

Grenzüberschreitungen

Traditionen und Identitäten in Südosteuropa

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Wolfgang Dahmen, Petra Himstedt-Vaid
und Gerhard Ressel

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Oral History: from Autobiographical to “Collective” Narrative* – Serb Oral Discourse on the Expulsion of Germans from Hungary

MARIJA ILIĆ (Belgrade)

Introduction

One of the oldest sources on Serb migration to Hungary dates back to 1440 and refers to the refugees who fled the Banat town of Kovin devastated by the Ottoman Turks, thus founding a new settlement under the same name on the Danube Island of Csepel (Hun. *Ráckeve*, Ser. *Srpski Kovin*; ČIRKOVIĆ 1982: 320). Since then, and possibly even prior to it, the Serbs settled into the Hungarian, later Habsburg and Austro-Hungarian lands, fleeing the Ottoman invasion of the Balkans. However, there was no significant Serbian presence in the territory of present-day Hungary until 1690, when a huge flow of refugees from the Serb-inhabited lands under Ottoman rule poured into the Habsburg Monarchy (POPOVIĆ 1954; VESELINOVIĆ 1993).

Today, the Serbs in Hungary are a small, close-knit minority: estimated at somewhere between 5.000 and 7.000¹. Geographically, they live scattered throughout the country, mostly along the Mures and the Danube rivers and in the counties of Bács-Kiskun and Baranya, sometimes in the places where only two or three Serb families remain (PRELIĆ 2004: 54). Yet again, due to a well established system of educational and cultural institutions, the Serbs are regarded as one of the “bigger minority communities” in Hungary (alongside Germans, Croats, Slovaks, Slovenes, and Romanians – *National and Ethnic Minorities* 2005: 8).

This contribution is based on the anthropological and ethnolinguistic fieldwork conducted in 2001 and in 2008 in the Serb community of Szigetcsép in Hungary, which was carried out by a research team from the Institute for Balkan Studies, Belgrade. On that occasion, we interviewed more than 15 individuals (mostly over sixty years of age, male and female), in the process recording about 50 hours of audio material. The multicultural and multilingual village of Szigetcsép is situated on the Danube island of Csepel in Pest County, some thirty kilometres south of Budapest. The village is inhabited by Hungarians, Germans, Roma and Serbs with an admixture of families of Orthodox Bulgarian origin who have for the most part been assimilated into the Serb population (ŠIKIMIĆ 2003; 2007; ILIĆ 2008). At the time of our visit to Szigetcsép, there were no more than 100 Serbs; furthermore, it was an aging and

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¹ The figures are given according to the latest 2001 Census of Population in Hungary (http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/volumes/06/00/tabeng/1/load01_10_0.html). However, a precise number cannot be determined in this way especially for the many criteria applied in the Census, such as ethnic affiliation, mother tongue, knowledge of languages, affinity with cultural values, etc. (*Population Census 2001*; VÉKÁS 2005).

declining community. Living in Diaspora, surrounded by other ethnic groups such as German, Hungarian, and Croatian, they are considered to be a small enclave population with its own enclave language. Again, the Serbian communities in Hungary although being scattered form a kind of socio-cultural and kin network, so in that sense one can speak of one functionally interrelated broader community who maintains internal cohesion.

In this contribution I intend to outline the current state of anthropological and ethnolinguistic methods based on Russian ethnolinguistics, especially that of the group of linguists, anthropologists and folklorists currently engaged in the collaborative multidisciplinary project at the Institute for Balkan Studies in Belgrade. Furthermore, I will analyse some aspects of the oral discourse of the Serbs of Szigetcsép, particularly those fragments concerned with oral history. Finally, I will reflect on how autobiographical narratives contribute to the creation of “collective narrative” and shared knowledge of the community.

1. Fieldwork and Field Methods Today: Ethnolinguistic and Qualitative Research

Throughout the fieldwork, two seemingly disparate approaches were combined: that of the Russian Ethnolinguistic School and the Anglo-Saxon Qualitative Research Method. The Russian methodological approach (TOLSTOY 1989; TOLSTAJA 2002; BARTMIŃSKI 1992) is based on the collection of local vernaculars, dialect lexicon and narratives on the traditional way of life such as traditional rituals, folklore texts, beliefs, etc. This method explores the ways in which language and traditional culture are interrelated, aiming to achieve the reconstruction of traditional Slavic spiritual culture. Its questionnaire contains questions such as “How did you get married?” “Do you remember the old wedding rites?” “What do you usually do on the Day of the Dead?” etc. (PLOTNIKOVA 1996). Our target group therefore was predominantly the older population, who still embraced the traditional way of life and who might remember the past on which we wished to focus.

