

Land and morality in a rural community: Emotive language in the narratives of the past ¹

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The paper presents the analysis of ethnographic research in a village in eastern Slovakia. My aim is to consider the narratives of people from countryside who witnessed socialist period and to present their view of land which they cultivated. I explore two sources: people's life stories; and a local chronicle which was written during the 1960s. I argue that (1) both kinds of narratives serve as cultural tools for members of a collective as they recount the past in certain context; (2) in this, expression of moral emotions indicates narrative conventions related to social norms. I demonstrate that the semi-official context of the local chronicle demands expression of moral emotions in evaluation of the big-scale political events, but the chroniclers are rather cautious in assessment of local people's behaviour. On the other side, in informal settings people summarize life periods using moral terms and freely express positive as well as negative attitudes toward other people and social conditions, to make sense of the past events in relation to the present time. Thus, the language of emotions indicates the specific narrative context as well as social rules. At the same time, emotional expressions should be read considering a narrator's personality and social background; in this, the local historical and cultural setting is essential.

Key words: narratives, collective memory, socialist period, moral emotions, emotive language

Introduction

The European transformation of 1989 played a special role in the expansion of the study of memory in the social sciences in the end of the 1970s. In interpreting the communist past, historians and social scientists have employed the term 'collective memory', but also other concepts, such as historical memory, social memory, cultural memory, etc.² In his study

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² In this regard, it is important to notice that the meaning of these expressions is not always clear (see BERLINER, David. The Abuses of Memory: Reflections on the Memory Boom in Anthropology. In: *Social Thought and Commentary*, 2005, pp. 197-211). Regarding the term "collective memory", Wertsch notes that "there may be as many definitions as there are parties discussing it, and these definitions may overlap, conflict, or simply be unrelated" (WERTSCH, James. Collective Memory. In: *Memory in Mind and Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 117-1180). More about the study of memory in Slovak ethnology see KILIÁNOVÁ, Gabriela. Prehľad bádania o sociálnej pamäti a inšpirácie pre etnológiu. In: *Etnologické rozpravy*, vol. 3, 1996, no. 1. For a review of the development of memory studies, see OLICK, James. Introduction. In: *The Collective Memory Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 3-62. CONFINO, Alon. Collective memory and cultural history: Problems of method. In: *American Historical Review*, 1997, pp. 1386-1403.

of public memory in twentieth-century America John Bodnar used the term “vernacular memory”, as opposed to “official memory”. Official memory is grounded “*in the power of larger, long-lasting institutions*” and propagated by elites who promote “*interpretations of past and present reality that reduce the power of competing interests that threaten the realization of their goals*.” Meanwhile, vernacular memory is derived “*from the lived or shared experiences of small groups*” and “*represents an array of specialized interests that are grounded in parts of the whole. They are diverse and changing and can be reformulated from time to time by the creation of new social units*”.³ Confino, however, points out that this dichotomy, which governs Bodnar’s analysis of the relations between local and national memories, is rather inadequate because these two types of memory constantly commingle. Confino links collective memory and collective identity: he argues that a study of collective mentality “*heightens our awareness of the fact that collective memory is an exploration of a shared identity that unites a social group, be it a family or a nation, whose members nonetheless have different interests and motivations*”.⁴

My aim in this paper is to consider narratives of people from a village in eastern Slovakia who witnessed socialist period. I will explore an important topic embedded in their representations of the past – the attitude to land which they cultivated. I will address two sources: (1) the life stories of people who witnessed socialism; and (2) a local chronicle which was written during the 1960s.⁵ Both sources could be classified as vernacular memory in terms of Bodnar’s approach because both are derived from memories of individual members of a small community. However, the second source is linked to a local council – an institution which appointed a chronicler and supervised the chronicle. During socialism, it meant that the chroniclers’ accounts must have corresponded, at least to some degree, to the official politics of the communist government. Yet the chroniclers were still local inhabitants. I will argue that their narratives demonstrate in what way “official” and “vernacular” memory can commingle under certain socio-cultural conditions. Rather than divide these kinds of memory into two separate categories, I will pay attention to how people are remembering past events in particular context.

It should be said that the tradition of chronicles has a long history in Slovakia: its beginnings could be dated already by medieval times. Chronological records of events belong to a specific kind of historical documents, denoted as narrative sources; they have been explored by the Slovak historians as a specific kind of data.⁶ In ethnology, special attention has been paid to the chronicles of villages which have been a necessary part of ethnological research. They are viewed as a rich reservoir of cultural knowledge because they reflect the local specifics of social life and material culture. Among other aspects of this resource, ethnologists have considered chroniclers’ interpretations of events in connection to their lives and personalities

³ BODNAR, John. *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 13-14, 247.

⁴ CONFINO, ref. 2, pp. 1389-1390, 1402.

⁵ The present contribution will continue my previous study on local memories: BUŽEKOVÁ, Tatiana – GRAUZELOVÁ, Táňa. Lokálne dejiny: rok 1968 v interpretáciách politických zmien v rurálnom prostredí. In: *Príliš ľudská tvár socializmu. Reformy zďola a okolnosti obrodneho procesu v Československu v roku 1968*. Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV, 2017, p. 492-531; BUŽEKOVÁ, Tatiana. Gluing bits of life together: Autobiographical reasoning in the narratives of women from the rural community in Slovakia. In: *Etnologia Slovaca et Slavica*, vol. 39, 2018 (in press); BUŽEKOVÁ, Tatiana – UHRIN, Michal. Unity and division, suffering and satisfaction: Collective remembering of the religious changes in eastern Slovakia (forthcoming).

⁶ See, for instance, SOPKO, J. *Kroniky stredovekého Slovenska*. Budmerice: Rak, 1995.

and have explored their narratives as culturally and politically situated.⁷ In this study, I will proceed along this line of argument and will interpret the text of the local chronicle in relation to the chroniclers' lives and the specific time of their records.

