it is important not to forget that the Jewish population which had inhabited the Slovak lands since the IIth century

especially in the period since Slovakia gained recognition as an independent sovereign nation after the split of the multinational state of Czechoslovakia in 1993. In this regard, it is important to point out that this persistent ethno-nationalist trend (which in Slovak politics the far right *People's Party Our Slovakia* (L'SNS) would represent) has to be understood within the context of Slovakia's national development from pre-communist times to the present (Harris 2019). This is why Lenka clearly differentiated between what was written in her passport (*Štátne občiantsvo*), a civil and political identity in which there was no question that she was Slovak, and her national identity (*národnost*).

In the book *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Thomas Eriksen (2002) stressed that ethnicity is a dynamic and shifting aspect of social relationships, and that it can be consciously constructed. This idea resonates in the way Lenka, after her early years of struggling with self-identification, started to play with her identity, because in a multicultural city like London, as she put it, "you could be from anywhere." Then she went on:

Although I was conscious that I was trying to suppress that I was Roma when I went to England, I just somehow felt much better with people from everywhere. I had friends from India, Pakistan, Iran, and I was attracted so much to their culture and music. Even people when they saw me, like Turkish people, told me that I looked like them. I love their dance, their music, and they are very temperamental [pause]. So, maybe it is really in my genes that there is some attraction, something that is unconscious... when you are Roma you still somehow find a way. I just felt these people are mine.

In this narrative we can see that, for Lenka, temporary emigration with all its associated experiences did not mean displacement and detachment from home: it was in fact the other way around. This is why she emphasized that from now on she would not have to choose between being either Slovak or Roma anymore. The meaning of Slovakness could embrace both, and was inclusive also of her sense of herself as a selfidentified European woman. As Lenka stated: "This is the thing when you travel and live abroad. I had horribly low self-esteem as well, because of how I looked. I even wanted those blue contact lenses (her natural eye colour is black), but then I thought this is my advantage, mixing, difference, and all those thoughts gave me much more confidence and freedom." Then, after a long pause, she added: "It is incredible that I had to move to England, to go abroad, to get home."¹²

Given the multiplicity of social identities we all face, and how dynamic and relational they are, Lenka's reflections can fruitfully be compared with what Michael Ignatieff (rector and president of the Central European University in Budapest) stated in an interview for a Catalan newspaper when he was asked about Catalan nationalism.

was estimated before the Holocaust at 135,000. Today, there are only 2,600 self-identifying Jews in Slovakia. Some others prefer to keep this origin private and remain silent.

¹² The idea of home, as a fluid and dynamic concept, within this context can be metaphorically associated not just with family and the locality Lenka comes from, but also with her country, Slovakia. Therefore, it is both personal and subjective, but also acts as a place for collective identification (Davies 2014, 154-155).

Ignatieff said that not having to choose one's identity (ethnic or national) over another, should also be treated as a right in itself: "the right not to decide" (*La Vanguardia*, October 22, 2019).

Broken Silences and Intergenerational Family Conflict: Finally Settling in Prague

After her two years in London, Lenka returned to Bratislava and decided that she wanted to move on with her life and try to pursue her theology studies. This in turn led to her arriving in Prague through the Erasmus programme. However, once she started to work in an estate agency, a job she got on account of her knowledge of different languages, she decided to give up theology and enrol in a psychology programme, "in order to pursue her dream." Nevertheless, these changes and her new confidence in herself did not come without a social cost.

Once Lenka started to speak out about her Roma origin with pride, thus leaving those "shameful" ethnicized silences behind and celebrating her mixed, fluid identity, her relationship with her mother (who still lives in the small village in the eastern part of Slovakia) started to be affected to the point of creating a kind of intergenerational conflict. As she put it in one of our meetings, "It is sad, and actually the most ridiculous thing, that now when I am talking about Roma issues my mum is very angry and says to me 'Why do you care about that?' So this is kind of a funny situation: that I am trying to fight for my Roma origin, and this leaves her more alone, let's say."

Her mother is well aware of the structural, deep socio-economic inequalities and prejudices based on long-term ingrained stereotypes that Roma still face in Slovakia (Scheffel and Mušinka 2019, 17–21), as they do in most parts of Europe (Stewart 2012). However, on this basis she believes that there is nothing to celebrate, because there is still a risk in being heard. So, just in case, it is better to keep quiet or remain in silence. In Lenka's case, on the contrary, due to the acquisition of the symbolic capital of education and language that enables her to move much more freely across national borders (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002, 8) and become detached from local and parental constraints, the situation is very different. Her mixed and dynamic relational, and to some extent post-national identity, has found a broader European and even globalized, as Habermas (2015) would term it, cosmopolitan space.