In order to overcome the possible shortcomings of this method, such as its focus on ideal descriptions of local customs, its lack of context sensitivity, and its thematic limitations, we switched to a modified methodology – a combination of the Russian and the Qualitative Research method. Qualitative research is largely practiced in the social sciences; it uses participants’ opinions and experiences by putting a strong emphasis on their personal view of life (HODGSON 2000; WIESENFELD 2000; WITZ 2006; SORESCU-MARINKOVIĆ 2006). On the one hand, the “classic” ethnolinguistic questionnaire was used as a guideline for the interview, but conversation between interviewer and interviewee did not follow it too strictly; on the other hand, the comments and free discourses of the interviewees were also recorded, thus setting the interview in the context of the dialogic and idiosyncratic stream of discourse produced in everyday talk (ŠIKIMIĆ 2005; ILIĆ 2005). Due to the type of survey (a combination of directed and guided interview) which generated qualitative data, and to the limited number of interviews (8–10), this research material does not lend itself to quantitative analysis.

In the transcription process, the “narrow transcription” model has been applied, focusing mainly on the spoken text, including minimal contextual information and

for the most part omitting paralingual features of the speech act (DRESSLER, KREUZ 2000; LAPADAT 2000; LAPADAT, LINDSEY 1999). This type of transcription affirms the text-centered analytical approach and its interest in the relations between language and an ideological set of beliefs.

2. Ethnolinguistic Fieldwork: Limitations

Fieldwork in Szigetcsép was limited in many ways, particularly by time and its generational approach. The short term fieldwork did not give us the opportunity to draw closer to our informants and gain their confidence, which surely led both the informants and the researchers to some kind of self-censorship (ĆIRKOVIĆ 2006).

Yet again, the age (generational) limitation can be justified to some extent, as the oldest Serbs appeared to be not just the best, but very often the only informants on the Serbian native vernacular and local customs. In point of fact, the majority of Csepel Serbs resisted ethnic exogamy until World War II, making an effort to maintain their ethnic identity, ethno-cultural traditions and command of the native language (PRELIĆ 1995: 99; 2004: 153). Owing to the huge social changes that took place after World War II, such as industrialisation, de-agrarisation, village-to-town migrations, etc., lifestyles of the Serbian and other ethnic communities have dramatically changed. The rate of inter-ethnic marriages in the Serbian community, for instance, rose to more than 50%. Since Hungarian became a kind of prerequisite for progress and integration into the broader regional community, the native Serbian vernacular showed a sharp decline in use even within family circles. Thus, the community faced language shift within less than three generations. In scholarship on minority languages, the three-generational model of language shift is regarded as typical of the post-World War II small minority and Diaspora communities (PETROVIĆ 2004; 2005; VUČKOVIĆ 2000; FILIPOVIĆ 1985).

As argued by MLADENOVA (2003), process of language shift as well as general change in language use is always followed by conversion of a socio-cultural model. Social theoreticians introduced the term "social frame" (Fr. *cadres sociaux*) in order to explain interdependence between everyday practices, processes of remembering and forgetting, on the one hand, and shifts in social frames, on the other hand (HALBWACHS 1985 [1939]). In the case of the Szigetcsép Serbs, the socio-cultural frame changed from traditional (rural, patriarchal), typical of elder generations, to a modern-like (urbanised, global-type) one. For this reason, the present ethnolinguistic material offers a perspective of one to two generations sharing the same historical destiny, memories, cultural concepts and value system. Furthermore, social theorists argue that the generational approach becomes an important conceptual tool for analysing the intersection between individual and collective identities (OLICK, ROBINSON 1998: 123).

3. Ethnolinguistic Fieldwork: Perspectives

Considering the presumed shared ethnic identity of interviewers and interviewees and the type of questions usually asked, it might be expected that the discourse on both sides would inevitably be coded within an ethnocentric matrix and revolve around crucial identity issues. We were introduced to our interlocutors by local

officials as people (“experts”) coming from Serbia (“the motherland”), interested in the local Serbian vernaculars and customs. Hence, in the eyes of our interviewees we were undoubtedly perceived as some sort of insiders.