To interpret the two types of narratives in terms of both community and individual, I chose an anthropological perspective which links individual and social dimension of collective memory. James Wertsch has outlined an approach which is grounded in the use of textual resources, especially narratives. He proposes a "distributed version" of collective memory, where narratives are viewed as cultural tools. Wertsch argues that in explaining the past, people use symbolic means to interpret what they witnessed and that "*the narrative tools provided by our sociocultural setting provide the stock of stories we employ on any particular occasion of meaning making*".⁸ In accordance to this perspective, I will consider people's oral accounts and the local chronicle to be two distinct kinds of narrative tools shared in a local "mnemonic community". I will address the recurrent topics in people's narratives which are related to land and will interpret them in terms of the specific cultural and historical context.

An important dimension of the collected accounts of the past is people's moral assessment of the changes in economic conditions and the related socio-political processes. This dimension is indicated by expression of certain emotions. In interpreting the corresponding narrative sections, I turn to the concept of the moral emotions, which a cultural psychologist Jonathan Haidt defines as "*those emotions that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent.*"⁹ Exploration of moral emotions touches various aspects of social life and for this reason has recently attracted attention of many social scientists.¹⁰ Anthropologists concerned with the relationship of language and emotion argued that the key locus to the study of emotion might be the politics of social life. Through exploration of emotional discourses in social contexts they have demonstrated how emotion is tied to the politics of everyday interaction.¹¹ In my paper, I will consider how verbal expression of moral emotions is subject to the narrative conventions which are related to social norms: what should be said, what could be said and what must not be said in a certain context.

I will illustrate my argument by the results of ethnographic research in a village Horná Vieska situated in eastern Slovakia.¹² While I will confront them with historical works, I do not intend to contribute to a reconstruction of an accurate picture of the past: my aim is to present people's perspective.

⁷ PAVLÍKOVÁ, Martina. Kronika a kronikár z pohľadu etnológie. In: *Etnologické rozpravy*, 1999, no. 1; *Kronika a kronikár (etnologický aspekt)*. Diploma thesis. Bratislava : Comenius University in Bratislava, 1998.

⁸ WERTSCH, James. Specific Narratives and Schematic Narrative Templates. In: *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004, p. 49; Texts of Memory and Texts of History. In: *L2 Journal*, 4 (1), 2012, pp. 10-11.

⁹ HAIDT, Jonathan. The moral emotions. In: *Handbook of affective sciences*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 854.

¹⁰ See, for instance, TURNER, Jonathan H. – STETS, Jan E. Moral Emotions. In: *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions. Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research*. Boston : Springer, 2006; PRINZ, Jesse. The Moral Emotions. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, 2010; FASSIN, Didier. On Resentment and Ressentiment. The Politics and Ethics of Moral Emotions. In: *Current Anthropology*, vol. 54, 2013, no. 3, pp. 249-267.

¹¹ See, for instance, LUTZ, Catherine A. – ABU-LUGHOD, Lila. (Eds.). Studies in emotion and social interaction. Language and the politics of emotion. New York : Cambridge University Press, 1990; NIEMEIJER, Susanne – DIRVEN René. *The Language of Emotions: Conceptualization, expression, and theoretical foundation*. New York : John Benjamins Publishing, 1997.

¹² I changed the name of the village as well as the names of my respondents and the chroniclers. To identify a narrator, I will use a fictional Christian name and a year of the narrator's birth.

The field research

The village of Horná Vieska is situated in a mountainous part of eastern Slovakia. It is a small village: the number of inhabitants is approximately 600. Before 1950 most of the inhabitants of Horná Vieska were Greek Catholics. Today more than 50% of the inhabitants are Orthodox Christians and approximately a quarter of the population are Greek Catholics.¹³ According to the latest national census, most of the people living in Horná Vieska declared themselves to be of Slovak ethnicity.¹⁴ The gender structure of the population in the village is balanced: the numbers of men and women are approximately the same. However, women prevail in the age category above 55 years old. The population gradually decreased after the Second World War. At present the village is growing older: during the last decade, the number of children has decreased, while the number of older inhabitants has increased. According to my respondents, many permanent residents live in the cities because they are employed there; thus, the actual number of inhabitants may be different from the official one.

These changes in population structure have been caused by unfavourable economic conditions. In the past, Horná Vieska was predominantly an agricultural locality; the main occupations of the inhabitants were pastoral work, sheep breeding, and forestry. During socialism many people started to work in factories in nearby towns due to the industrialization of Slovakia. The transformation of the agricultural cooperative in the 1990s led to a significant decrease of work opportunities in the village and to increasing inhabitants' tendency to move to the cities. Today, most people who live in the locality are employed in trade, transport, communications, the educational system and health care, and very few work in agriculture; mostly, people rent their land to a collective farm in the village Dolná Ves in an adjacent valley. Agricultural activities therefore are mostly limited to gardening and poultry farming. In addition to the decrease of working opportunities in Horná Vieska, the primary school and the kindergarten there have been closed. Now children attend the school in Dolná Ves. The closest health care centre is also situated there; more serious health problems demand visits to a nearby town P. Thus, many people, especially the young, have moved to the cities from this mountainous area, where they cannot get jobs and do not have immediate access to satisfactory infrastructure.

The ethnographic research for this study was undertaken in 2014 and 2015 during four sequential stays (each lasting several weeks). In this study, I will present the results of the thematic analysis of narratives told by 12 informers – 7 women and 5 men who were born between 1925 and 1940. 7 of them are Orthodox Christians and 5 are Greek Catholics. In the past, these people were farmers. 9 of them finished primary school and 3 people graduated at secondary school.

As I mentioned above, I will also present the analysis of the local chronicle. It describes the events that took place in the village between the World War I and the year 1970. The text was written by two chroniclers. The first one, Michal, covered the period 1914-1964; he was commissioned by the local council to write a chronicle in 1960, and started his work in 1961.

¹³ More about the changes of religious confession see BUŽEKOVÁ and UHRIN, ref. 5.

¹⁴ Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. Resident population by ethnicity in municipalities. Available at: https://www7.statistics.sk/wps/wcm/connect/d21d8809-a844-4ba0-bb89-961f304365f1/Table_2_Resident_Population_by_nationality_by_municipalities_2011_Census.pdf?MOD=AJPERES, 2011 (accessed 22 December 2017); Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. Resident population by religion in municipalities. Available at: https://www7.statistics.sk/wps/wcm/connect/4796984f-f3de-48b4-9f39-0a57a97cb270/Table_3_Resident_Population_by_religion_by_municipalities_2011_Census.pdf?MOD=AJPERES, 2011 (accessed 22 December 2017).