At the end of this conversation, I asked Lenka about her father, who is now almost seventy years old (because he was not really mentioned in any of the interviews). For it was her father who, along with his parents (Lenka's grandparents) passed on to her and her sister their ethno-cultural sense of belonging and their Slovakness, in other words their national affiliation. So I asked what was her father's general opinion of the Roma. She replied that her father connected Gypsy with being uneducated, and then added: "I told him that I was going to finish psychology. So, finally, he understood that we are not just Gypsies or [pause] not what he understood as being a Gypsy."

CONCLUSION

In order to conclude in the spirit of the comparative and holistic nature of anthropology, we can say that this life story, like any life story, is unique but that the story underlying is not. We know that life stories and autobiographies are reconstructions of lived lives, and therefore, even if they are valuable, they are limited in terms of being reliable sources of information. However, through this brief analysis of Lenka's life narratives and identity journey, we can say that what can be told and what should rather be left out, who is being silenced or is self-silencing, and how or based on what (ethnicity, religion etc.), if analyzed can reveal a lot about the community and the society or situation under study.

We can agree that some silences are necessary, especially those related to intimacy, meditation and reflection, as these are profoundly needed in today's society. Likewise, there are even some moments and events when silence is demanded during social interaction (as for example during the practice of some ritual prayers). However, and this is the aim of this study and where I see its potential originality, it has come to my attention that there are also other types of silences – disturbing long term daily silences in Central and Eastern Europe – that are significantly different from all silence's abovementioned meanings. Shared ethniziced silences that have persisted over generations, illustrate therefore an on-going process of tracing symbolic mental barriers of belonging and exclusion (feeling or being forced to feel out of place) among the population.

Multiple, everyday long-term silences and undercover family secrets, I believe, are not sufficiently taken into consideration in anthropological studies (especially in nationalism studies). However, if these were to be fully recognized, gathered and analyzed, such silences could bring new insights into how the different modern nation-states have been, and are being, built in this part of Central and Eastern Europe. How this process of "othering" (this "us" versus "them") has been performed, in an inclusive or an exclusive way? Do we have space for the recognition of differences, and mixed and multiple "ethnic" dynamic identities and loyalties (like those felt and expressed by Lenka) in an overall sense?

In this regard, one of the points I want to make as a result of this research (which is part of a broader independent project on the dynamics of long-term silences and nation-building in Central Europe, in the Visegrád group countries) is that shared silences, as a strategic tool of communication, can create a community of silences (that is familiar, local etc.) and bring people together. Therefore, they can be an essential element for the functioning of the community. In this ethnographic case, for example, these silences made the family (it was "safer not to say"), while also contributing consciously or unconsciously to a particular ethno-cultural model of nation building in which diversity and multiplicity of ethnicities were just hidden and self-silenced. Therefore, we could say that locally silencing strategies can give a false image of a society much more homogenized than is actually the case. However, if contested and broken, as we have seen through this post-national identity journey of Lenka, these silences can also create intergenerational family conflicts, and even, at a more macro level, can tear a bigger community or nation apart.

Therefore, we could say that for nation-states that have been imagined and based on the principle of ethno-cultural homogeneity (e.g. the Slovak or Czech, along with other Central and Eastern European nation-states), these kind of ethnicized silences could be considered an integral element to consider in the complex and dynamic process of nation-building.

In other words, through looking at the dynamic relationships between long-term ethnicized silences (with their different meanings, uses and temporalities, and whether broken or not), family secrets and nation-building, which has been the goal of this research, we can ask what can we learn not just about the quality of our current democracies, but also about our past? Where do we come from, where we are now and, at least in terms of a warning – due to the rise of xenophobic forms of populism and radical nationalists sentiments (Hann 2019, 1-2)¹³ in the EU and worldwide in which old (e.g. Roma, and Jewish) and new ethnicized silences and self-silencing are on the rise – where are we going?

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¹³ Chris Hann mentions that even though xenophobic forms of populism are worrying, in Budapest today, for example, more Hungarians are tired of Orbán's political propaganda and are switching to other media and taking to the streets to express their discontent: a trend which makes Budapest again a city of hope (2019, 2). In the case of Slovakia, one recent hopeful measure taken by the Slovak coalition government in order to recognize the plurality of Slovak society is that the current census of 2021 (contrary to the previous one) will give an opportunity for Slovaks to list their affiliation to multiple national identities.

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