As for the questionnaire type, it was also to be expected that questions concerned with linguistic, societal and cultural specificities of the local community would spontaneously trigger identity discourse patterns on the part of our interviewees which, as MLADENOVA (2004: 107) points out, provide answers to questions such as: Who are we? What are we known for? What makes me proud to be ...? Moreover, if the majority of a community, or at least many individuals within the same community, repeat more or less the same narratives concerned with social or cultural subjects, then these narratives can be labeled “collective narratives” (GALASIŃSKA, GALASIŃSKI 2003). Their main grammatical features are usually generic and typifying references, sentences, and impersonal constructions². They sustain the “big narrative” of a collective and collective identity. Not primarily based on empirical evidence from everyday life, they are rather rooted in community ideology, as this is the case with stereotypes (BARTMIŃSKI 2005: 141). This is the point where contemporary ethnolinguistic field material could afford us a new perspective on how autobiographical narratives transform to cliché, stereotype or collective narratives, and vice versa.

4. Oral History in the Ethnolinguistic Interview

Accounts of historically significant events were given sporadically, spontaneously, and in fragments. However, if one takes the perspective of the humanities and social sciences, they turn out to be a valuable source for historical scholarship (YOUNG 1997; FRIEDLÄNDER 2000; JAMES 1997), cultural and social history (CONFINO 1997; OLICK, ROBINSON 1998), and cultural studies (ASSMANN 1992).

In analysing the transcribed interviews with the Szigetcsép Serbs, I distinguish between three narrative types: (I) legendary; (II) narratives of the “recent past”; and (III) narratives of everyday life. All of them comprise a body of oral history texts, an account of memories of historical significance passed down by word of mouth and/or collected through recorded interviews (RITCHIE 2003: 20). Oral history narratives are always selective, consisting of the evaluations, attitudes and understanding of past events of a given narrator (LATVALA 1999).

(I) The legendary narratives of the Szigetcsép Serbs reflect events that are usually not part of their first-hand experience, going back to the deeper past and being passed down to our informants by their elders (i.e. parents, grandparents). Being shared across different generations, such narratives, as proposed by ASSMANN (1992), should be considered forms of cultural memory. They concern basic identity issues such as “When did we arrive in Hungary and where did we come from?” and “Where

² Generic sentences as well as other generics refer to an entire class of entities (MLADENOVA 2003: 17); that is to say, they make statements about prototypic members of a category (ECHARDT 2000: 237).

were the settlements of our ancestors?" Recounted more or less by every person interviewed, they build a corpus of collective narratives.

(II) Narratives on the recent past mostly refer to first-hand experience. While talking about some autobiographical experience or traditional customs, the informants reflected on historical events that interfered with their lives. These narratives are based on everyday communication and autobiographic experience and therefore, according to ASSMANN (1992), belong to communicative memory. Such memories are in a sort of transition between individual and collective or shared memory. Hence, if the event affected the group as a whole it is expected to be transferred to the collective memory and to acquire collective narrative features.

(III) Finally, the third group of narratives reflects on everyday life, including memories of public, private and ritual life. Regarding ritual life, collective narratives prevail, whereas autobiographical and collective narratives constantly intertwine when referring to other spheres of life.

In the following section I will try to focus on the second type, explicitly on the possible ways of transition between autobiographical and collective narratives, and vice versa.

5. Socio-historical Background: Expulsion of the Germans from Eastern Europe

At the end of World War II and in the four years that followed, the huge majority of ethnic Germans (Ger. *Volksdeutsche*) of Central and Eastern European countries were forced to leave their home territories by the victorious allied military forces and the newly established (communist) governments. It is claimed that at least 12 million Germans were expelled from Eastern Europe and transported to occupied Germany between 1944 and 1948 (PRAUSER, REES 2004: 4). Of these, some 180.000 were expelled from Hungary, which is far fewer than the millions believed to have been expelled from Poland and Czechoslovakia. Additionally, it is argued that, unlike some other countries, the Hungarian government, as well as its population, was generally opposed to the idea of expulsion (APOR 2004: 33–34). Nevertheless, according to the Potsdam Treaty of 1945, almost half of the German population was driven out of Hungary, mainly out of Budapest rural environs. In particular, those who had signed up for any kind of German, pro-Nazi list or organisation during the war (e.g. *Volksbund*, *Waffen SS*), were among the first to be deported (APOR 2004: 36).

Although many important documentary and autobiographical works on this topic have been published, some historians claim that it was a taboo subject in European and German historical scholarship for almost half a century after World War II (PRAUSER, REES 2004: 1). Conversely, other historians, such as MOELLER (2005: 150–152) for example, argue that a declared “silence around German suffering has never really existed”, since the “rhetoric of victimization” emerged in public discourse in both the Germanies since the shooting had stopped. At any rate, it could be rightfully argued that the topic of German suffering was opened to controversial discussion only in the last two decades and ever since there has been an ongoing debate (MOELLER 2005). However, the oral discourse of the Szigetcsép Serbs, although influenced by the official discourse, should be distinguished as an unofficial (local,

family, vernacular, etc.) memory discourse that rendered logic of (dis)continuity of its own (OLICK, ROBINSON 1998: 112).