Irena, the second chronicler, recorded events from 1965 to 1970; she was commissioned by the local council after Michal's death in 1964.

Michal mentions the so-called "old chronicle" which was lost (he explains it by the war events in 1944-1945); and the previous chronicle which was written by another chronicler, Simon, who had recorded events from 1955 until 1960, but addressed the previous period of time as well. Later Simon's chronicle was also lost – during my field research I was told that it was destroyed by a fire in the village. It is possible, however, that the two "old chronicles" shared the fate of other chronicles which were destroyed or modified during socialist period due to ideological reasons. As Pavlíková has noticed, in 1956 the Commission for Culture issued a regulation for the local authorities to ensure recording events of 1944-1955 in case they were not recorded in the local chronicles. But „*this regulation had another (hidden) meaning, as it was not only about the extension of the chroniclers' work. In many chronicles these years were described "too" accurately, which was not acceptable for the contemporary governmental institutions. Thus, in the post-war years many village chronicles were "lost", destroyed or removed to the archives*".¹⁵ It seems that Simon's interpretation was not satisfactory: Michal used Simon's text in his description of the events 1944-1955, but he criticized it (especially regarding the liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Army, the collectivization of agriculture and the religious context) and interpreted the events in a different way. He also used additional sources, such as the published communist documents and the local documents related to the events which he recorded.

During my research the ethnographic interviews aimed at collecting people's life stories were supplemented by participant observation of numerous activities (for example, conversations at home, Masses, celebrations, funerals, neighbourhood visits, daily work, and talking in the street). In case of chronicle I did not have such an additional source of ethnographic data. Nevertheless, the text could be related to part of the local inhabitants' oral accounts: I interviewed older people who witnessed the events of the 1950s and 1960s as adults.

Interpretation of my respondents' life stories and the chronicle in terms of cultural tools implied the following procedures: (1) Thematic analysis aimed at identification of the recurrent themes and specific episodes; (2) Linking these themes and episodes to historical and cultural setting; to a concrete time and circumstances of telling/writing; and to a specific situation of a narrator.

It is important that the respondents' life stories were recorded during repeated ethnographic interviews in informal settings, whereas the chronicle was written in the semi-formal context. Thus, the two kinds of narratives served different goals. My respondents were asked to tell about their lives to an ethnographer who explained that she was interested in the past of people living in the village.¹⁶ The chroniclers, on the other side, were commissioned by a local institution to describe the important events in the village. Hence, they were writing under certain institutional and ideological pressure. Nevertheless, these two kinds of cultural tools display certain recurrent themes. Below I will address one of the most important topics: people's ties to their land.

People's life stories and chroniclers' biographies

Horná Vieska is a small locality; in the past people found spouses mostly within the village, and this tendency changed only in the second half of the 20th century with the industrialization

¹⁵ PAVLÍKOVÁ, ref. 7, pp. 87-88.

¹⁶ More about the procedure see BUŽEKOVÁ, ref. 5.

of Slovakia and increasing social mobility. The inhabitants were therefore connected by kinship ties of various degrees. Today the matter of kinship is still very important; the sentence ‘Our village is a big family’ appeared in many stories. Elsewhere¹⁷ I have demonstrated that during the initial interviews the respondents did not put life events in a chronological order, but typically conceived their life stories as “family maps”: (1) they placed their ego into a family network and related it to land and houses which their family owned; (2) they have paid considerable attention to deaths in their families; (3) a common theme related to the family was children’s and especially grandchildren’s education and employment.¹⁸ A fragment of the story told by Milena (1935) offers an example of such a ‘family map’:

*“My father had oxen and he was a skilled shoemaker. For example, he sewed *kapce* [high felt boots – the author’s note], and when *baganče* [stog – the author’s note] were torn, he patched them, he repaired them. So, during winter time my father had such a work and he had money to live with. There were six of us children. But only three of us are still alive. One of my brothers drowned, he was eighteen, and he was studying, he was going to be a butcher. But when he returned from school in the end of July, he went to the lake with his friends and he drowned. He was so exceptional, my brother, that everyone envied him; all his friends envied him. They overloaded the boat and it turned over and he drowned. The other brother died when he was fourteen. My father was shoeing oxen, and the ox jerked. My brother was hanging around and the ox stroke him to stomach. He passed out, then he woke up, but he got a tumour. And he died. He was fourteen. In November, the same day as my birthday. The other brother who was born after me, he died when he was only four months old; there was an illness then, diphtheria, which afflicted babies. So, there were three of us left. Thus, I have a brother who is younger than my daughter. My daughter was born in April, and my brother in November. This was unpleasant for me and my parents, that I had a daughter older than my brother. Mother and daughter were pregnant at the same time. My mother was 49 years old when she gave birth to my brother. You could have met him, he is the head of the land office. And his son is living close, just opposite Maria’s house. He is married. He lives in the house which his grandmother gave to him. He repaired it. The other one is also married, he has a daughter who is going to school. He is an engineer, he is dealing with computers. And his third son is not married yet. So, my brother has three sons, and my sister has two daughters. One of them is a member of the folk ensemble. And the other one is a businesswoman”.*

The “obligatory” biographical sections of the chronicle which address appointing the chroniclers by the local authorities offer two examples of the authors’ life stories. These accounts display a different narrative schema. Michal starts by a description of his family:

I was born on 3 May 1915 in a village of L. in the region of Spišská Nová Ves [...] My father was a shoemaker. My grandparents on father’s side lived in the city of P. and my grandfather subsisted himself and his family by slavish work. I did not know my grandfather on my mother’s side; my grandmother lived in L. and served gentlemen and occasionally worked for wealthy farmers. My father moved from P. to L. as a shoemaker’s apprentice. There he married and lived until he died in 1937. My mother came from workers’ family. Before she married, she worked as a servant in gentlemen’s houses. She is still alive. In our family where I was born and grew up there were 14 children. Today only seven of us are alive. From all of us siblings, only I have high school education – I graduated at a pedagogical school. The rest of my brothers and sisters only attended a local primary school because there were no financial resources for all of us. My sisters married workers and my brothers are also employed as workers.