6. Socio-historical Background: Expulsion of the Germans from Szigetcsép

The official Szigetcsép statistics show that about 500 local Germans were expelled in May 1946 and transported to Bavaria and Eastern Germany³. This was almost two-thirds of the Szigetcsép German population. Until then, the Germans and the Serbs had been the two major ethnic groups in Szigetcsép, which at that time had only a few Hungarian families. Nevertheless, more than 500 Hungarians are reported to have settled in Szigetcsép after the expulsion of the local Germans, arriving from Mezőkövesd (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County), Körösladány (Békés County), and Slovakia (<http://w3.datanet.hu/~szigcsep/szcsep/cseptori/falutort.html>; APOR 2004: 34–35; CAJANI 2004: 82–83).

The interviewees' claims are in line with the historians' accounts of the region. In the Serb discourse it was regularly recalled that the Germans once lived together with the Serbs, the Germans being described as the larger and more prominent group. In fact, the Szigetcsép Germans were commonly called Swabs (Ger. *Schwaben*; Ser. *Švabi*), a term regularly used in the former Austro-Hungarian countries although only a small proportion of the German settlers' ancestors actually came from Swabia (APOR 2004: 35; JANJETOVIĆ 2004: 121).

7. Case Study: Narrative about a Swab Woman

In the light of this, it comes as no surprise that our interviewees remembered local Swabs well and – consequently – referred to them frequently. In the narrative (1), a woman R.B., aged 80, recalled a story about Maruška, a Swab woman who had lived in the neighbourhood and who was alongside her family expelled to Germany. R.B. evoked a visit of a Serb called Duško to Maruška in Germany. Maruška's speech addressing Duško is given the central place within the narrative.

- (1) (Tape CS9, Institute for Balkan Studies, Audio Archive; R.B., female, 1921; M.O., female, 1919–2007; the interviewees are siblings, born and married in Szigetcsép; education: elementary school; the interview took place in R.B.'s family home; M.I. a female interviewer, born in Belgrade 1973.)
- 1.1. R.B.: The Germans that were in the *Volksbund*⁴, they were with Hitler, you know. And then, it came, it came, houses, land was taken from them, and everything. It was in '45. Then the Hungarians from *Mezőkövesd* settled here.

³ From the Szigetcsép informants I learnt that many of the Germans expelled to Eastern Germany later returned and resettled in their home village of Szigetcsép, which was not the case with those sent to Bavaria.

⁴ The German War Graves Commission (Ger. *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*) is an organisation, whose task is to register, maintain and care for the graves of German war dead abroad. It was founded as a private charity in 1919; after 1933 and during World War II it came under the influence of the National Socialist. Since 1946 the Volksbund has resumed its

- 1.2. M.I.: Did those Germans come back later then?
- 1.3. R.B.: They didn't, no, no. They didn't come back. M.O.: What would they do here, anyway? R.B.: Yes. M.O.: (embarrassed laughter) This is Hungary, not Germany. R.B.: They [Germans] had been expelled. M.O. (embarrassed laughter)
- 1.4. R.B.: Duško, you know Duško, you know Duško, Marina's father. M.I.: Mhm. R.B.: He was in Germany, because his wife had a friend here, a Swab woman too. And the Swab woman had relatives in Germany, who had been expelled. Once she [his wife] told Duško: "We'll go to Germany. We'll go to her [the Swab woman's] relatives". He didn't want to. She said: "Come on, let's go!"
- 1.5. We were the Serbs, and they [the Germans] first thought that we set it up for them.
- 1.6. And among her relatives there was a woman who lived in the Serbian part. In fact, my mother-in-law had a house in the village. They were in one courtyard. One part of the house was Swab, the other was theirs. And the courtyard was shared. Well, the woman was from that house, Maruška was her name. Well, she [the Swab woman] asked her [Maruška] in Swabia if he could then come there. She [Maruška] said: "Let him come, I will be so glad to welcome him." She knew, she knew his mother, she knew his whole family.
- 1.7. She had then showed up, and said this to Duško, Dušan, we call him Duško: "Dušan, don't you ever sign up for anything, or for anybody. If we hadn't signed up [for the *Volksbund*], we would have never got into this position." And they had a big courtyard here and a coffee-house as well. "We would never have got into this position."
- 1.8. That's why she warned Duško, not to sign up for anything. That is to be quiet, because we're here in Hungary. He shouldn't sign up for anything, let's say, in Serbia, to move here or there. You are living here, be quiet here, and that's it. You shouldn't support this person or the other. "Be quiet, and stay where you are", she said. Yes, Maruška told him that. She knew how to sing in Serbian. Maruška knew Serbian.

R.B.: Nemci što su bili u Folksbundu, bili su uz Hitlera, znadeš. I onda je došlo, došlo, tima su pokupili kuće i zemlju i sve. To je bilo četrdeset pete. Onda su se ovde naselili Mađari iz Mezekevešda. M.I.: A je su se vratili posle ti Nemci? R.B.: Nisu se vratili, ne, ne. Nisu se vratili. M.O.: Šta imadu oni ovde da tražu? R.B.: Da. M.O.: (usiljeni smeh) Ovo je Mađarska, nije Nemačka. R.B.: Isterali ih. M.O.: (usiljeni smeh) R.B.: Duško, znate ga Dušku, znate Dušku, koji je, onaj Marinin tata. M.I.: Aha. R.B.: On je bio u Nemačkoj, jer žena mu ima drugaricu ovde, isto Švabicu. I ta Švabica ima rodbinu u Nemačkoj, što su i isterali. Pa je jedared rekla Duški: "Ićemo u Nemačku. Ićemo kod njeni." On neće. Kaže: "Hajde, ajde, ajde!" Mi smo bili Srbi, prvo su mislili da je to od nas poteklo. A bila je jedna baš u rodbini, što je stojala ovde u srpskim kraju. To je baš bila, moja svekrva je imala kuću u selu. U jednoj avliji su bili. Na jednoj strani je kuća bila švapska, a druga strana bila njeva. A zajednička bila avlija. Pa je ta ženska iz te kuće bila, Maruška se zvala. Pa je ova ista pitala u Švapsku da ovaj oće da dođe sad. Ona kaže: "Samo nek dođe, zdravo ću ga rado dočekati." Znala je, mater je znala, znala je celu familiju. I onda je izišla i to je rekla Duški, Dušanu, dakle Duško ga zovemo: "Dušane, nemoj da se nikada ni u kaku potpisivaš, ni uz koga. Je l i mi da nismo se potpisali, ne bi na ovo dop-." Imali su veliku oni avliju ovde, kafanu. "Ne bi na to doprli." Zato je ukazala Dušku da se ne potpisiva ničemu. Daklem da čuti, da tu smo u Mađarskoj. Ne da se potpisiva, da kažem, u Srbiji, da ideš el ovamo, el onamo. Tu živiš, čuti

ovde i gotovo. Ne treba da ovog partiš, i onog partiš. "Ćuti di si", kaže. Da, to mu je rekla Maruška. Zнала je srpski da peva. Maruška je znala srpski.

First of all, a terminological clarification is needed. The communicative genre to be analysed I will mark *dialogical narrative*; it is composed of several utterances made by different speaking subjects (BAKHTIN 1981; 1979; ROGERS, MARSHALL, TYSON 2006)⁵. Structurally, it is a narrative chain consisting of focal story, utterances that preceded the story and utterances coming as a response to the story. The term *narrative* implies that a fairly consistent story about someone's past experience was told, in which the verbal sequence of clauses matches the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred (LABOV 1973).

Let us now consider the structure of the dialogical narrative. The initial question unfortunately was not recorded, but it was a typifying interviewer question about local Germans (e.g. "The Germans lived here also, didn't they?"). In response, R.B. gave general information about the German and Hungarian local communities, whereby she also used typifying references (in bold, 1.1. *The Germans that were in the Volksbund, they were with Hitler, you know. And then, it came, it came, houses, land was taken from them, and everything*). Eventually, my following question (1.2. *Did those Germans come back later then?*) provoked the intriguing reaction of "embarrassed laughter" (1.3.), and furthermore prompted the focal story, the one about Maruška (1.4.-1.8.). "The laughter reaction" is ambivalent, so I will put it aside for the moment, and come back to it later. Yet, R.B. began the "Maruška story" by describing the circumstances of Duško's visit to Maruška using specific and even ostensive labelling (1.4. *Duško, you know Duško, you know Duško, Marina's father*). Then, in the following comment R.B. again switched to the typifying references when describing the Serb-German relationship after the expulsion as viewed from the Serb standpoint (1.5. *We were the Serbs, and they [the Germans] first thought that we set it up for them*). This comment implicitly motivated Duško's particular behavior, i.e. his initial hesitation to meet his fellow villager Maruška in Germany. In the following sequence R.B. moved once again along the axis from generic (typifying) to specific by providing us with actual information on Maruška's living in Szigetcsép (where, whom she was related to, etc.) (1.6. *In fact, my mother-in-law had a house in the village ... One part of the house was Swab, the other was theirs ... Well, the woman was from that house, Maruška was her name*). Finally, Maruška's speech addressing Duško is placed in the central spot (in bold, 1.7. *If we hadn't signed up [for the Volksbund], we would have never got into this position.*). R.B. used direct, indirect speech, and discursive repetition in order to underline the importance of Maruška's words, and to interpret the lesson to be learnt from Maruška (1.7.-1.8.).