¹⁷ BUŽEKOVÁ, ref. 5.

¹⁸ I interpreted this kind of narratives in terms of cultural concept of biography. This term refers to essential features of any account or narrative that may be considered a biography and to the biographical cultural norms which define conventional life phases. See HABERMAS, Tilmann. How to tell a life: The development of the cultural concept of biography. In: *Journal of Cognition and Development*, 2007, no. 8, p. 2.

He continues by listing all his employments, including the present position of a teacher at the local primary school and then describes his communist responsibilities, such as the head of the Village Organisation of the Communist Party of Slovakia (hereafter VO CPS), referent of the Local National Council (hereafter LNC), secretary of the Association of the Folk Cooperative Society, activist of the financial budget committee of the LNC, administrator of the Further Education Office, and propagandist of communist education. The end of the chronicler's biography, again, is dedicated to his family:

I am married to Alena Z. who was born in P. (her father was a railwayman-gardener and her mother was a housewife). We have three children. The first daughter (V. P.) is married to veterinary and the other two children are going to school (a daughter D. to economic school in P. and a son A. to the primary school). My wife is a teacher and works at the local school.

Although the beginning and the end of Michal's story remind the general schema of the "family map", including relatives' deaths and the emphasis on education, we can notice that this picture is rather different from my respondents' accounts: first, Michal does not address property; and second, his story has an ideological flavour, visible in underlining the proletarian background of Michal and his family members. This ideological bias is explicit in the list of Michal's communist responsibilities. Furthermore, Michal's work positions and functions are put in chronological order and therefore present a continuous sequence of life events, unlike the initial narratives of my respondents. Jens Brockmeier identifies such a chronological sequence as a linear model of autobiographical time. He notices that "*the prototypical example of this view, applied to the history of the individual, is the various forms of the CV, the oral or written Curriculum Vitae or "course of the life," a self-presentation that occurs in formalized social settings*".¹⁹ Thus, considering the ideological aspects of Michal's story, we can relate this narrative schema to a questionnaire which people used to fill when they presented themselves in official settings during socialist period.

Such presentation of the chroniclers' lives was important: writing a chronicle has been a significant (and prestigious) official activity which was subject to various formal and semi-formal regulations.²⁰ As Pavlíková has noted, "*according to the Government Regulation No. 169 issued already in 1932, a person commissioned to write a chronicle should have been a secretary of a local cultural association, a teacher, an archiver, or a local notary. In other words, it should have been a person who understood the importance of their position and was willing to carry out their duties, but who was also properly educated and acquainted with the local context. Thus, in the countryside chronicles were written mainly by rural intelligentsia and public figures, mostly local teachers. They were usually nominated by a local council*".²¹

In case of Michal, this consideration is true: he was a local teacher; he had proper education as well as knowledge of the local context; and he was apparently interested in writing the chronicle. His abilities and preoccupation with this work were demonstrated by a high aesthetic quality of his writings as well as by his own drawings, by which he embellished the text. The second chronicler, Irena, who was born in 1936 and was commissioned to write the chronicle by the local council after Michal's sudden death in 1964, created rather different account. First of all, unlike Michal's figurative (and sometimes even poetic) expression in many sections related to nature, the history of the village, or folk culture, Irena's style is austere. She does not interpret: she states how the things are. In general, her account is formal and reminds

¹⁹ BROCKMEIER, Jens. In: *Narrative Inquiry*, vol. 10, 2000, no. 1, p. 62.

²⁰ MURÍN, P. *Právna úprava obecných kroník*. Martin: Matica Slovenská, 1985; CIFRA, Štefan. *Tvorba kroník – zodpovednosť pred potomkami*. In: *Národná osveta*, vol. 8, 1998, No. 6.

²¹ PAVLÍKOVÁ, ref. 7, p. 88.

an inventory. This difference between the two authors could follow from Irena's lower level of education and a different social background: as she stated in the biographical section, she achieved primary school education, then worked as a shop assistant and then as an official at the local council. Her further career developed mainly in connection to her membership in the Communist Party (she joined it rather young, in 1960): for ten years she had been a deputy of the District National Council and then became a secretary of the Slovak Women's Association. The text of her biography in the chronicle is as short and strict as her records of the local events.

A significant biographical topic which is richly represented in my respondents' life stories, but absent in the semi-official layout of Michal's and Irena's biographies, is inheritance issues and corresponding conflicts between relatives. Michal's description of heirloom in the local context helps to understand the roots of these conflicts:

We know from the testaments, although roughly, about various forms of heirloom and customs related to it. [Description of heirloom in the 18th and 19th century follows – the author's note] Later in Horná Vieska heirloom was changed due to bad quality of land: the parcels and the meadows were inherited by all children equally; however, not the whole parcels, but equal parts of every parcel. Even today this kind of heirloom has an impact on the forms of farming (a cooperative farm has not been established in the village and it is not planned, due to the inappropriateness of land and fields) due to the enormous fragmentation and chaos among the heirs and the land users. It is typical that an heir does not know at what time of a year it is legitimate for him to utilize a meadow; it happens that he mows it only two or three times during his whole life, sometimes only once. Some people never get an opportunity to use the meadows to get benefit from their inheritance.

In people's oral accounts, the issues about inheritance are often included into the "family map". For example, Julia says:

People here worked in the forest. Women took care of trees, men hewed. My mother worked until 64, then she became a pensioner and had 500 crowns. My father worked at constructions, the panel houses, the pension where you live now. He lived 85 years. No, 86. I took care of them. Of both, father and mother. Nobody can say anything [bad]. And I took care of their house, I washed windows and did everything. Now my father's brother's son's daughter claims it. But I was born in this house. And they are going there now. I do not want money. They have children, that is important. But they now own the place where I was born. My father was from there, and his brother as well. She, that Jana, she was visiting my mother when she was already ill, I cannot say anything [bad]. But it was I who took care of my mom, and now Jana has everything. I do not need it. I have my house, which we built with my husband. I have children, and my children have their own houses. In the past, you know, people extended houses. The house, where my father lived, had two parts, one was my father's, and another his brother's, Jana's father's father. His part was destroyed, and the other part was free. And Jana now divided it. But she did not call me. I was always with my mother, she was always with me. I went to work, I worked at the boarding house, close to her house. She visited me there. I washed things for her, I cleaned the house, I did everything. And now, when I am going there and see those curtains which my mom bought, my heart is aching. But I cannot do anything about it. And I have my own house.