Autobiographic and collective, or to put it linguistically, specific and generic references, constantly intertwine within this particular narrative. For example, the narrative began as a story about Germans in general (1.1.), and then switched to the story about specific persons (Duško, Maruška, etc.) (1.4.), to be suddenly interrupted by a comment on the general state of affairs between Serbs and Germans following

⁵ The utterance itself is defined as a unit of speech interaction, and the boundaries are marked by a change of speaking subject (BAKHTIN 1979).

the expulsion (1.5.), and after that it switched again to the specifics – the story about Maruška (1.6.). Finally, the segments (1.7.–1.8.) conceal the controversy of specific/generic dialogicity: here, R.B. switched from Maruška's direct speech addressing Duško (1.7.) to indirect speech addressing the Serb community in general (1.8.). Indirect speech repeated and modified words of Maruška, letting them pass on the Swab historical lesson to the Serbian neighbours (1.8.). One of the last, concluding sentences, a generic clause *par excellence*, resembled a well-known Serbian saying (Ser. "Ćuti di si" – "Be quiet, and stay where you are"). Thus, it constituted the quintessence of the historical lesson to be learnt (1.8.).

From R.B.'s standpoint, Maruška's words cultivated a specific meta-historical consciousness, and were thus seen as an expression of both the individual and the group experience, addressing Duško as well as the Serbs in general. To conclude, I return to the laughter reaction and the accompanying comment (1.3.), which I understand not as an expression of rejoicing over the "pro-Nazi" Germans being expelled, but more as a bitter, embarrassed laughter, a kind of non-verbal comment on minority destiny in general.

In the following section I will try to focus on the smallest narrative units referring to the Swabs that were recounted by the interviewees, and how these collective narratives were contextualised within their discourse.

8. Case Study: the Notion of the Swabs

Let us now focus on two different contexts in which the Swabs were spontaneously mentioned. In the transcription (2) the question about the number of families who migrated to Szigetcsép during the historical migration period, initiated S.N. to talk about the number of the Serbs in Szigetcsép prior to World War II, when the Serbian community was larger and stronger than nowadays (2.2.). The following question about the actual number of Szigetcsép Serbs at the present time, obviously distressed S.N. (2.3.), and triggered his identity discourse. The discourse was based on "then/now" pattern (2.4.–2.5.):

- (2) (Tape CS21, Institute for Balkan Studies, Audio Archive; S.N., male, 1933, born and married in Szigetcsép, education: elementary school; the interview took place in the local Serb cultural center; interviewer M.V., female, born in Jagodina (Serbia) 1974).
- 2.1. M.V.: Is it known how many families came with Čarnojević to the village [a Serb religious leader who led the Great Serb Migration in the 17th century].
- 2.2. S.N.: That I don't know. But there were about three hundred of us, as far as I remember, three hundred, three hundred and fifty souls.
- 2.3. M.V.: How many Serbs are there today in Szigetcsép? S.N.: A hundred and fifty (sighs). M.V.: And you remember that there were as many as three hundred, three hundred and fifty before?
- 2.4. S.N.: Well, I remember, it was before World War II. (Long pause) After, after the war, well, people started mixing with each other. A Serb took a Hungarian woman. And before, until World War II, before it, people weren't free to do that. To have a Serb take a Hungarian woman. The elders wouldn't allow it. M.V.: So, before the Second War it wasn't like that? S.N.: It wasn't like that. I can't recall that a Serb took a Hungarian woman, or a Hungarian woman [took a Serb]. Because there were really not many Hungarians then, but, well, Swabs, Germans. M.V.: So, there were mainly the

Swabs? Was there anyone else? S.N.: No. There were Swabs and Serbs. Mainly Swabs, as many as Serbs. And maybe just three, three or four Hungarian families.

- 2.5. M.V. How about today? S.N.: Today? Then, the Hungarians were [settled] here. The Germans, after the World War, the Germans were taken away, evacuated, how to put it, (short embarrassed laughter) to Germany. Then, the Hungarians were settled, brought over here, such poor families, brought over here into the Swab houses. They were given horses, land to cultivate. M.V.: So, actually the Hungarians came in large numbers only after the Second War? S.N.: After that. Yes, yes. They were so poor. So, they were given that [property]. Now, they are here. There are not many Swabs, and there used to be so many. M.V.: Biljana has already asked you if there were any Bulgarians.

M.V.: Da li se zna koliko je ovaj porodica došlo sa Černojevićem tad u selo? S.N.: To ne znam. Ali oko tri stotine nas bilo, kako se ja sećam, tristo, tristo pedeset duša. M.V.: Koliko danas ima Srba u Čipu? S.N.: Sto pedeset. (uzdah) M.V.: A vi se sećate znači da ih je bilo i trista, trista pedeset ranije? S.N.: Pa sećam se, pa to je bilo pre Drugog svetskog rata već. (pauza) Posle se, posle rata se, ovaj, počelo tu da se meša narod. Mađaricu uzeo Srbin. A prije, prije sve do Drugog svetskog rata, prije to nije bilo slobodno, da je Srbin uzeo. Nisu dopuštali st... M.V.: Stari? S.N.: Stari. M.V.: Znači pre Drugog rata to nije bilo? S.N.: To nije bilo tako. Nijednu ne sećam se da je jedan Srbin Mađaricu, il Mađarica. Jel Mađara nije bilo zdravo ovde, nego, ovaj, Švaba, Nemaca. M.V.: Znači bilo je najviše Švaba. Je l bilo još koga? S.N.: Ne, Švaba je bilo i Srba. Najviše je bilo Švaba, ko Srba. A Mađara ako je bilo jedno tri, tri četiri porodice. M.V.: A kako je danas? S.N.: Danas? Onda su, ovde su Mađare. Nemce, posle Svetskog rata, Nemce su izneli, evakuirali, kako se kaže (kratak usiljeni smeh), u Nemačku. Onda su Mađara doselili, doneli ovamo, take sirote porodice, doneli ovamo u švapske kuće. Tu im dali konje, zemlje im dali da rade. M.V.: Znači Mađari su došli zapravo u većem broju tek posle Drugog svetskog rata? S.N.: Posle. Da, da. To su taki siroti bili. Pa su im dali tako. Sad ima. Švaba nema mnogo, a sila ih je bilo. M.V.: A Biljana vas je pitala da li je ovde bilo Bugara?

“then” (time: *before WWII, then*; population: *more Serbs, more Swabs, not many Hungarians*; state of affairs: *there were no mixed marriages*);

“now” (time: *after the war, these days, at this time*; population: *Hungarians are [settled] here, there are not many Swabs*; state of affairs: *people started mixing with each other, The Germans [were sent] to Germany, the Hungarians [were] brought over here into the Swab houses. They were so poor*).

It is significant that for S.N. “now” begins after World War II (2.5.). Everything that happened after that point fits into the time sequence of “now”, and all prior to it fits into the time sequence of “then”. The crucial events remembered as the most significant at this historical turning point are “expelling of the Swabs/settling of the Hungarians” and the “emergence of mixed marriages”. Ideological connotations are to be found in nostalgic views of “then” and of the ethnic distance existing at that time, as well as in the implied rationalization for the Serb community decline. “Then/now” pattern which is surrounded by nostalgia was regularly recreated within the discourse of other (older) interviewees.

Generally, the Serb discourse on Szigetcsép Hungarians, as in the case of narrative (2.5.), offered an image of “poor”, “of high birth rate”, and “small” population before and immediately after World War II. However, these claims should be inter-

preted not only in terms of accurate memory, but also in terms of coping with the sensitive topic of the other (CANEF 2004; SIKIMIĆ 2004; VUČKOVIĆ 2007). Thus, many ethnographic accounts of the Banat region, for example, reported mainly positive stereotypes of former Swab neighbours, which reveals the notion of the “imaginary (former, absent) Other”⁶.

On the topic of expulsion S.N. gave vague information that “*the Germans ... were taken away, evacuated, how to put it, (short embarrassed laughter) to Germany*” (in bold, 2.5.). None of these words denoted what really had happened; the first (*taken away*; Ser. *izneli su*) is rather an euphemism, the other (*evacuated*; Ser. *evakuirali*) also, and what is more, it looks like a deliberate mistake, which is more evident if we take into consideration S.N.’s meta-narrative comment (“*how to put it*”) and his laughter reaction. The laughter reaction is by all means an emotional expression of embarrassment, especially if we consider his preceding (positive) evaluation of the earlier state of affairs when the Swabs lived together with the Serbs. In my opinion, this minimal memory narrative (in bold in the text) indicates the reality of historical trauma and social taboo. This is easier to understand if we associate it with the previous narrative (1), when the minority Serb fear of a German-like destiny was explicated.