Talking about such issues, my informers were rather emotional: they displayed sadness, anger, even disgust. This aspect indicates that the description of inheritance is not just mapping property in relation to the family members. The "family map" is related to a profound connection which people have with their houses and land as essential parts of their lives. But heirloom is also about social norms and proper/moral behaviour within the family.²²

²² See also BUŽEKOVÁ, ref. 5.

Although the chroniclers' biographies do not display the social aspects of people's connection with land, other parts of the chronicle help us to understand the local context, in which this connection arises. The text inevitably addresses another indispensable dimension of land ownership – agricultural work, which is also a vital part of people's life stories. Significantly, this element, too, has a moral dimension in my respondents' narratives. In the chronicle, however, the moral emphasize is given to different aspects of the local events.

Moral dimension of the narratives of the past

Michal mentions that due to the “inappropriateness” of land, people from Horná Vieska, however poor they are, “*fulfilled their desire to cultivate land*” by saving money and buying parcels in the two neighbouring land areas which was called by a collective name “at Spiš”. But

“...in August 1959 this land was transferred for no pecuniary reward to the cooperative agricultural farm in Dolná Ves, because in Horná Vieska a cooperative farm has not been established and it would not be established for economic reasons (pastures and unprofitable meadows shall be forested due to the delimitation plan; and most of the cultivated land will be transformed to meadows)”.

The mentioned transformation was part of the agricultural policy of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia after 1948, which was directed at the collectivization of agriculture. According to Státník, the collectivization in the 1950s in eastern Slovakia took on a form of state terrorism which applied violent methods to whole villages; however, due to the inhabitants' resistance, a large part of land in the end of the 1960s was still in private ownership.²³ But rural inhabitants who did not join the cooperative farms were under significant pressure: they had to hand over a large part of what they produced or face fines and imprisonment.²⁴ Elsewhere in the chronicle we can read more about the events in the 1950s and the resistance of people from Horná Vieska against the forced collectivization. Michal describes it as follows:

“The idea of the cooperative farm was not accepted, although in 1950 a preparatory committee was established. [...] 160 peasants of minor and average property (other types of peasants did not live in Horná Vieska) joined the cooperative farm of the first type which implied private property. However, in the end they did not manage to cultivate the land together and more than that, the preparatory committee was soon dismissed, because it was not possible to maintain the cooperative farm which did not belong to the socialist sector in agriculture. [...] At a state level, the process of assessment of quotas on agricultural products started, which was called kontingenty of the specific agricultural sectors. [...] This measure was by no means understood by people from Horná Vieska and their attitude was manifested by various insults which they addressed to the officers of the LNC. After the assessment of quotas on agricultural products was announced, every peasant went to the LNC to see their own plan, and this led again to the insults and objections expressed by almost all the peasants. They were foolishly talking that only those people who created this assessment are bound to give over the agricultural products, which would have meant that only the members of the agricultural committee of the LNC were bound to do that”.

We can see that Michal's account of the first phase of collectivization in Horná Vieska is rather factual. He does not try to conceal people's protest, but in judging their behaviour he does not use reproaching words other than “foolish”. His description of the resistance corresponds

²³ STÁTNÍK, David. Národnostní a náboženské poměry na severovýchodním Slovensku v letech 1968–1970 na příkladu okresu Svidník. In: *Příliš lidská tvář socialismu. Reformy zdola a okolnosti obrodného procesu v Československu v roku 1968*. Bratislava: Institute of Sociology SAS, 2016, p. 294.

²⁴ This part was called “kontingenty”. See CAMBEL, Samuel. *Päťdesiate roky na slovenskej dedine. Najťažšie roky kolektivizácie*. Prešov: UNIVERSUM, 2005, p. 9.

to my informers' recollections who, however, were much sharper in their evaluation of the events. Ivan (1932), for example, says:

“Communists took everything from us. They came to the barn, they took pigs, and if we wanted to have meat for ourselves, we had to pay thirty crowns for one pig-sticking. We were left with nothing! And then we had parcels at Spiš, our parents bought them, two at Dolná Ves, and one at Š. And they took it too! They adjoined them to the collective farm in Dolná Ves. And they seized our stone-pit in Horná Vieska. They took everything from us – pastures, rocks, everything”.

Accounts of these events in the life stories are characterized by the following aspects: (1) they point to injustice; (2) they refer to a narrator's family, particularly to parents; (3) they are emotional – they express anger and sadness. Interestingly, my respondents' evaluation of the second phase of collectivisation in the beginning of the 1970s, in which people from Horná Vieska joined the collective farm in Dolná Ves, was rather different. Their narratives comprised the following motives: (1) people were relieved from hard work at private farms; (2) the associated period was characterized by the word “cheerful” (“*veselo*”); (3) this period had positive moral connotations, contrary to a negative assessment of the present time.

As Milan (1944) has stated,

“The cooperative farm from the first phase in the 1950s did not work. And then, when that regulation was issued, we joined them [the cooperative farm in Dolná Ves – the author's note]. People were very glad then. We were relieved that we would not have cows and would rest”.

Andrej (1940) explains further:

“We had a farm. We had cows, bulls, we had to manage everything. I was the only child of my parents who had a big farm, and I could not leave them alone. My wife worked hard at their farm. The cooperative farm was established in Dolná Ves only in the 1970s, so we were relieved and for the first time in our life we went to vacation. And here in Horná Vieska the land was transformed to meadows. People mowed and hayed grass for sheep and cows. And the main cooperative farm was in Dolná Ves. Here we did not cultivate the land, all the land was transformed to the meadows. My cousin who lives in the next house was the head of the cooperative farm in Horná Vieska. We had sheep and cows here. And we hayed a lot. People mostly worked in the forest. And during winters women were at home and in spring they went to forest. It was cheerful, to work together”.