Lastly, the transcription (3) renders a narrative by the oldest interviewed woman describing the old ritual carnival *fašange*. This narrative is also based upon discursive “us/them” (*we/Catholics; the Serbs/the Germans*) (3.2.), (3.3.), and “then/now” pattern (3.3.–3.4.). M.A. also connected “then” with at that time existing clear ethnic distance – symbolised in the wooden cross which was placed in the border street separating the Serb and the German part (3.3.).

(3) (Tape CS3, Institute for Balkan Studies, Audio Archive; M.A., female, 1911, born and married in Szeged, education: elementary school; the interview took place in the local Serb cultural center; interviewer M.I., female, born in Belgrade 1973).

3.1. M.I.: And *fašange* [a ritual carnival], did it last a whole week or how many days? M.A.: Here, we celebrated it for just one day, *fašanga* was on Sunday. And on Clean Monday [the first day of Lent], then they masked themselves just for fun.

3.2. And among Catholics, there *fašange* was celebrated for three days. For three days there was *fašange*.

3.3. Because, the Serbs were all the way up to the cross [the cross marking the end of the Serb part], and down there, there were the Germans.

3.4. The village wasn’t like it is today with houses all around. The village [had] these two rows of houses, and there were a couple of houses on the road to the station. And now, it is a big village.

3.5. M.I.: What did the men wear [during the carnival]?

M.I.: A *fašange*, je su trajale nedelju dana ili kol’ko dana? M.A.: Kod nas je samo jedan dan, nedelja je *fašanga* bila. A Čisti ponedeljak, to se onako komendijašili, onako. A

⁶ See, for example, reports on the almost unexceptionally positive images of the Swabs among the Hungarians in Romanian Banat, HANNONEN 2001; the Romanians in Serbian Banat, SORESCU-MARINKOVIĆ 2007; the Bulgarian Catholics in Serbian Banat, VUČKOVIĆ 2007; the Serbs in Serbian Banat, unpublished fieldwork material by the author.

kod katolika, tamo je tri dana bilo fašange. Tamo su tri dana, su imale fašange. Jel do krsta su Srbi bili, onde do ovamo gore, su Srbi bili, a onamo dole, to su Nemci bili. Nije bilo tako selo ko sade i ovamo kuća. Selo, ovi dva reda kuća, i par kuća je bilo tamo kud se stanici ide, tamo je bilo. A sade, sad je veliko selo. M.I.: U šta su se oblačili muškarci?

In the narrative (3), there is no reference to the expulsion, but the notion of the Swabs is apparently implanted in the collective memory composite which is activated by adverbs or adverbial phrases such as “then”, “once”, “before World War II” etc. (3.3.). Both narratives (2) and (3) consist of generic and typifying (ethnic, confessional) references. There is almost no single specific reference apart from meta-pragmatic comments, such as “I (don’t) remember that...” Furthermore, ethnic typifying is so stable and strong, that in the narrative (2) informant S.N. even used metonymy, i.e. a single ethnic denoted a whole ethnic group (e.g. 2.4. *A Serb took a Hungarian woman*).

9. Concluding Remarks

As has already been mentioned, the framework as well as the substantial features of the interviews (topics, ideological cores, etc.) classify this sample into an identity, ethnocentric discourse type. In the discourse of the Szigetcsép Serbs, as expected, generic and typifying references, favoured by both interviewers and interviewees, were dominant.

However, in the ethnocentric discourse, the Swabs were imagined as “the historical (ethnic) other”, replaced by the Hungarians after the expulsion. The notion of the Swabs is embedded in one of the crucial ideological cores in the community discourse, which refers to a whole set of past time values and rules. Furthermore, “the Swab reference” is employed in constructing key identity space/time coordinates. In individual discourses, references to the expulsion are to be found in fragments, in minimal memory units condensing the past experience. Besides, there was always a constant intertwining between autobiographical accounts and collective narrative assertions, which suggests that we should start discussing the terms of dialogicity between these two poles. If we had deliberately asked all our informants about the expulsion, we would have possibly satisfied the fieldwork standards required by oral historians. In that case, (re)construction of a collective narrative on the expulsion would be plausible.

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