In my respondents' life stories, the period of the first phase of collectivization is named “after the war” and associated with communists. The following period is named “completely after the war” and is described in a positive way. In general, people do not judge socialism as a unite, but divide it to several phases. Significantly, the same kind of land ownership at different time can be assessed inversely. The governmental regulations concerning agricultural land in the 1950s were described in extremely negative terms, but the cooperative farm and work in the state forestry since the 1970s until the fall of communism were typically associated with honest work and were denoted by the general term “cheerful”. Narrators connected private land ownership with good life conditions before the war, but at present it meant something else for them – conflicts within families, cult of money, and demoralization of youth.

It should be noted that people's assessment of land ownership is not ideological, but rather pragmatic. Peasants' pragmatism has been a matter of broader discussions in the anthropological literature. Marida Hollos, for instance, has argued that although much has been said about the “peasant value system” in which a “love of the land” ranks high, peasants “are basically pragmatists who are interested in a pay-off, in the economic support and betterment of their families. As long as this is possible solely through the increasing accumulation of land, private ownership becomes the cornerstone of peasant cultivation. However, when other forms and means of economic improvements are offered,

even the more prosperous cultivators are willing to give up their independence in return for security and less responsibility. Peasant resistance to collectivization is not based on an irrational attachment to land ownership but on a rational calculation. Where sufficient economic gain is not forthcoming from collective work, ideological incentives are not sufficient to weigh against previous economic security".²⁵ However, besides pragmatic aspects, an investigation of economic processes must necessarily consider the social context. As Martha Lampland has noted, a simple change of institutions by political decisions cannot change economies: "*Institutions are peopled by local actors, for whom the patterns of thought characteristic of the previous regime are normal and routine. [...] People live within complex social relations: ties of affection, respect, obligation, and reciprocity. A radical change in economic activity requires not only a change in thinking, but a restructuring of the larger social world of which one is a part*".²⁶

Indeed, the positive or negative attitudes which my respondents presented were substantiated by the descriptions of their daily life – duties as well as leisure. Beside this basic reasoning, however, their statements display moral evaluation. For example, Maria (1935) says:

"After the war everything changed. Communists wanted to take everything. It was collectivization. But people did not want to hand over their property. Nevertheless, later we understood that it would be better, to have a cooperative farm. We earned money, we had everything. It was better than to be private farmers. And now it is hard again. In the past people were not such scoundrels. We mowed, hayed, and we had fun. And we worked at the construction of water supply and canalization here without payment. It was cheerful! And who would do anything without payment now? Nobody. And I worked at the construction of the community centre, then my son was just a baby. But everyone had to work. I worked ten days – five for my part, and five for my husband's part. I used to have my son with me. And I was not paid! And who would work like this today? Now it is clear where the truth is. In the past, people lived better. Now people get money, but they steal and kill each other. What kind of system is it? Old people are saving money, and someone would come and steal. What kind of order is it? In the past it was different. It was cheerful".

Moral dimension is essential for understanding how older people see their lives and historical events. In my respondents' narratives, moral judgements are explicitly expressed especially regarding young people's behaviour, including dubious conduct of younger family members who do not work and do not marry. Such reasoning often takes a form of comparison between "now" and "then". Elsewhere, I suggested that this narrative template can be explained by workings of autobiographical memory.²⁷ Here I just would like to emphasize that such judgements were particularly expressive when my respondents were talking about work and family: they emotionally stated that the family is declining, and people now are not working properly, they just concentrate on money. It should be said that my respondents also indicated the "proper" line of behaviour by expressing pride of their successful and hardworking descendants who have proper families.

Noteworthy, the moral terms in my respondents' narratives and in the chronicle appear in regard to different kinds of events. While they abound in my respondents' descriptions of work, family and the changes in land ownership, the chroniclers' texts related to these issues lack emotive expressions. Michal was writing in 1961-1964; thus, he pictured the first phase of collectivization. As I mentioned above, his evaluation of people's resistance was moderate,

²⁵ HOLLOS, Marida. Ideology and economics: Cooperative organization and attitudes toward collectivization in two Hungarian communities. In: *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 7, 1982, no. 2, p. 180.

²⁶ LAMPLAND, Martha. The advantages of being collectivized. Cooperative farm managers in the postsocialist economy. In: *Postsocialism. Ideals, ideologies and practices in Euroasia*. London; New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 32.

²⁷ BUŽEKOVÁ, ref. 5.

despite that in the biographical section he presented himself as a proper communist. Irena, also a communist, reports about the period 1965-1968 – the beginning of the “cheerful” times. Her text mentions some events which often appear in my respondents’ narratives, particularly participation in the construction of the water supply and canalization in the village. Irena does not underline the moral dimension of this unpaid work, although it could be a good opportunity for a socialist propaganda. For example, in case of the construction of the water supply, she just describes the technicalities of the process and regarding people’s work simply states:

“The citizens helped to earth the water pipes. Every citizen took on a socialist obligation to work on the water supply for twenty hours”.

Contrary to this dry report, my respondents usually labelled these works as “cheerful” events, as Maria did in her narrative, and described how they worked together for the community and at the same time had fun.

Unlike my respondents, Michal and Irena typically use emotive terms in relation to the large-scale political events. I will illustrate it by several examples. Michal refers to pride and owe in relation to the Slovak National Uprising and the liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Army. It is not surprising, considering that many local inhabitants took part in the uprising and/or fought as partisans during the Second World War; and Michal pays considerable attention to such issues as the construction of the monument dedicated to the local war heroes as well as granting them the memorable medal by the government. But we can find emotive expressions also in the sections describing the large-scale political events which were projected into the local setting. Here Michal takes over the communist officialise: the positive emotions (pride and owe) are reserved for the communists, while the negative emotions (contempt and anger) for their opponents. But his judgements of the events at a state level and at a local level differ. For instance, in the beginning of the chapter “The events since the Victorious February of 1948 until 1955” he points to the “struggle against reactionary” and reprobates the Democratic Party (hereafter the DP) which took side of bourgeoisie. However, he is very lenient toward the local members of the DP whom he describes as people who just erred because they did not understand what was good for them:

“The political development in Czechoslovakia and Slovakia before and after the February 1948 confirmed the great power of the Communist Party connected to the work class and working farmers. The basic organizations of the CPS at fabrics and in villages were always informed about the struggle against reactionary; they always knew what was necessary to do in maintaining our socialist democratic system and to be the leading power in every part of our lives.

The communists had a strong position in Horná Vieska. The local organization of the CPS was a ruling and leading power in the village, even when the DP had its followers here. The backward attitude of the chieftains from the DP in Slovakia was condemned by the communists from Horná Vieska, but also by the DP members themselves, with some exceptions – simple people who were tempted by many promises and entered the DP out of political misunderstanding; but during the political events which took place since 1945 they had gradually understood that the DP were traitors connected to bourgeoisie. In these conditions, in February 1948 in Horná Vieska there were no significant events”.

Like Michal, in her description of the political events Irena uses emotive expressions corresponding to the socialist officialise. For example, she starts her report of the events in 1968 as follows:

“Our citizens were proud and enthusiastic when comrade Svoboda became the president and comrade Dubček became the first secretary. The federation of two states – the Czech Socialist Republic and the Slovak Socialist Republic – was established. It looked very promising for our village, too, because the minority of Slovak population was able to achieve equality at the governmental and state level. But Dubček’s and Smrkovský’s behaviour led to failure and the promised socialism with the human face has changed to babbity and the most horrible reaction at home and abroad. The best communists were withdrawn from the leading politic and economic positions. The vast attack of reactionary politics took place by means of mass media. They were promising better life conditions, but in fact they disorganized industry to destroy our economy. They started to prepare contra-revolution and wanted to kill innocent people and eliminate communists, like it was in Hungary. The help of the Soviet Union was quick and effective and on 21 August 1968 the broadcast informed that the Warsaw Pact Units entered the territory of Czechoslovakia”.

The respondents who remembered the invasion in 1968 did not provide its general picture, like Irena did; instead, they referred to their personal experiences. The accounts of the invasion included two themes: a description of where the narrators were at that moment and what they were doing, and an expression of surprise and fear, often specified as a fear of a possible war.²⁸ The possible threat of war was linked to two types of local reaction following the invasion: “panic”, which meant that people were hastily shopping, or even plundering the local shops to secure food and other resources, and “putting up posters” expressing disapproval with the invasion. The topic of panic is much more frequent, however. Irena briefly mentions both types of reaction:

The Soviet units passed our village on 21 August. They did it on invitation of the president Ludvík Svoboda to maintain peace. The local national council together with the committee of the VO CPS watched citizens’ actions and the movement of the Soviet units through our village. In this case there was no unwise conduct, the citizens were calm. Later it turned out that in our village, too, unwitting students put posters against some functionaries and the Soviet Union. They were quickly removed, and the youth was reprimanded.

After these events in our village there was a panic that the war would start. For this reason, people started to buy food excessively. Two days later, on 23 August 1968, unknown criminals broke in the shop through the roof, where they stole food and money”.

It could be said that in relation to the collectivization and the invasion in the local setting Irena and Milan are rather neutral and just state what happened, although now and then they include in the text an emotive evaluation of people’s behaviour, like words “unwise” or “foolish”; but these expressions are not condemning, they just indicate that people made silly mistakes. The same approach can be identified in their reports on the changes of religious confession. Michal describes the consequences of the abolition of the GCC in 1950, and Irena refers to the re-legalization of the Greek Catholic Church in 1968.²⁹ Regarding the following conflicts between the Orthodox Christians and the Greek Catholics, she states:

²⁸ It appeared that the expression ‘1968’ triggered recollections of a shock from an external threat. Like the accounts of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, these narratives correspond to flashbulb memories, referring to memories of learning of surprising, shocking, or important items of public news (for an overview see, for instance, HIRST, William – PHELPS, Elisabeth A. Flashbulb Memories. In: *Curr Dir Psychol Sci*, vol. 25, 2016, no. 1, pp. 36-41). The emotional nature of flashbulb memories is important in interpreting people’s memories of traumatic events, including war attacks. In this paper, I will not pay attention to this aspect of memory.

²⁹ About these events see, for instance, STÁTNIK, ref. 23; TÍŽIK, Miroslav. *Náboženstvo vo verejnom živote na Slovensku. Zápasy o ideový charakter štátu a spoločnosti*. Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV, 2011; BARNOVSKÝ, Michal. Gréckokatolícka cirkev na Slovensku po druhej svetovej vojne. In Kocsis, András Sándor, *Felekezetelek, egyházpolitika, identitás Magyarországon és Szlovákiában 1945 után*. Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 2008, pp. 277-288; More about the local memories of these events in the village see BUŽEKOVÁ and UHRIN, ref. 5.

“Since 1951 there has been the Orthodox Church in the village. In May 1968 comrade Husák announced rehabilitation of the Greek Catholic Church. The secret petitions for the Greek Catholic Church have started. The citizen F. A. and her mother A. M. vulgarly insulted the local Orthodox priest B. and his wife because they did not want to convert to the Greek Catholic faith. The Action Committee of the Greek Catholic Church was chosen. Its members asked the Local National Council to assign premises for the church services. But the Local National Council does not have such premises. In the same year H. S., N. M. and F. R. broke windows at the house of the Orthodox priest. They were arrested by police and punished. The following households joined the Greek Catholic Church: [...] [the long list of the households follows – the author’s note] These citizens caused turmoil in the village. They were going to the neighbouring villages and persuaded people to come to the church services to support the Greek Catholic Church in the village of Horná Vieska“.

Although Irena’s narrative is apparently biased against the Greek Catholics’ actions, it could be an expression of the attitude which was demanded by the official context because the communist government supported the Orthodox Church. Irena herself was a Greek Catholic, and when I met her during my research, she was regularly attending church services.³⁰ In general, her account evokes emotions because she describes the turbulent events, not because she uses emotive expressions. Irena’s approach strikingly contrasts my respondents’ oral accounts of the conflicts between people of the two confessions. They widely used emotive language, including insults, and extrapolated their evaluation of the concrete persons’ behaviour to the moral judgement on whole religious groups.³¹

On the other side, my respondents did not elaborate on the large-scale political events and even claimed that they were not interested in politics – as they often stated, when they were young, they just worked. Jan’s (1926) reference to Dubček is a good example of this “pragmatic prism”:

“Now, when there was that coup, I do not know what was it... Dubček. There were Dubček’s bread rolls, they were very good! Good! And then they took Dubček from us. They killed him. But he was a good man. Those bread rolls were called Dubček’s. Life was not expensive then. The prices were appropriate. Now it is very expensive. At Dubček’s time it was good. The prices went down, things were cheap. A bread roll’s price was 50 halers, black bread’s 5 crowns, white bread’s 7 crowns. And now – well, bread is more and more expensive! But we must eat, must not we?”

My respondents’ memories as well as the local chronicle point to the peasants’ pragmatism, but at the same time to the complex social relationships within the local community, linked to the moral values. However, the chronicle and the oral accounts differ in where they put moral emphasis: the chroniclers employ moral expressions related to the socialist propaganda while reporting on the big-scale events, whereas my respondents address small-scale social aspects, especially work and family, and the corresponding moral norms. Investigation of moral emotions and emotive language therefore can be a useful tool in the study of vernacular memory: it can reveal nuances of the local socio-cultural context in people’s representations of the past.³²

Conclusion

Exploration of people’s memories of socialism is by no means new in ethnology in Slovakia: they were collected and analysed with the use of oral history method as well as biographical

³⁰ Unfortunately, I was not able to interview Irena more than once. The interview took place at a gathering in the local club of seniors. I did not manage to talk with her about the chronicle, and later she was too ill to meet me.

³¹ More about it see BUŽEKOVÁ, ref. 5; BUŽEKOVÁ and UHRIN, ref. 5.

³² Investigation of moral emotions in people’s accounts of the past will be the object of my forthcoming study.

method.³³ In exploration of people's past it was important that “*even at the turn of the 1940s and the 1950s peasantry was the absolute majority of population in Slovakia; thus, for a long time the peasants' fate has been the fate of the whole Slovak nation*”.³⁴ After the fall of the communist regime, rural communities have been investigated in connection to the transformation of socialist economy. The academic debates on countryside related to the socialist period became part of “coming to terms with the communist past”, characteristic of the post-socialist countries. These debates have typically paid attention to the economic aspects, including collectivization of agriculture and industrialization of rural areas. In this, an important role has been given to political manipulation, the ideological aspects of economic development, and their impact on peasants' lives.³⁵

In this paper, I presented the results of ethnographic research in the village in eastern Slovakia aimed to obtain people's memories of the socialist period. I considered two kinds of narratives of the past: people's life stories and the local chronicle. I argued that the narratives serve as cultural tools for members of a collective as they recount the past. In interpretation of the narratives, the local historical and cultural setting is essential. As Danglová has noted, people's practices, opinions, social and economic relations are deeply rooted in the past; the cultural heritage is not monolithic and depends on the local conditions.³⁶ My results demonstrate that in the study of narratives as cultural tools, the language of emotions can serve as an indicator of the narrative conventions in a certain context.

The semi-official context of the local chronicle demands expression of moral emotions (such as pride or indignation) in evaluation of the political events at a state level, but the chroniclers are rather cautious in assessment of local people's behaviour. On the other side, in informal settings people talk freely about the things which they approve or disapprove. When asked to recollect their lives, they summarize life periods using moral terms and express positive as well as negative attitudes toward other people and social conditions, to make sense of the past events in relation to the present time.³⁷ Thus, the language of emotions and especially moral emotions points to the specific narrative context. At the same time, emotional expressions should be read considering narrators' personalities and social background: they employ it in accordance to their positions and the values which they choose to elucidate in a given situation.

³³ E. g., PROFANTOVÁ, Zuzana (ed.). *Žili sme v socializme I., II.* Bratislava : Ústav etnológie SAV, 2012, 2015; PROFANTOVÁ, Zuzana (ed.). *The small history of great events in Czechoslovakia after 1948, 1968 and 1989.* Bratislava : Veda, 2006; VANĚK, Miroslav. *Obyčejní lidé...?! Pohled do života tzv. mlčící většiny: životopisná vyprávění příslušníků dělnických profesí a inteligence.* Praha : Academia, 2009; VANĚK, Miroslav (ed.) *Mocní? A Bezmocní?: politické elity a disent v období tzv. normalizace: interpretační studie životopisných interview.* Praha : Prostor, 2006. VANĚK, Miroslav – URBÁŠEK, Pavel (eds.) *Vítězové? Poráženi?: životopisná interview. Politické elity v období tzv. normalizace.* Praha : Prostor, 2005.

³⁴ CAMBEL, ref. 24, p. 5.

³⁵ E. g., DANGLOVÁ, Oľga. „Decollectivization“ and Survival Strategies in Post-socialist Co-operative farms. In: *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, 2003, pp. 31-56; PODOBA, Juraj. Cultural Lag as a Determinant of Social Conflicts of the Transformation Period. In: *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, 2003, p. 157-186; RAITCA, Dušan (ed.), *Zmeny v hodnotových systémoch v kontexte každodennej kultúry.* Bratislava : Ústav etnológie SAV, 1992, pp. 32-46; DANGLOVÁ, Oľga et al. *Vidieť v procese transformácie.* Bratislava : Ústav etnológie SAV, 2005.

³⁶ DANGLOVÁ, ref. 35, pp. 7-8.

³⁷ More about the mechanisms of autobiographical reasoning see BLUCK, Susan – HABERMAS, Tilmann. The Life Story Schema. In: *Motivation and Emotion*, vol. 24, 2000, no. 2, pp. 121-147; HABERMAS, ref. 19; BROCKMEIER, ref. 20.

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